GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE ONE-CHILD POLICY – THE IMPACT ON GENDER INEQUALITIES IN CHINA

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Gender Analysis of the One-Child Policy – The Impact on Gender Inequalities in China

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it reproduces no material previously published or written, nor material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

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Martyna Krystyna Nowak

For all those whose voices
have never been heard

ABSTRACT

The family planning policy in China, commonly referred to as the one-child policy, has been, in its various forms, in force for nearly forty years. During this time, China has undergone tremendous changes. It has shifted from a centrally planned to a market economy and has become a global superpower, remaining, however, in official discourse, a socialist state.

While the policy and the effects it has brought have been widely discussed in both academia and media, the majority of studies adopted a demographic perspective, which neglects the factors of gender, age, culture, and diversity. In order to overcome these limitations, this research proposes a dynamic approach of post-structural feminism and the life course perspective. It focuses on understanding the experience of three generations of women who lived through different socio-political times and different stages of the policy. The main objective of the study lies in challenging popularized myths regarding the one-child policy and their influence on the situation regarding gender inequality in present day China, highlighting the way in which perception of the policy is socially constructed, internalized and reproduced in everyday interactions under the interlocked system of the state, culture and free market.

Taking into consideration the size and complexity of the situation in China, the research is limited to women of different age, socio-economic background and number of children or other dependants they have to care for, who currently live in the urban areas of Guangzhou and Shenzhen, cities of the Guangdong province in southwest China. The data on their experience, regarding opportunities in education and employment, family relations and the concept of marriage, childbearing and multiple aspects of caring, was gathered during in-depth interviews. Detailed analysis of this material has shown the changeability of the policy's influence on the lives of different women and that it has caused a huge setback for gender equality. What is more, this research allows the hidden voices of women to finally be heard.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACWF – All-China Women's Federation
CCP – Communist Party of China
IUD – Intrauterine device
NBS – National Bureau of Statistics
NRT – New reproductive technologies
PRC – People's Republic of China
SOE – State-owned enterprise
UN – United Nations

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION - A NEW WORLD IN 30 YEARS

Last century was a period of tremendous changes in the Chinese social, political and economic reality: the Xinhai Revolution in 1911, which ended the Chinese imperial era and led to the creation of the Republic of China was followed by domestic war and the victory of the communists, the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and, later, the rejection of socialist collectivism in 1978, when the reforms of transforming the centrally planned economy to a market economy started, slowly moving China from the approach of socialist welfare to a neo-liberal state and the promotion of self-reliance of the individual.

While China cannot be considered as a unique example of a socialist country changing to a market economy and the 'access' to the outside world this changed provided, its case is special. It is special not only because of the way the system transformed but also because of the speed and range of those changes. It was just slightly over ten years that separated the disastrous Cultural Revolution from the economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping and the emergence of China in the world market. It did not take much longer for China to be declared an economic miracle and become a world superpower. As summarized by Jamie FlorCruz of CNN, who worked in the Chinese countryside in the 70's, "Incredibly, China has pulled off the equivalent of reform, renaissance and industrial revolution in 30 years" (FlorCruz, 2008).

What is often overlooked, however, are the costs, especially social and gendered costs, of such radical and speedy change. Unemployment, growing income gaps, horrifying pollution levels with all of its consequences are the price China needs to pay for its constantly growing GDP. And additionally China must grapple with the changes caused by probably one of the biggest, fastest and most unnatural population control programs, known worldwide as the one-child policy. In one generation it has turned China from an overly overpopulated country to one which has heavy clouds of fear concerning an aging population hanging over it.

Being born in a socialist country myself, and growing up in a newly emerged capitalist one, I should probably not be mesmerized by the differences in life and life experiences of those who have lived through the nightmares of Mao's collectivist experiment, those who had to learn hard and fast the rules of a market economy and

fight their way to survival in the transformation period, and those who are today dreaming about the most luxurious goods the world has to offer. The life of today's grandparents and their grandchildren seems to be as different as it could possibly be. Hence the differences and the generation gap that exists in China cannot be compared to any other place in the world.

However, the whole concept of social change in China is too broad to be covered by one single project. This thesis will focus on the latest of these changes, that is the period after 1978 and one of the most important phenomena of its time, which has brought about a 'revolution' of the composition of Chinese society - population control policy, known in Western literature as the one-child policy, introduced in 1979. Since then, this regulation has undergone multiple modifications. It has shifted from the strict and aggressively implemented option of 'one child for all' in the early '80s to the 'two children for some' in the subsequent periods. Despite the most recent relaxation of the policy in 2015 which allows all couples to have two children, complete omission of the policy, which permits the state's close control over population, does not seem possible.

However, it seems that the latest changes have made many believe that this is the 'beginning of the end' of the state interfering with people's reproductive rights, leading to arguments that carrying out another study on this topic is redundant. In my opinion, many of these kinds of misunderstandings are caused by the fact that the one-child policy is a misnomer. By this I do not mean that it only oversimplifies the reality, as throughout the policy's development many people were allowed to have more than one child, especially in cases of minorities, rural families where the first child was a girl, families in which parents work in potentially dangerous industries, and more recently, families where parents are themselves single children. I treat the name 'one-child' as a misnomer because it does not reveal the real Chinese name of the policy, and in this way it overshadows the policy's real scope. The actual name of the policy, in Chinese *jihuashengyu zhengce* should be more accurately translated as fertility or family planning policy. This translation allows us to understand that this policy and all the consequences of it, which are commonly discussed, represent not something that has happened, but rather something that continues to happen and shape the lives of Chinese people, and especially Chinese

women's lives. It is women's perspective on the changes the one-child policy has brought and their impact on gender inequalities that will be the focus of this research.

Being a misnomer is, however, not the only problem with existing research on this topic. A big limitation is the fact that the majority of studies on the one-child policy and its consequences have been conducted with the usage of a demographic perspective. Although demographic research has revealed the scope of the social engineering project of the one-child policy, pointing out issues of, inner alia, missing girls, an aging population, 'eternal bachelors', unregistered children and the problems for the further development of the Chinese economy, it failed to provide understanding of the influence of the policy on gendered lives. We have to keep in mind that demographic inquiry is integrated into the theory of modernity, hence it falls into the trap of the positivist paradigm and the linear model of development, economic rationality and scientific objectivity. As an outcome, the hypotheses in those studies are only based on relationships between selected variables, while neglecting many others.

As a way to overcome the limitations of the demographic perspective on the research on the one-child policy, especially its overlooking of gender, culture, power, diversity and locality, I propose an alternative approach for research on this topic, which, in my opinion, will better explore the complexity of the phenomenon, taking into consideration previously omitted or oversimplified factors. I believe that combined 'forces' of post-structural feminist analysis and life course perspective will, colloquially speaking, do the trick. This dynamic alternative will allow the complexity of the situation in China and its influence on the lives of Chinese women, showing their own perspective and understanding of the impact the policy has had on gender equality, to be fully explored. Additionally, I strongly believe that only by understanding people who are subjugated to the policy, learning about their problems and needs, can there be better alternatives for the future. Without this we are doomed to continue repeating the same mistakes, just dressed in different forms of more and more 'rationalized' justifications.

In order to clarify this statement, we can evoke the example of the problem of the 4-2-1 phenomenon and the huge dependency ratio, pointing not to the socially constructed myth of an aging population, but the fact that the majority of the

caregiving responsibilities fall almost exclusively on women, which has multiple implications on their lives. Another example can be derived from the discussion about the Chinese state's need to 'create' a perfect, educated generation of children which will allow China to compete with the world's most powerful countries. However, if we look through a feminist lens, we will see that these children do not 'make' themselves perfect. It is rather the effect of the campaign for perfect mothers, who are responsible for their, usually, one and only child to become a person of the highest quality (matching the requirements of the Chinese state), and this leads to many sacrifices, both personal and financial from mothers, who were made to believe that compliance to these requirements is their responsibility. It must be noted that the one-child policy is treating women as a tool to reach numbers planned by the government, which are supposed to allow China's further 'development'. Although the 'aim' of the policy has been to some extent achieved, as population growth has been significantly slowed, half of the population is urban based and more and more people have higher education, these changes did not come without costs. What is more, many of these changes cannot be 'attributed' to the one-child policy only. Chinese citizens are now paying the 'price' for the policy's temporary success, and I will attempt to show that the share of this costs among women is the highest, as it translates directly into the deepening of gender inequalities.

The main question and the objective of this research is to understand the life experience of Chinese women under the one-child policy. In order to do this, I will concentrate on examining Chinese women's perception and experience of gender equality, paying attention to the process of the social construction of gender inequalities, as well as the ways in which they are justified, internalized and constantly recreated. Acknowledging the changeable character of the policy and periods of history, diversity of life experience as well as differences in perception of different women, I will focus on understanding women from: different backgrounds, different generations, a wide range of socio-economic positions and various care giving duties. Taking into consideration the size and complex situation of China, this research will address only the perception of women currently living in urban areas, focusing on comprehending the one-child policy's impact on their experience in education and employment, family and marriage relationships, childbearing and

body politics and different aspects of caring for and after children and other members of the family.

At this point it is crucial to elaborate on the reasons for choosing the one-child policy as the basis of this study.

First is the reason of personal interest, which, although not 'purely' academic, remains, in my opinion, an extremely important factor for the 'success' of one's research project.

Second of all, the one-child policy, with all of its consequences, is not something that happened. It is happening all the time, throughout the whole life of Chinese women (and men as well), and the way in which demography treats the category of women neglects not only the process of 'creating' a gendered self in social interactions and institutions, but also by doing this it neglects the influence of power struggles. And when we realize that these power negotiations are constantly changing and are laced with factors of age, socio-economic position, culture, gender, locality, ethnicity and other diversities, we have to admit that power struggle must, by extension, implicate the existence of social inequalities, among which there is, of course, gender inequality. It does not always take the same form, as its changing over time, just as the Chinese woman's (or man's) perspective on it might shift over the years and after certain life events. But why do I still want to focus on gender inequality? The answer has been perfectly summarized by Clisby and Holdsworth (2016) in their statement that women "as a group, continue to experience greater inequality when compared to man, as a group" (p.1). What is more, in the context of the one-child policy and reasons for choosing it as the basis of this analysis:

> the gender violence perpetrated in the name of urgent demographic goals marks the one-child policy as an important focus for feminist critique (…) To be sure, important research has been done on the policy's evaluation and its social, demographic and health consequences. Yet most of this work is framed in the discourse of demography, family planning, and reproductive health, none of which fully exploits the potential of contemporary political and feminist theory. (Greenhalgh, 2001:847)

The third reason for choosing the one-child policy and the situation of gender inequality in China is the simple fact that every piece of research which intends to break through the socially constructed myths which we 'damp ontologically'

(Rapport, 1997) and assume to be universal and undisputed, needs a starting point. This means that the form of gender inequality in today's China cannot be associated only with the existence of the one-child policy, because that policy did not happen in a void and there are multiple collateral factors that 'collaborated' with it. But, as the saying of Laozi (2015) goes, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step - and the one-child policy is as good of a first step as any other. And, furthermore, to understand a whole we need to understand its parts, keeping in mind that each single part is strictly correlated and co-dependent.

While talking about women in China and diversity, the huge differences between urban and rural areas cannot be neglected. Therefore, the scope of this study will be limited to urban women who live in the biggest and richest cities of costal China's Guangdong Province. And, here again, I choose urban women because of my personal interest, as well as because when it comes to gender issues and the one-child policy, it seems that rural women have been 'better' covered, as the majority of research focuses on them. I want to focus on the more current impacts of the policy, moving beyond the discussions of forced abortions and missing girls, towards control of the top-down implementation of family planning and its impact on women – not only those who want to have more babies, but also those who don't want to have any and refuse to get married young or at all. These changes and their impact on family composition seem to be pronounced more in urban areas, as the countryside usually remains more 'traditional'. It is however important to highlight that I will 'apply' a rather vast understanding of the term of urban women, not limiting participants of this research to those who have urban *hukou* only, but including all 'kinds' of women who have been living in the city for a significant period of time. Drawing from their experience, I will focus on the exploration of influential discourses which dominated the research of the one-child policy and the reasons for their acceptance and internalization or refusal. Did the one-child policy really increase education and employment opportunities for women? Did it finish the universal preference for boys? Did it change the concept of the family and marriage? On whom did it actually place the burden of care for children and elderly? - these are some of the questions I will answer, challenging at the same time socially created myths which tend to be used as a rationalization of the policies and the situation in

the mixed reality of the socialist state, market economy and particular interpretation of Confucian culture.

However, what must be kept in mind is that post-structural feminist analysis assumes that we cannot regard a policy, nor the role of the state, as universally beneficial or oppressive for women. Because of the additional help of life course perspective, I will show how the same policy, can be beneficial at a certain point of life, while becoming a burden at another. Highlighting complicated interplay between multiple factors and complexity of the life experiences, this research will allow the voice of women to be finally heard.

The outline of this thesis is as follows:

Chapter Two-Literature review - will focus on the development of the one child policy over the time, starting with the voluntary practices in the early '70s and finishing with the latest relaxation of the policy in October 2015. It will be followed by a discussion about the consequences of the policy, which has been revealed in already existing literature on the topic. It will end with a conclusion about the dominance of the demographic perspective in the research concerning the one-child policy and its consequences. **Chapter Three – Theoretical framework –** presents arguments about the limitations of the scope of demographic inquiry and its negligence of multiple factors, such as gender, culture and power. This chapter will also propose an alternative to overcome these limitations – post-structural feminist and life course perspectives, as tools for achieving more in depth understanding of the outcomes of the policy on the lives of Chinese women and gender equality. While analysing the most important feminist subjects, I will also highlight the importance of the role of the Chinese state in recreating gender inequalities. This chapter will conclude with the framework analysis of the project. **Chapter Four - Methodology and research design –** focuses on the everlasting quantitative versus qualitative debate and the choices of the research methods as tools which are found to be the most useful to reveal the complexity and diversity of experiences and perspectives on the one-child policy. In the second part of this chapter I will also talk about the selection of the research's participants, as well as the possible limitations of this

project. **Chapters Five, Six and Seven – Data analysis –** analysis of data obtained during fieldwork, focusing, consecutively, on the experience of three groups of women: young and single, middle-aged and married and elderly and retired. Each group's analysis will be divided into the themes of: education and employment, family and intimate relationships, childbearing and body politics and care. **Chapter Eight – Conclusion –** will elaborate on the difference of the experience of different groups, evolving again around the themes of: education and employment, family and intimate relationships, childbearing and body politics and care. Then, I will move on to the discussion of theoretical implications and suggestions for the future of the policy. The chapter will end with remarks on limitations of this study and suggestions for its further development.

CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Before elaborating on the influence of the one-child policy on gender equality, we have to focus on the historical context of its introduction and explore the logic standing behind the decision-making processes, as well as the evolution of the policy since its introduction in 1979 until the most recent changes introduced in 2015. This will highlight the policy's non-homogeneous character in time and in different places of China, which will become the backdrop of this whole study.

In the second part, while reviving existing literature on the one-child policy, I will identify problems and debates which have emerged as a result of the one-child policy: the phenomenon of 'missing girls', 'bachelors' army', leftover women, assumption of the empowerment of Chinese women due to better education and employment choices as well as the 4-2-1 phenomenon with its bilateral connotations of an aging population and the emergence of the so-called 'little emperors' generation'. As well as considering the literature on these topics, I will also focus on the possibilities of alternative and more critical explanations of these supposed outcomes of the one-child policy, especially in how they relate to gender equality in China.

The last part offers a conclusion and highlights a literature gap in the studies of population control policy, suggesting the need for alternative analysis, which would allow not only the filling of that gap but also new light to be shed on this already well-known, yet not deeply understood phenomenon.

2.2 The history and development of the one child policy

The one-child policy, introduced in China in 1979 with an "Open letter calling on Party and Youth League Cadres to take the lead in having only one child" (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1980), has as its main focus control over the size of the population, interfering with an individual's reproductive decisions through a centralized system of family size planning. The policy, labelled by Tyrene

White (2006) as China's longest campaign, is probably also the most famous and controversial policy of family planning known inside and outside the academic world.

The question we need to ask is where did the number 'one' come from? To answer this, a brief historical overview is needed.

China's 'greatest visionary' Mao Zedong had left the country destroyed by the utopian undertakings, especially by the collectivist experiment of the Great Leap Forward campaign in the early '50s and the Cultural Revolution in the '60s. Mao's successors needed to find a way to 'lead' an impoverished China to a better future, without, however, posing any threat to the absolute power of the Communist Party. The most famous figure at this time, Deng Xiaoping (in power from 1978 till 1992), was a strong believer in the power of science and technology as the most important force of the 'Four Modernizations of China' (the other three being agriculture, industry and national defence), and it was the 'leitmotiv' of his rule. Convinced that modern science could solve China's every problem, Deng approved the idea of the one child for all policy, proposed by Song Jian (1981) who, interestingly enough, was a leading missile scientist of the People's Republic of China. Song based his idea on the early work of the Club of Rome, a global think tank, which in the 1970s first outlined the concept of fast population growth as a danger to humanity in general (Meadows, Meadows, Randers,& Behrens III, 1972), predicting, with the usage of a computer simulation, that population growth at the current rate, combined with food and industrial production, pollution and consumption of non-renewable resources, "would lead to planetary limits being exceeded sometime in the 21st century, most likely resulting in the collapse of the population and economic system (Turner, 2008: 397). The work of the Club of Rome was "boldly and arbitrary" (Greenhalgh, 2005:253) altered by Song Jian, who, through computing and mathematical equations, came up with China's ideal population 'size' and the conclusion that there should only be one child for every Chinese couple, convincing authorities that this was the only possible option (Song, 1981), neglecting the fact that "Science is not propaganda, and to make it subservient to policy is to risk corrupting its integrity and damaging its credibility" (Aird, 1982:290). The fact that China, mainly due to the pronatalist policy of Mao Zedong, was overpopulated, could not be challenged. However, the top-down implementation of the policy created

many problems and caused a major setback for gender equality which cannot be underestimated – an issue that will be the major focus in the next part of this thesis.

The introduction of the strict family planning policy was preceded by, what we can call, a voluntary campaign in the early '70s. This campaign, known as *wan xi shao* – 'later, longer, fewer', was directed to young Chinese people to encourage (but not force) them to get married later, have fewer children's and leave longer gaps between their offspring (Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005). At the same time, although without making it 'official', population growth started to be included and taken into consideration when debating future economic plans. However, these solutions did not seem to be enough to solve the problem of population growth which had increased by a staggering 80% between 1890 and 1950 (United Nations, 2005). In this situation, a more radical plan, based on Song Jian's calculations, commonly known as the one-child policy, came to life with an article written by Chen Muhua (1979), chairmen of the Family Planning Commission, in Renmin Ribao in August 1979, claiming that control of population growth was the crucial element that would bring to life the Four Modernizations of Deng Xiaoping (Chen, 1979). In this way, the strict family planning policy, a contradiction to Mao's prenatal orientation, started to change China, becoming a basic state policy and seen as the 'only option' for China and its development (Greenhalgh, 2001).

Therefore, starting from 1979, thousands of family planning commissioners spread across the country to control population growth and distribute contraceptives. The only thing that mattered was lowering the numbers of births. However, this goal of the Chinese government had to be 'incorporated' into the official CCP's line of socialism and women's liberation. As mentioned by Greenhalgh (2001):

> In the population version [of justification of the policies –MN], the party, through its promotion of state birth planning, emerged as the hero that saved women from the oppressive bonds of the traditional patriarchal family. Women's liberation was inextricably linked to national liberation: in emancipating women, the party was also liberating the nation from a semicolonial, semifeudal past, transforming it into a modern, powerful nation able to reclaim its rightful place in the world. (Greenhalgh, 2001:853)

The one-child policy, according to the state's official rhetoric, was supposed to be beneficial to the whole nation and future generations (Central Committee of the

Communist Party of China, 1980; Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1982; Chen, 1979). The poster promoting the family planning policy said that it was beneficial for the health of mothers and children, and that it was also advantageous to male and female workers, who could use their full potential in production, work and study, which would bring prosperity to the whole nation (Family Planning Office of Kunming, 1978). The State Council, referring to the advantages of the policy, touched directly on the issue of women, saying that the policy liberated women and became a reason for the improvement of their status and productive force. What is more, it allowed them to break away from the overwhelming role of giving birth multiple times after marriage and hence carrying the heavy burden of a family and household. It also guaranteed women more opportunities to study and gain knowledge in the fields of science and culture and take an active part in economic and social development (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2000).

Implementation of the policy in urban areas could be considered a relatively easy task - families there did not depend on field work and a proverbial 'additional pair of hands' did not decide their survival, making it relatively 'easier' to accept strict birth control targets. Additionally, citizens of big cities were all distributed in *danwei*, working units where control over people was easier to implement and there was effectively no chance of a hidden, unplanned pregnancy, as sometimes even women's menstrual cycles were monitored (Kane, 1985).

However, in rural areas of China the situation was completely different (Davin, 1985). The opposition of people, who could not imagine their lives without at least couple of children, especially without a son, who would not only continue the family line, but also take care of the family farming and elderly parents, was imaginable. Additionally, the lack of social security or retirement plans in rural areas, together with the backwardness of Chinese villages, where manual labour was still required in almost every aspect of a family's existence, made people extremely hostile to the requirement of the officials to have only one child. Necessities, such as food, clothing and housing depended only on the family's work, as it was the "basic unit of production" (Greenhalgh, 2008: 181) in rural areas. If there were not enough children, and especially, no sons, the family could not satisfy its basic functions (Liang, 1985),

especially since the opening reforms in 1978 and the introduction of the market economy state's provisions and support had been taken away. By not taking these cultural specifics into consideration, the implementation of the one-child policy in rural areas of China became, as mentioned by Zhang (1999:204), *tianxia diyi nan* (the most difficult job under the heaven). The opposition of the people and the determination of family planners who had to fulfil the utopian assumption of the one-child policy, led to the first wave of aggression in 1983. Because meeting the population goal (meaning achieving the 'planned' numbers) was one of the main interests of Beijing, people who were responsible for the family planning control, most probably because of fear of the consequences of failure (and, probably also as a result of the power that have been assigned to them), initiated extremely aggressive and brutal undertakings in order to fulfil the expectations of the results of the early years of the strict family planning policy (Hershatter,2007). In that period, mostly in rural areas, women were forced to carry out abortions at very late stages of pregnancy and to undergo violent sterilizations. Additionally, destruction of private property also occurred. These events became infamous in the West, especially in the United States, via articles in newspapers and magazines establishing the image of the one-child policy as a brutal, heartless terror for many years to come, which actually fit well with the American politics' "coercion story" of China (Greenhalgh, 2010:3).

Although the events of 1983 were undoubtedly terrifying, they did not last for a long time and this period alone should not dominate the 'image' of the one-child policy. In 1984, partly because of the events of 1983 and the wave of criticism aimed at China, and partially due to the anxiety surrounding the growing level of infanticide of baby girls, the first relaxation of the policy was introduced. According to the new rules, rural couples, whose first baby was a girl, could get permission to have a second baby.

The second wave of aggression began in 1991, again because of unrealistic plans and expectations from the top level. Local officials, responsible for the successful running of the policy, received planned numbers of population size, which varied from place to place. In order to prepare perfect statistics, even though couples had permission for a second baby, forced abortions were performed if the limit of new-

born babies was already reached in that particular province. The letter of the law had, at the time, almost no significance (Greenhalgh &Winckler, 2005).

A huge shift in the implementation of the one-child policy took place after the United Nations Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, which "played an important role in China's family reorientation" (Wang, 2012a:567). During the conference, a significant emphasis was placed on reproductive health and improving women's situation, instead of the singular aim of reaching demographic goals (Wang, 2012b). These aims were also reemphasized in the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women, which became the moment when Chinese academics were exposed to the idea of gender, which allowed them to start to challenge the socialist state's idea of gender equality between men and women (in the sense that they are the same), which "connotes the control of women by authoritarian socialist patriarchy" (Wang & Zhang, 2010:48).

The Cairo and Beijing Conferences, as well as more and more noticeable negative effects of the one-child policy led, in the mid-1990s, to the inclusion of social scientists' insight to discussions on the future of the policy (Greenhalgh, 2005). It seems somehow astonishing that it took the leadership of China almost 20 years to realize the graveness of the situation the one-child policy had brought to the country. Even more surprising is the lack of predicting the consequences of a population growth policy, such as an increasingly noticeable sex ratio imbalance, especially in a country like China, where Confucian tradition was still strongly rooted in society and according to which numerous offspring, especially sons, guaranteed the well-being of elderly parents and the continuation of the family line. Even if the 'designer' of a policy, as an engineer, did not have the knowledge of social scientists or demographers, it seems unlikely that he was unable to 'calculate' some of these consequences. The preference of sons over daughters was coded into Chinese society and traditional beliefs. Having a daughter was compared to watering the neighbour's garden - a vain and costly effort, as, according to tradition, after marriage, a woman would become part of her husband's family (Evans, 2008). I am convinced that it was possible to predict that, especially in rural areas where having a son was considered to be an essential and irreplaceable part of family survival (Greenhalgh, 2008), a family size planning regulation might lead to opposition and selective

abortions or, in extreme cases, to the infanticide of baby girls. It seems like Deng's mantra of development at any cost was, as can be seen, fulfilled to the very end, while the aspects of gender equality were pushed away from the plan, despite the fact that the narrative of women's health and liberation (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2000) "remained the official line, but in fact women's interests were radically subordinated to those of the nation" (Greenhalgh, 2001:854). And, what is more, because of the aforementioned authoritarian state's role, Chinese feminists tended to repeat the state narrative of the one-child policy being beneficial for women, even though they also acknowledge its 'bad side' (Greenhalgh, 2001). Zhu and Li (1997), in their 'ground-breaking' paper (as it dared to criticized actions taken by the government) highlighted the fact that the one-child policy sped up women's life cycle change by reducing reproductive years and spread knowledge about the health issues connected to reproduction, establishing better growth and development of baby girls. However, at the same time, because of internal and external pressure, women were forced to undergo many pregnancy termination procedures, paying the price for the policy's 'success'. They didn't, however, blame the concept of the policy as such, they instead focused on its poor implementation.

In 2001 a further relaxation of the policy, this time not limited to rural regions only, was introduced. According to new regulations couples could have a second baby if both parents were only children (Wang, 2012a). This change was a part of the rewards and punishment system, with a shift toward prizing those who obeyed the rules, rather than punishing those who did not conform. The carrot and stick approach started to emphasize the carrot. This change showed that another negative outcome of the strict one-child policy, that being the proclaimed aging population and 4-2-1 phenomenon, started to worry China's leadership and something had to be done if the responsibility of caring for elderly parents was still supposed to be, as officially stated in Criminal Law (Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China, 1997) and Constitution (Constitution of the People's Republic of China, 2012), a demanded responsibility of children and grandchildren (Hershatter, 2007).

The next noticeable change in the implementation of the one-child policy occurred during the leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. Starting in 2003, the Hu-

Wen administration focused more on, what was supposed to look like, a 'humanitarian' approach in general, also when considering the one-child policy (Wang, 2012a). The law was becoming more effective than in the past, and couples, who fulfilled the requirements for having a second baby, were allowed to have it, even if their region had already surpassed the assigned number of births for a particular year. Also, each couple's preferences were supposed to be considered while deciding on contraceptive methods, and more attention was placed on individual cases and clear explanations of each method's advantages and disadvantages (Hesketh, Lu, & Xing, 2005). However, in the third chapter we will take a closer look at the policy and contraceptives usage, which may slightly dim the optimism of that analysis – especially the connection of these changes with the state's 'worry' about the situation and the maltreatment of women (Scharping, 2013).

Although the general results of such a 'people-friendly' approach were, without doubt, positive, what must be kept in mind is the fact that, in politics, nothing is done without a reason. The reason behind all these changes was the legitimization of the Party rule over China (Greenhalgh, 2010). In light of the problems which the top-down implemented policy has itself brought about, it had to be proven that the fate of women was still on the agenda.

Regardless of how people-oriented the new Hu-Wen administration became, aggressive slogans of the one-child policy, such as "Raise fewer babies but more pigs", "House toppled, cows confiscated if abortion demand rejected" or "One more baby means one more tomb" (Ertelt, 2007) were not banned until 2007, when more 'favour-stressing' catchphrases became widespread. Renmin Ribao, the leading daily newspaper in China and the mouthpiece of the Communist Party, published a list of one hundred ninety new slogans, which were to replace the old statements, especially the seventy-six extremely aggressive ones. New slogans, such as "Giving birth to a boy or a girl is equally good, girls can also continue a family line" (*sheng nan sheng nü yi yang hao, nü'er ye shi chuanhou ren*) or "The more sons and daughters in a family, the more middle class standard of living declines" (*jiating zi nü duo xiaokang hui huapo*) (Zhao, 2007), spread across the country. Softening the language of propaganda had, however, no influence on the policy itself, being probably just an attempt to 'rehabilitate' the image of China and its population policy

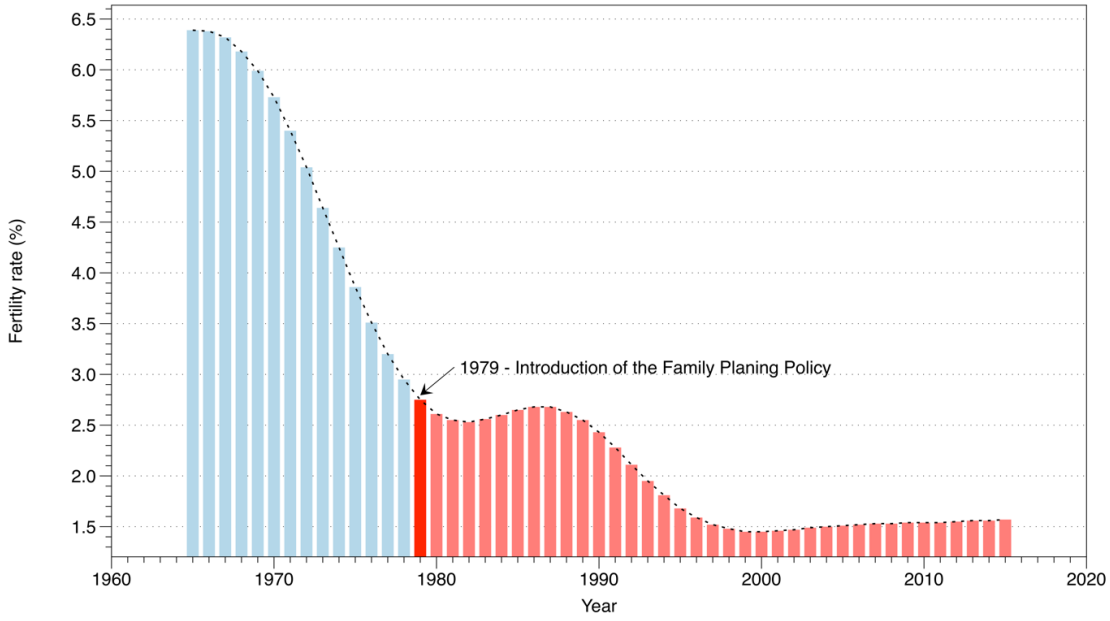
in other parts of the world, especially as the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games were approaching and, again, in justifying the continuation of the policy, despite the fact that fertility rates had already dropped behind the level of replacement - in 2000 it was at 1.45 (Index Mundi, 2015), and in urban areas were dropping long before the introduction of the one-child policy (Lavely & Freedman, 1990), reaching 2.4 in Shanghai in 1964 and 1.3 in 1979-1980 (Nie & Wyman, 2005). As a matter of fact, fertility rates were constantly dropping since 1960, and the most significant drop could be observed between 1970 and 1978 during the *wan xi shao* campaign and before the introduction of the top-down family planning policy. While the yearly drop of fertility rate from 1965-1978 reached an average of 5.72%, after implementation of the one-child policy was less pronounced, reaching the level of 1.6%. (See Figure 1).

The next shift and relaxation of the one-child policy happened in November 2013, under the new administration of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, during the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party, when the decision for allowing couples where one parent is a single child to have a second baby was made (Hatton, 2013). It did not, however, lead to a big alternation in China's fertility rate, especially in the case of urban residents, usually with a higher level of education. Due to the high costs of bringing up a child, people 'stuck by' the 'previous' version of the one-child policy voluntarily and didn't want to make a use of the change (Levin, 2014). According to the Xinhua Daily Telegraph (2014), only 270 thousand out of 11 million eligible couples (2.5%) applied for permission to have a second baby.

Following 2013's relaxation, in October 2015 the two-children-for-all policy was introduced (National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 2015), which raised voices of the end of the family planning policy whatsoever, dismissing the fact that as long as we talk about the top down implementation of the family planning, there can be no discussion concerning its end – no matter how many children per couple are to be permitted.

Despite these recent relaxations in the one-child policy, we must keep in mind the rationale for them. It would be somewhat misleading and, unfortunately, naive to believe that the changes were adopted as a response to the citizens 'demands' or

complaints. Rather, as has been mentioned already a number of times, these tactics are used as a tool to legitimate the power of the elite within the government and, at the same time, facilitate a shift from a welfare state to the neo-liberalist ideal of individual responsibility and self-reliance (Pratt, 2006), which in the case of China is still happening under the flag of socialism, especially since the flaws of the whole technocratic concept behind the one-child policy and the consequences of neglecting factors such as gender, culture and history are clearly visible after almost forty years of its implementation and are becoming a threat to the further development of China and continue to constitute a huge set-back for gender equality.



Index Mundi (2015). China-Fertility rate. Fertility rate, total (births per woman).
Retrieved from: http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/china/fertility-rate

Figure 1 - China total fertility rate: 1965-2015

2.3 The consequences of the one-child policy

The one-child policy, which interferes so remarkably with one of the most intimate part of people's lives and which changed traditional Chinese society with its deep rooted Confucian tradition into a modern (at least from a demographic point of view) society in such a short time, could not proceed smoothly. Scholars from both China and abroad contributed a lot of work to assessing the one-child policy and its overall effects. In the following section I will focus on the themes which are most

often covered in these pieces of work, questioning their assumption of being 'universalizing truths' and the speculations they make in regards to gender equality.

2.3.1 Missing girls of China

After nearly forty years of the one-child policy being in force, the national fertility rate dropped to 1.57 in 2015 (Index Mundi, 2015) and it had supposedly prevented over 400 million births (Whyte, Wang, & Cai, 2015). Although that number, provided in 2006 by Xinhua News Agency (2006), seems to be overly high, it is quite certain that the strict policy, which predicted only one child per each couple, did prevent many births. The problem is, however, that policy led, among others, to a huge sex ratio imbalance. The unbalanced sex ratio, which remarkably exceeded the 'biologically accepted norm' of 108.5 boys per 100 girls (Croll, 1995), reached the outrageous amount of 163.8 boys per 100 girls in one of the cities in the Shandong province (Croll, 1995). According to Li (2007), in general, around 120 boys are born for every 100 girls. The imbalance in the sex ratio is especially noticeable in second-order births and varies depending on the particular location, with the biggest differences in the rural-urban division (Poston, Conde, & DeSalvo, 2011). In Guangdong province, which this research will focus on, it is estimated to be at a level of 120:100 (Zhu, Lu, & Hesketh, 2009). According to Population Census of China (1982), in 1982 the national sex ratio was at a level of 105.45 (104.57 in Guangdong province), reaching above the accepted norm only in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, where it was said to be 109.02. For the age group of 0-3 years old (already born after the introduction of the one-child policy) the national level ratio was at a level of 107.4 (Population Census of China, 1982). In comparison, in the 2010 population census (Tabulation on the 2010 Population Census of the Peoples Republic of China, 2010), although the established sex ratio for the whole population was 104.9, it revealed alarming levels for younger age groups: 119.13 for 0-4 years old and 118.66 for 5-9 years old. (See Table 1 and Figure 2).

Such a noticeable imbalance suggested the increasing problem of female infanticide. Ma Jiantang, chair of the National Bureau of Statistics, commented on this situation by saying that the sex ratio is still far beyond 'natural' norms, "and we

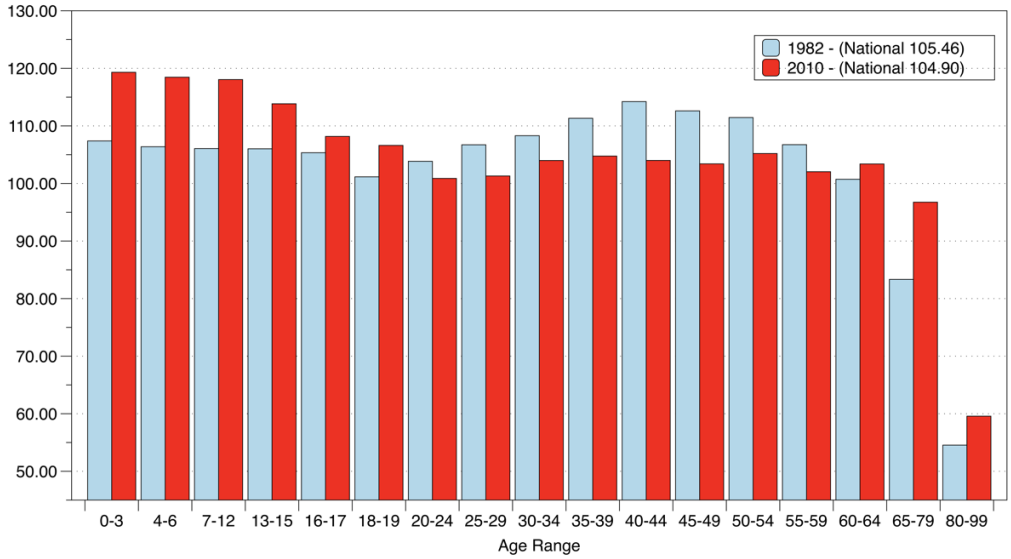
must attach great attention to this problem and take more effective measures to promote sex equality in terms of employment and salary, while caring more for girls" (Wang, 2011).

Table 1 - National sex ratio

Age	Year	
	1982	2010
0-3	107.39	119.31
4-6	106.38	118.46
7-12	106.06	118.05
13-15	106.02	113.84
16-17	105.34	108.17
18-19	101.15	106.61
20-24	103.85	100.88
25-29	106.72	101.30
30-34	108.3	103.99
35-39	111.32	104.76
40-44	114.22	104.00
45-49	112.61	103.41
50-54	111.45	105.20
55-59	106.74	102.04
60-64	100.73	103.39
65-79	83.33	96.75
80-99	54.54	59.57
100 +	-	32.69
General Population	105.46	104.90

TABULATION ON THE 2010 POPULATION CENSUS OF THE PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA. (2010). BEIJING: CHINA STATISTICS PRESS.

POPULATION CENSUS OF CHINA (1982). POPULATION CENSUS OFFICE UNDER THE STATE COUNCIL AND DEPARTMENT OF POPULATION STATISTICS. BEIJING: STATE STATISTICAL BUREAU.



Tabulation on the 2010 Population census of the Peoples Republic of China. (2010). Beijing: China Statistics Press.
Population Census of China (1982). Population Census Office under the state Council and Department of Population Statistics. Beijing: State Statistical Bureau.

Figure 2 - National Sex Ratio

Although the practice of female infanticide was not unknown to Chinese culture before (Verschuur-Basse,1996), as girls were considered to be undesirable and treated as a commodity of men's power, the scale of the phenomenon after 1979 reached alarming levels. The long-lasting tradition of a preference for sons over daughters, as those who continue the family line and guarantee the well-being of elderly parents, caused a problem when each family had to limit itself to one child only, even if that only child was an 'undesirable' girl. Many parents, especially in rural areas, where having a son was considered a guarantee of family survival, were eager to do everything in order to get one. Traditional forms of infanticide, mainly by drowning baby girls immediately after birth, although did happen occasionally in twentieth century China, were not very common and more 'modern' forms of assuring of getting a baby of the 'desired sex' usually took place. What was happening more often were sex selective abortions (as both stationary and 'movable' ultrasound devices spread widely across the country from the late 1980s), the abandonment of baby girls or not registering them in the official records (making them the so called black children of China), in the hope of having a baby boy next time and not 'wasting' a family's quota for a useless daughter (Croll, 1995).

Since the problem of sex ratio imbalance was becoming more and more urgent, a ban to reveal the sex of the baby to the future parents was imposed on all medical staff. However, such a rule was easy to get around, using bribery or even by using some form of 'sign language', such as a smile in case of a boy, or a frown if the foetus was a girl (Croll, 1995).

It is difficult, if not impossible, to estimate the number of 'missing girls' caused by each of these methods. By analysing the data from China's population census of 2000, Cai and Lavely (2003) calculated the number of missing girls, from a sample of those born between 1980-2000, at the level of 12.8 million. They suggest, however, that this number is an overestimation. When comparing the data of the 1990 and 2000 censuses they came to the conclusion that:

> Under the assumption that girls over age 10 would be difficult to hide from official statistical systems, we assume that one-third of the nominally missing are "hidden" and two thirds are truly missing from the population. (Cai and Lavely, 2003:26).

It is, however, certain that orphanages were filled with baby girls and handicapped boys, as it was drastically shown in the documentary *The Dying Rooms* , filmed secretly in 1995 by Kate Blewett and Brain Woods (The Dying Rooms, 1995), showing that whether the girls are missing or were hidden or abandoned (Smith, Ping, Merli, & Hereward, 1997; Merli & Raftery, 1997; Huang, Lei & Zhao, 2016; Liang & Ma, 2004; Zhou, 2005), sex preferences were vastly 'practiced' in post-reform China, even though recent findings show that, especially urban parents are less concerned about their baby's sex, wanting it 'just' to be perfect, no matter if it is a girl or a boy (Milwertz, 1997; Greenhalgh, 2010). In addition, more and more parents, especially in urban areas, claim that they would prefer to have a girl (Currier, 2008; Chau, 2009) – a phenomenon which led to the assumption that the preference for a son in China was at an end and even that the 'empowerment' of Chinese women would take place (Fong, 2002). This, however, missed the logic behind this new 'preference' – in the end, no matter which 'side' the preference is directed towards, as long as it exist it must be reflecting some generalized assumption of gender roles.

2.3.2 No life without wife?

What is interesting, according to Wang and Zhang (2010), who focus on Chinese feminist thought after 1995's Beijing Conference, "the sex ratio imbalance has caught the attention of both the state and the public because 'millions of men will have no wives" (p.50), adding that before 2007 "in China the global discourse on girls' birth right circulates only among feminists" (p.50).

Hudson and den Boer (2004) concentrated on the emergence of a huge surplus of men in China's population, predicting that it will become a potential danger. Their analysis was, however, widely criticized, as the conclusion of their work emerged only from the statistical comparison of the situation in other societies, where a huge surplus of man led to a rise in violence, aggression and crime in general. According to Hudson and den Boer (2004), selective abortions, abandonment and, in extreme cases, the infanticide of baby girls led to an emergence of a so called 'bachelors army', that is a group of men of marriageable age who will not be able to find a wife, at least within China. The difference between the number of men and women is estimated to be between 32 million (Zhu, Lu, & Hesketh, 2009) and 111 million (Manthorpe, 1999). According to the 2010 census (Tabulation on the 2010 Population Census of the Peoples Republic of China, 2010) men outnumber women by 31.8 million (2.4% of the whole population). To compare, the difference in Sweden is 0.3% in 'favour' of women (Countrymeters, 2016).

Poston, Conde and DeSalvo (2011) estimated the number of man of marriageable age who will face difficulty in finding a wife at a level of over 40 million. If the situation in China does not change, in 2020 there will be, according to their analysis, over 50 million 'brideless' men. These estimations are followed by predictions of problems associated with such a huge number of young man, such as the popularization of prostitution (and transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV), kidnapping, human trafficking of women, violent behaviour and the "development of a conservative gender ideology" (Poston, Conde & DeSalvo,2011: 318).

It is, however, worth mentioning that Chinese people do not blame the 'bachelor army' for the growth of violent behaviour, especially in the cities. The problem of

growing crime rates is associated in urban areas with the floating population (Ross, 2010) – migrants from rural areas, who, at the core, constitute a large part of China's economic success, although the urban citizens consider them to be second-class residents (Solinger, 1991).

The problem and concern about 'bachelor villages', located in remote or poor areas, where men cannot find a wife unless the woman has been kidnapped, was portrayed in the Chinese movie production of Li Yang's *Blind mountain* (Blind Mountain, 2007). Although modified many times in order to comply with the requirements of Chinese censorship, this production does portray the problem, focusing however more on the complicated situation faced by men rather than the misfortune of the woman who was kidnapped and sold as a wife.

Surprisingly enough, the fact that unmarried men outnumber unmarried women is not a new phenomenon in China (Ross, 2010). Thorborg's study (2005) shows that in 1982 the percentage of people who never got married varied greatly between women (1%) and men (9%). At that time, it could not have been directly linked as an outcome of the population control policy, as it was only implemented 3 years earlier. What is more, Hershatter (2007) and Stacey (1983) argue that the situation of many men from rural areas, who were unable to marry because they were too poor (and, importantly, it is the same 'group' of men – rural and poor who cannot find a wife supposedly because of the one-child policy) improved after 1949, as the socialist revolution started to make the fate of many people from lower social stratification levels better. It seems then that history has just made a 'circle' and the one-child policy might not be the only factor to blame. It might, however, as we will discuss later, mark the 'comeback' of the institution of marriage seen as an economic contract and the source of financial security for women, just as it used to be before 1949 when women's participation in the job market was scarce (Li, 2013).

Because of this, it seems necessary to rethink the issue of Chinese bachelors and the implication of the male surplus on the social order. First of all, we should point out that the number of Chinese bachelors, who will not be able to marry, might be overestimated due to two reasons. First of all, the demographic analysis of this phenomena assumed that each man (and woman) would marry only once in his lifetime. Another flaw of this interpretation is the assumption that a man's potential

spouse is a woman from the same age cohort, or at most two years younger, as used to be the norm in China for many years (Poston & Glover, 2005). The assumption that in such a rapidly changing social reality these practices will remain stable neglects the role of active agents and the ever changing power structures – just to give an example, the recent report on love and marriage conducted in Guangzhou (Wang, Y., 2012) showed that 70% of girls who are between 18-25 years old want to marry a man who is around 10 years older than they are.

The 'extreme' and controversial solution of Hudson, who suggested, that around 2020, a good solution for China's problem of an excessive amount of males would be a "bloody battle", in which many young men would die (Hudson and den Boer, 2004) seems to be significantly overstating the problem of the 'bare branches', as men who have no perspective of getting married all called in Chinese. What should be noticed, however, is how the unbalanced sex ratio and the excess of males might bring about significant implication for the value and stability of the traditional nuclear family. It is also worth noticing the remark of Ross (2010), who stated that "it seems more than coincidental that the development of recent fears about China's population coincides with the emergence of China as a major economic power" (p.338), as well as that the "re-surfacing of fear about China's male population continues a tradition of Orientalist stereotypes" (p.338). The 'danger' of the emergence of a bachelor army might be a continuation of the "coercion story" of the West about China (Greenhalgh, 2010).

2.3.3 Women that nobody wants?

While poor men unable to marry are seen as victims of the one-child policy, the group of women – educated and financially independent - who do not want to marry or postpone marriage and childbearing, are seen as a threat to the system of social harmony which has been so heavily emphasised by Chinese leaders, in which family is understood to be the basis of society and a 'guarantee' of maintaining stability (National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 2000). As a consequence, these women were labelled as 'leftover', insinuating that it is not them

who do not want to marry, but rather that they are not married because no man wants them (To, 2013).

Leta Hong Fincher (2014) argues that this new trend of not having a family or significantly postponing its start-up led to the joint action of a state and media campaign about the danger of becoming a leftover woman (*shengnü*), a "broad resurgence of gender inequality in post-socialist China" (p.4). She claims that:

> Marriage promotion for social stability is one factor behind the 'leftover' women media campaign. Another is related to the Chinese government's population planning goals (…). The State Council names 'upgrading population quality' (suzhi) as one of its key goals, and appoints the Women's Federation as one of the primary implementers of its population planning policy, along with other agencies such as Propaganda, Public security and Civil Affairs. (p.28-9).

The All China Women's Federation's (ACWF) website, supposedly the organ responsible for promoting women's rights, has published an article which tries to convince us that leftover women do not deserve our sympathy - what they need is education and self-reflection. The article states that as the one-child policy led to imbalanced sex ratio, girls have automatically become 'precious and uncommon species', which should exclude the possibility of 'leftover women' coming into being whatsoever, especially since those girls who are pretty are wooed by many men and some of them become rich men's mistresses (!) (Liu, 2011). Qiu Mei, a female representative quoted in the article, mentioned that many young talented girls become 'leftover' as they miss the best time to find a partner because they are pursuing further education (Liu, 2011). But, according to the article, it is not due to pursuing education, as there as many boys and girls in universities, but rather the fact that girls are too picky and keep on waiting for their flawless Prince Charming:

> As long as girls themselves are not too picky, finding a marriage partner can be said to be as easy as blowing off dust (…) There is a popular saying nowadays: 'Looks are like capital'. Beautiful girls don't need high academic qualifications and they can still marry into rich and powerful families. But for ordinary and ugly girls that is too difficult. Therefore, those girls hope to increase they competitiveness by raising their academic qualifications. Unfortunately, they don't realize that the older the woman is, the less value she has. By the time they get a masters or PhD degree, they are, to their own surprise, already old and faded. (Liu, 2011)

This 'propaganda' to convince young, successful women to get married as soon as possible and to not have too high expectations towards their partner is also supported by Xinhua News Agency, the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party, which in one of the articles reposted by ACWF, gives women eight simple pieces of advice to avoid becoming leftover, which included, for example, the principle of learning to wait and being attractive but not annoying (Xinhua News, 2010). One of the passages stated:

> Waiting for a man who, at a personal level, honours you, takes responsibility, is not poor, is not vulgar –this is what it means to find a good man to marry. Waiting for a man who is both rich and handsome, both romantic and focused, both wise and young - now that is a paranoia of not marrying somebody who is not of the most perfect quality. Does such a perfect man exist? And even if he does, for what reason should he want to marry you? (Xinhua News, 2010).

It has to be admitted, however, that those articles were taken down from the ACWF website due to many complaints (Magistad, 2013), but they are still available on the China News Website.

The campaign 'warning' against becoming a leftover woman was also accompanied by other actions to encourage early childbearing (as late pregnancy is causing babies to be born with some defects, which in the state's discourse is said to have nothing to do with the level of pollution) (Fincher, 2014; Ren et al.,2011) and to reinforce the conviction that Chinese women will not marry until their partner owns an apartment (omitting the fact that traditionally women moved into their husband's house, as at the day of marriage they ceased to be the part of the family they were born into).

Apartment ownership is actually the most important argument of Fincher's (2014) argument. The 'known' fact that owning a house is a must, helps in many ways to maintain a harmonious society and social stability. It helps busting the real estate market and it 'promotes' marriage because very often the only possibility to buy a house is to use both families'' assets. The gendered problem that emerges here is that although the purchase of the house is very often done by the accumulation of money from both the groom and bride's sides (and their families), the name on the deed is usually that of the man. According to the survey conducted by China's real estate portal iFeng and Horizon Research Consolatory Group, apartment ownership

deed had men's name written on them in 80.3% cases, and women in only 30% (My Wedding and House, 2013). This situation is disadvantageous to women (Fincher, 2014), especially in the light of the new interpretation of the Marriage Law from 2011, according to which non-movable property acquired before marriage cannot become a part of the negotiations when dividing assets in a divorce (Supreme People's Court of the People's Republic of China, 2011).

Not having their name in the deed, even if women (or their families) did actually contribute to the purchase, deprives them from any rights to the property, which in China is a family's most valuable asset. And, what is more, it still leads young girls, who are supposedly 'in demand' – as there are many more boys – to think that marriage is their ultimate life goal and achievement.

2.3.4 Empowerment of Chinese women?

The emergence of the phenomenon of the leftover woman highlights, however, that something must have changed in the situation of women in China as they have got the chance to become 'leftover'. Vanessa Fong (2002) argues that girls born after 1979 "have more power to challenge detrimental gender norms and use helpful ones than ever before, thanks to the decline of partiality and the absence of brothers for their parents to favour" (p.1098). Although the one-child policy has posed freedom limitations (as one cannot decide how many children to have), it also has had, according to Fong, an empowering effect on girls and women, as it has reduced the burden of multiple childbearing and childrearing. She believes this only applied to the first generation of women whose fertility was limited and decided for as 'problematic', as it is they for whom reality clashed with the desire of a big family – a desire and 'requirement' in which they were growing up. The following generations, being raised in small families, did not share their mother's and grandmother's desire, focusing rather on education and career possibilities rather than family building.

One of the signs of the empowerment of Chinese urban women, according to Fong, is connected to increased educational opportunities for girls who do not have to compete with their brothers, which makes them being at least partly financially

independent – in that way women could support financially their parents, proving that they "could be as filial as sons" (Fong,2002:1101).

The problem with such an interpretation is that being financially independent did not lift the responsibility of non-financial help and the support of dependent members of the family, both elderly parents and young children. In socialist China, women were also given an opportunity to work and get paid for it, but were still expected to be responsible for all or the majority of the household and caring duties – the one child-policy did not challenge that aspect (Hershatter, 2011). According to a Report on the Major Results of the Third Wave Survey on The Social Status of Women in China (2011) conducted by ACWF and the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the participation rate in the labour market of women aged 24-34, who have a child who is younger than 6 years, is 10.9% lower than the same age group of childless women, due to the continuity of their role of primary carer. What is more, the same report indicates that during the "work day, the average working minutes per person is 574 for women and 537 for men" and in days off work "the average leisure time per person is 240 for women and 297 for men" (Report on the Major Results of the Third Wave Survey on The Social Status of Women in China, 2011). It is not clear than if, in the broader perspective, it (the possibility to financially support the family) can be understood as empowerment, especially since the financial care of children and elderly parents is demanded from both sons and daughters by law (Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, 2011).

Another gendered advantage Fong (2002) sees is the fact that "men have neither the obstacle of the glass ceiling nor the protection of the glass floor" (p.1102). In other words, while women are still being denied management level positions, they have more possibilities to find a job in new sectors (e.g. services), which favour female employees. Women are then 'deprived' of professional success, but, on the other hand, have more chances to find employment. It should be, however, highlighted that these opportunities are often available for a particular group of women - for example, in the case of the service sector those who are young and good looking (Otis, 2011). This phenomenon has been referred to as the 'rice bowl of youth' (Hanser, 2005; Zhang, 2000). Although these new tendencies do create some temporary opportunities for young women, at the same time they tend to block

"employment access of older laid-off women workers, and reinforces gender stereotypes" (Wang, 2003:174). (See Table 3; and Figure 3 to Figure 11).

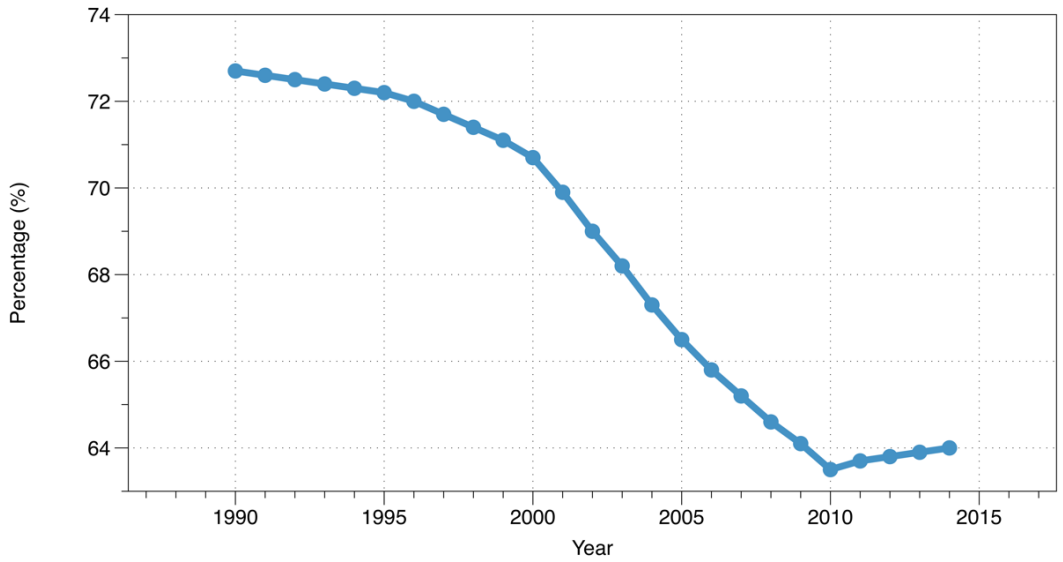
What is more, the pay gap between men and women is significant, as women make 67.3% of the wages of a man in urban areas (Report on the Major Results of the Third Wave Survey on The Social Status of Women in China, 2011).

The only 'place' where women do occupy higher and well-paid positions are foreign owned companies and joint ventures. However, it seems that this 'benefit' has also been limited since those companies opt to hire foreign over local managers (especially since learning Chinese has become very popular), meaning Chinese women have "begun to complain about a glass ceiling with both a racial and a gender tint" (Wang, 2003:176), as well as the fact that there are less and less SOEs in China as its welfare system clashes with the needs of the market economy, which creates a backlash of the near universal participation of women in the labour market in the pre-reform era (Cook & Dong, 2011).

It is, therefore, important to notice that despite the government's promise of the one-child policy serving as a 'tool' of women's liberation, supported by some feminist, such as Li Xiaojiang, the former director of the Women's Studies Centre at Zhengzhou University in Henan province (Greenhalgh, 2001), the participation of women in the labour market is falling significantly. According to data from the World Bank, the number of women doing paid work fell significantly from 73% in 1991 to 64% in 2013 (World Bank, 2016b). What is more, these number would have been even lower if women doing part-time and temporary jobs were excluded from the equation. (See Table 3; and Figure 3 to Figure 9).

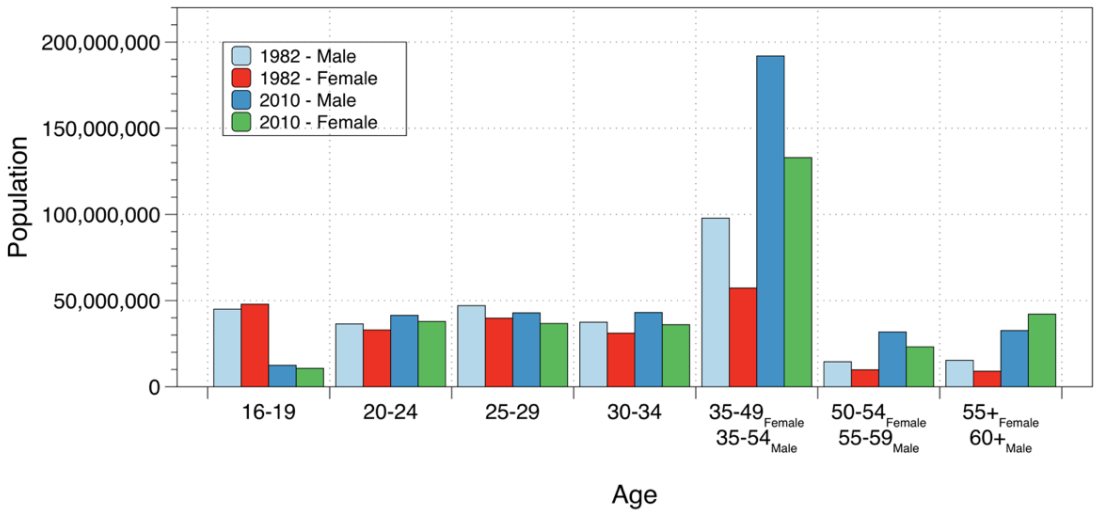
The state's policy, together with the market economy, encouraged parents to educate their children in order to give them a better life, but the neo-liberal ideology which underpinned the idea of population control (Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005) – still presented as something being done in the spirit of socialism and for the benefit of all – made it possible for very few to get to the proverbial top. And when we add the factor of culture, we realize that the very top is difficult to reach for boys, but nearly impossible to reach for girls who want to have a family as well. The one-child policy did not 'prevent' the fact that in post-reform China the responsibility for caring for family members has shifted back to family. And within the structure of family, it

was women who were and are expected to perform household and care duties, which may become overwhelming due to the 4-2-1 phenomenon caused by the one-child policy, which will be the focus in the following part.



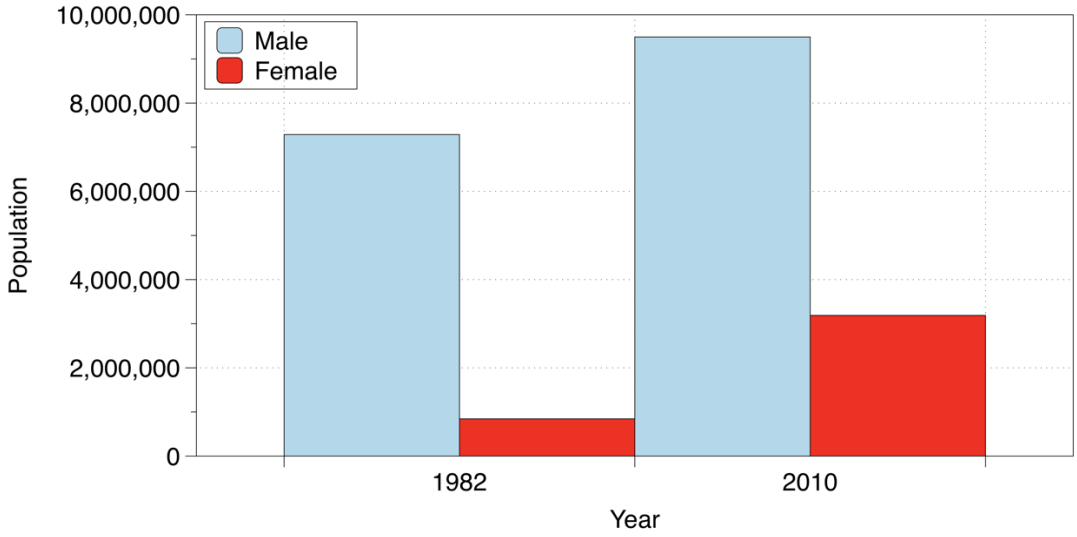
World Bank (2016b). Labour force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (modelled ILO estimate). Retrieved from: http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?locations=CN

Figure 3 - Labour force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+)



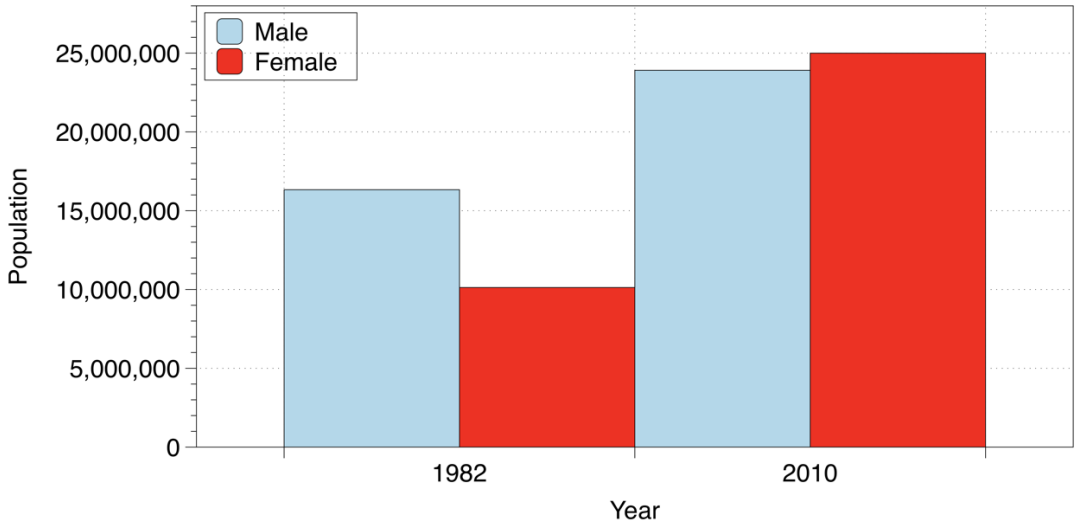
Tabulation on the 2010 Population census of the Peoples Republic of China. (2010). Beijing: China Statistics Press.
Population Census of China (1982). Population Census Office under the state Council and Department of Population Statistics. Beijing: State Statistical Bureau.

Figure 4 - Labour market participation according to age and sex



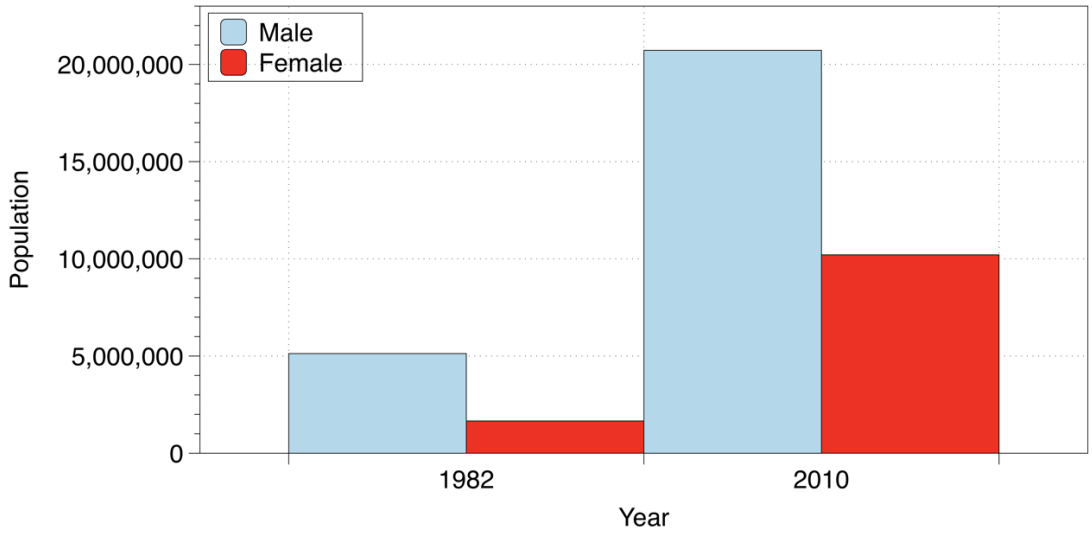
Tabulation on the 2010 Population census of the Peoples Republic of China. (2010). Beijing: China Statistics Press.
Population Census of China (1982). Population Census Office under the state Council and Department of Population Statistics. Beijing: State Statistical Bureau.

Figure 5 - Labour market participation distributed by sex and occupation (Government Officials, Party Leadership and Corporate Officer)



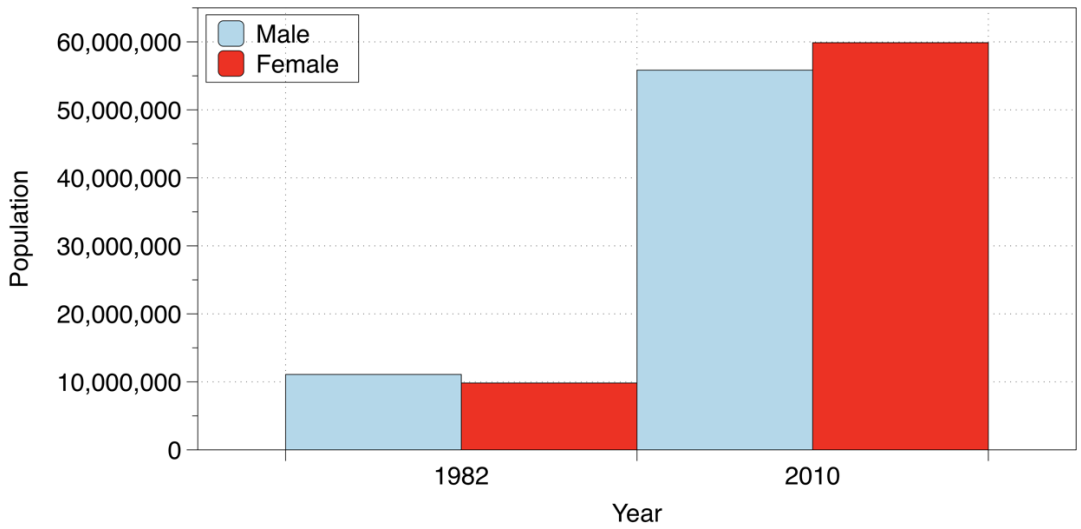
Tabulation on the 2010 Population census of the Peoples Republic of China. (2010). Beijing: China Statistics Press.
Population Census of China (1982). Population Census Office under the state Council and Department of Population Statistics. Beijing: State Statistical Bureau.

Figure 6 - Labour market participation distributed by sex and occupation (Vocational, Specialists and Technical Personnel)



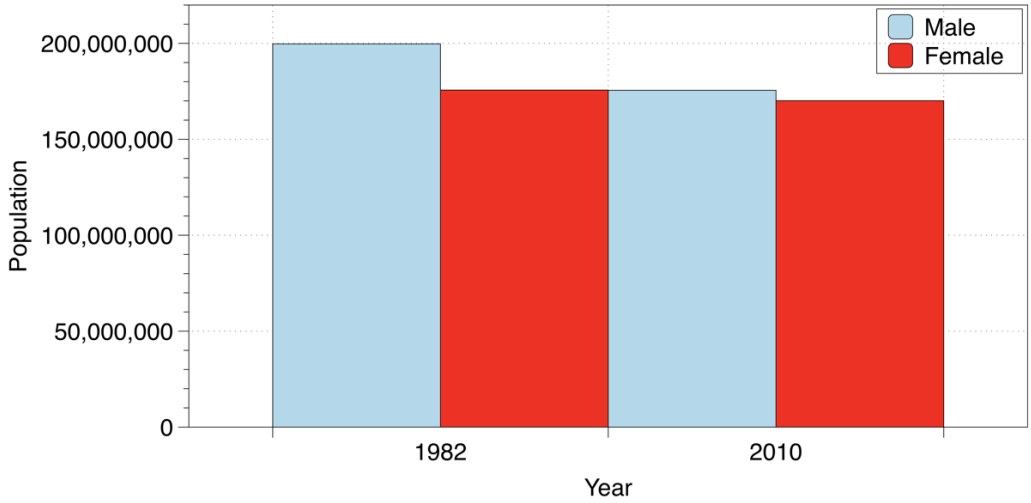
Tabulation on the 2010 Population census of the Peoples Republic of China. (2010). Beijing: China Statistics Press.
Population Census of China (1982). Population Census Office under the state Council and Department of Population Statistics. Beijing: State Statistical Bureau.

Figure 7 - Labour market participation distributed by sex and occupation (Office workers)



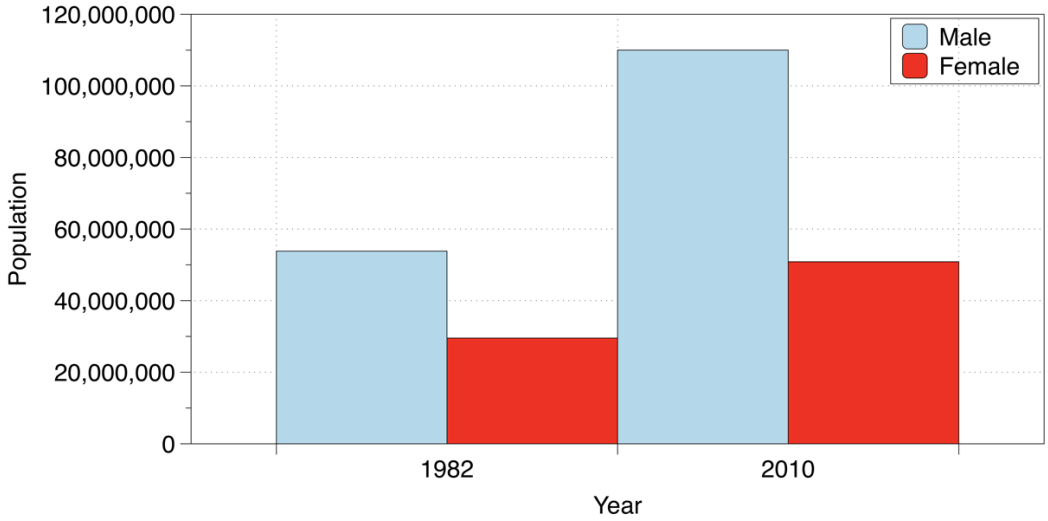
Tabulation on the 2010 Population census of the Peoples Republic of China. (2010). Beijing: China Statistics Press.
Population Census of China (1982). Population Census Office under the state Council and Department of Population Statistics. Beijing: State Statistical Bureau.

Figure 8 - Labour market participation distributed by sex and occupation (Sales, Business and Commerce Workers)



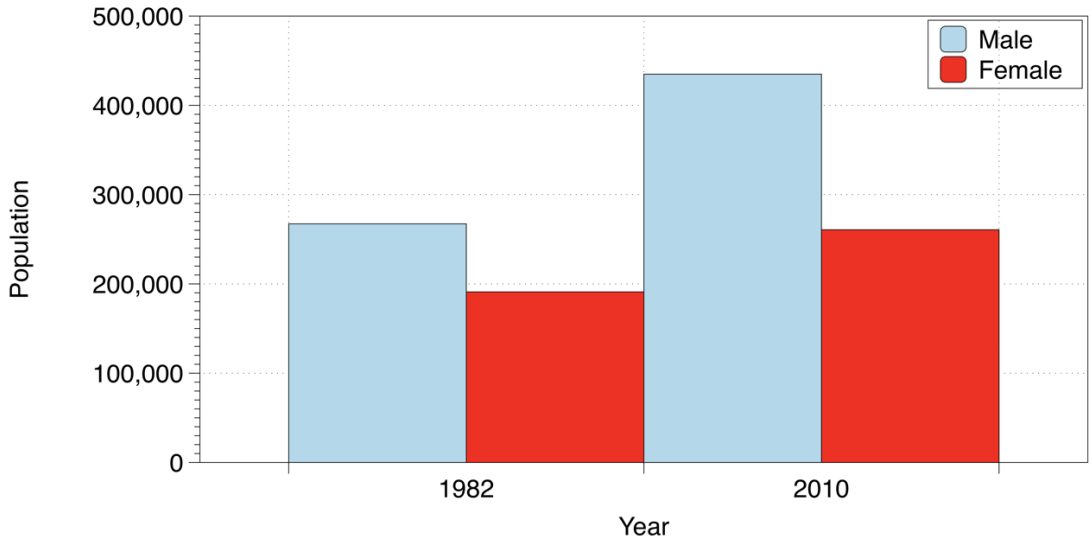
Tabulation on the 2010 Population census of the Peoples Republic of China. (2010). Beijing: China Statistics Press.
Population Census of China (1982). Population Census Office under the state Council and Department of Population Statistics. Beijing: State Statistical Bureau.

Figure 9 - Labour market participation distributed by sex and occupation (Farmers and other primary sector workers)



Tabulation on the 2010 Population census of the Peoples Republic of China. (2010). Beijing: China Statistics Press.
Population Census of China (1982). Population Census Office under the state Council and Department of Population Statistics. Beijing: State Statistical Bureau.

Figure 10 - Labour market participation distributed by sex and occupation (Factory Workers)



Tabulation on the 2010 Population census of the Peoples Republic of China. (2010). Beijing: China Statistics Press.
Population Census of China (1982). Population Census Office under the state Council and Department of Population Statistics. Beijing: State Statistical Bureau.

Figure 11 - Labour market participation distributed by sex and occupation (Others)

2.3.2 The 4-2-1 phenomenon and the issue of an aging population

The 4-2-1 phenomenon is associated with the effects the one-child policy had on the structure of present day Chinese society (See Figure 12 - Figure 15). On the one hand, because of rapidly falling birth rates, China is becoming a so called aging population, which is predicted to become a heavy burden around the year 2030, as the generation of Chinse singletons will have to take care of their elderly parents and grandparents (Flaherty et al.,2007). On the other hand, it creates a family structure in which six grown-ups (two parents and four grandparents) are taking care of only one child.

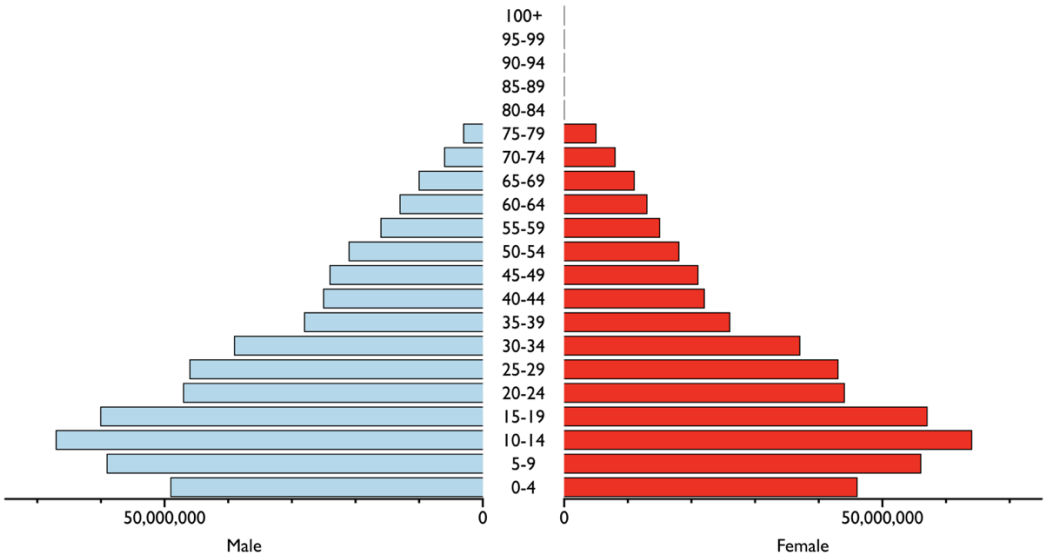
This means that, on the one hand, China is facing a massive lack of care, while on the other it is experiencing an abundance of it (Abrahamson, 2016). This trend can be observed in Table 2, which indicates that, according to the Census Data of 1982, 1990 and 2000 (Yi & Wang, 2003), 64% of women and 55.8% of men aged 65 and above live with their children, while only 0.4% of women and 0.7% of man live in institutions.

The problem of an aging population, while overlooked by the government and Family Planning Committees, was a core concern for some Chinese specialists, among whom was Liang Zhongtang, who aware of the fact that the aims of the one-child policy are impossible to realize, referred to the problem of an aging society and the

heavy burden it would bring to China as being *shifen* (ten tenths) serious (Greenhalgh, 2008). His calculations, made at the beginning of the very existence of the one-child policy, suggested that in 2020 the number of people aged over 60 will reach 23% of the population, which will cause China to become a "breathless, lifeless society without a future" (Liang, 1985:5). This analysis, however, assumed the responsibility of the state to provide a pension and health care systems which would be able to provide the necessary assistance for all those in need, hence neglected the 'price' (not only monetary) women and the elderly will have to pay. But, as has already been mentioned, the Chinese state is on its way to making the transition from the welfare to neo-liberal state and shifting that responsibility to the individual, while still, however, maintaining that it is all being done in the spirit of communism. Despite the latest changes to the policy (two-children-for-all) and the state's emphasis on broadening welfare policies (Fan, 2006), it will not change much the aspect of care, as "the traditional role of families remains more robust in China both ideologically and in practice as family support is still the dominant form of welfare provision" (Izuhara & Forrest, 2013: 535). What should once again be stressed is that by family care we should understand the care provided by women, as they are responsible for 75% of long term elderly care in China (Glass, Gao, & Luo, 2013).

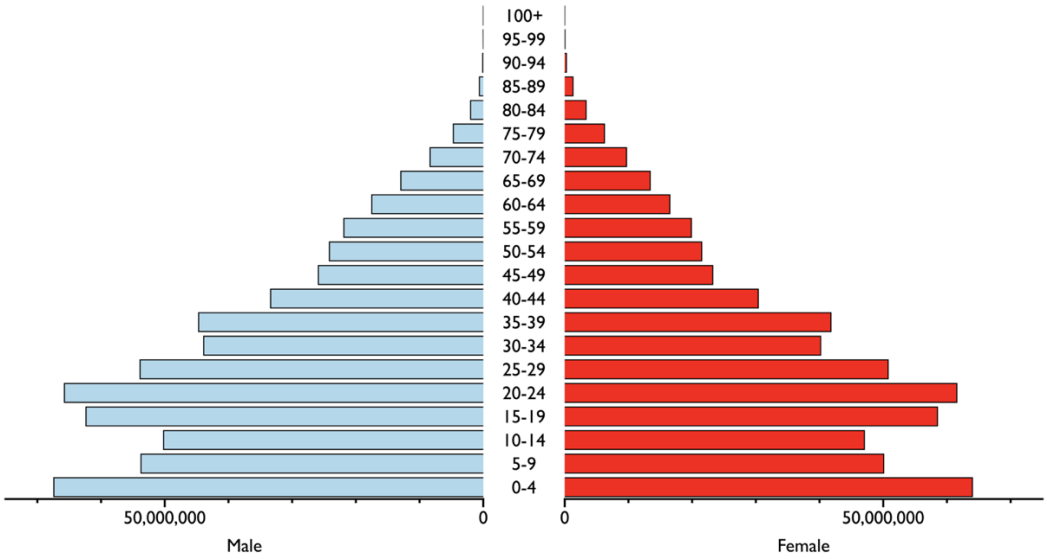
However, at this point the debate focusing on what is called the 'myth of aging population', which claims that the concern resulting from the changing age ratios is a socially created problem, needs to be highlighted. After deeper analysis of the phenomenon it can be seen that the 'fears' commonly associated (and promoted by the state) with the growing numbers of elderly members of the society, although seem to be reasonably justified at first, are in fact unjustified and baseless. Opponents of the theory of the threat of an aging population for the stability of the society and economy claim that, while fertility rates are falling in all affluent societies, life expectancy is extending and the proportion of people of the age of 65 and above is growing, it does not determine any of the common fears, such as the lack of a labour force for the future, growing costs for the healthcare system or the widening dependence ratio (Mullan, 2002). To counter arguments supporting the problems associated with the phenomenon of aging population, studies revealing data, which contradicts, inter alia, the assumption of the growing cost of the healthcare system

and its association with the growing percentage of people above 65 years old (Reinhardt, 2003) or problem of huge dependency ratio, which becomes a burden for young generations (McLennan, 1998) has been published. These studies clearly show that the social cost of raising children is actually much higher than that required in the case of the elderly, and also that the unhealthy lifestyle of younger generations creates more costs than the healthcare of older citizens (where costs are higher only for the last two years of their lives) and that the contribution of the elderly towards the development of the economy is neglected in demographic analysis, as the unpaid jobs they do for the families and community are not included in statistics. The 'aging society' becomes, therefore, as mentioned above, a socially created problem, which provides a ready 'tool' for governments who want to make 'justified' cuts in welfare expenses, especially in the pension system. As stated by Baird (2010), the age structure itself is not a problem - inequality and poverty are. And, in the case of China, a lack of sufficient retirement plans and assumption of the responsibility of care for frail parents and grandparents as the responsibility of children (which means, as we have mentioned before, daughters and daughters-in-law) which is demanded even by law according Criminal Law of 1979, Constitution of 1982 and Law on the Protection of the Elderly, which took effect in 2013 (Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China, 1997; Constitution of the People's Republic of China, 2014; National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 2012), becomes even more problematic in the new reality. This caused some scholars to blame the one-child policy and the generation of Chinese singletons for neglecting their duty and the loss of traditional Chinese virtues (Fowler, Gao & Carlson, 2010), while overlooking the fact that in the new market economy, with its shift of responsibility to the individual, lack of social support and urbanization and relocation across the generations, the traditional 'norms' simply cannot be fulfilled.



United Nations Statistics Division. (2016). Population by age, sex and urban/rural residence.
Retrieved from: http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=Population+by+age%2c+sex+and+urban%2frural+residence&d=POP&f=tableCode%3a22

Figure 12 - Changing population pyramid, 1982.



United Nations Statistics Division. (2016). Population by age, sex and urban/rural residence.
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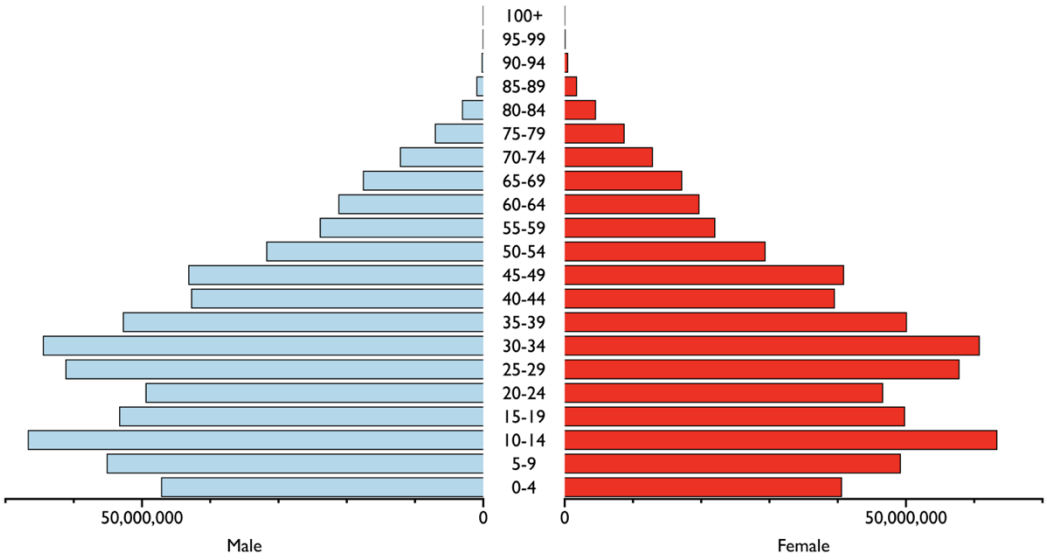
Figure 13 - Changing population pyramid, 1990.



United Nations Statistics Division. (2016). Population by age, sex and urban/rural residence.
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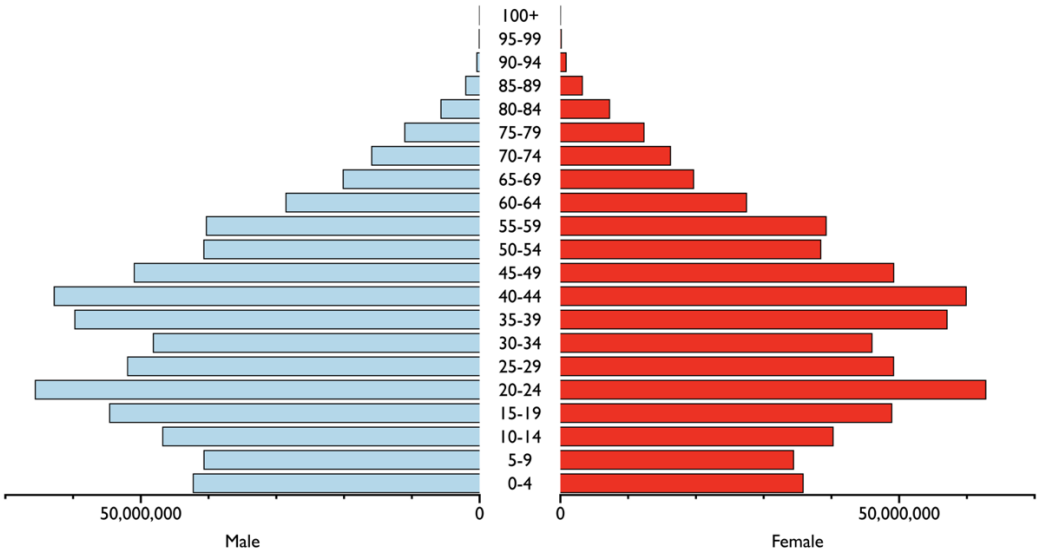
Figure 14 - Changing population pyramid, 2000.



United Nations Statistics Division. (2016). Population by age, sex and urban/rural residence.
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Figure 15 - Changing population pyramid, 2010.

Table 2 - Living Arrangements of Elderly Population Aged 65+: Cross-time Comparisons in 2000, 1990, and 1982, and Rural-urban Comparisons in 2000.

	Rural-urban combined			2000 rural vs. urban	
Males	**1982**	**1990**	**2000**	**Rural**	**Urban**
Living alone	10.7	8.3	8.4	8.7	7.7
With spouse only	16.9	20.7	28.8	26.3	33.7
With spouse & others, not with children	0.8	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.8
With spouse & children	39.9	40.6	37.4	36.5	39
With children, not with spouse	28	27	22.6	25.6	16.8
With others, not with spouse & children	2.2	1.8	1.7	1.9	1.3
Institution	1.5	1.1	0.4	0.3	0.7
Grand total	100	100	100	100	100
Subtotal of living with spouse	57.6	61.8	66.9	63.5	73.5
Subtotal of living with children	67.9	67.6	59.9	62.1	55.8
Females	**1982**	**1990**	**2000**	**Rural**	**Urban**
Living alone	13.7	10.8	10.7	9.8	12.4
With spouse only	10.6	13.4	19.1	17.9	21.3
With spouse & others, not with children	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.6
With spouse & children	16.2	19.6	22.4	22.8	21.7
With children, not with spouse	57.5	54.3	46.2	48.1	42.6
With others, not with spouse & children	1.4	1.2	0.9	0.9	1
Institution	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.4
Grand total	100	100	100	100	100
Subtotal of living with spouse	27.2	33.3	41.9	41	43.6
Subtotal of living with children	73.6	74	68.7	70.9	64.4

YI, Z., & WANG, Z. (2003). DYNAMICS OF FAMILY AND ELDERLY LIVING ARRANGEMENTS IN CHINA: NEW LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE 2000 CENSUS. CHINA REVIEW, 3(2), 95-119.

2.3.2 Little emperors/empresses and their perfect mothers

It is not easy, and it may not even be possible, for a woman who is working and has responsibilities concerning her own family to have enough time and resources to take good care of elderly parents and grandparents, even if she would like to do so (Liu, 2008). However, while the new model of the family has brought about the issue of the aforementioned dependency ratio from the point of view of caregiving responsibilities, we should also take into consideration its opposite – the issue and ratio of 'caretaking'. In other words, we should also ponder the issue of six grownups (two 'sets' of grandparents and a 'set' of parents) who focus all their attention, resources and hopes on their one child and grandchild. On one hand, the pressure posed on that child is incredibly high. The desire of parents, who suffered during the Cultural Revolution and were often denied proper education, to create a 'perfect

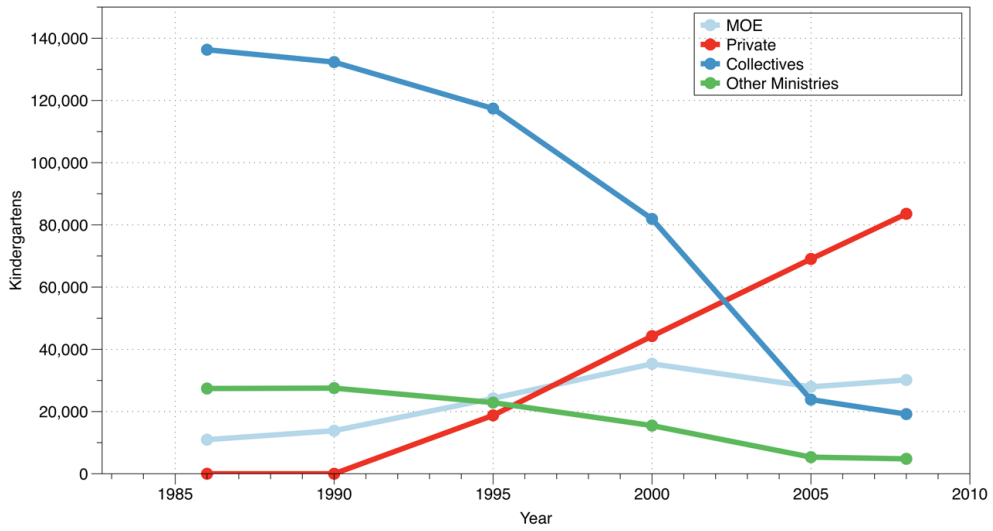
child', who will be extremely rich and successful, results in pressuring children to obtain the best grades in every school subject as well as many extracurricular activities and classes. As Croll (1995) suggested, such a pressure can evolve into a change of family relations, as many children simply cannot keep up with all the expectations and, in extreme cases, are leaving home and running away, as well as committing suicide. This picture has, however, a second side. Because of the one-child policy and the 4-2-1 phenomenon, the only child in a family has often been spoiled by a group of six grownups, who fulfilled all of the child's demands and wishes - this phenomenon is often referred to as *ni'ai* syndrome, that is the spoiling and pampering children by relatives, who were 'drawn' in love towards their one and only offspring. Children are often spoiled by their grandparents, who take care of them in cases where both parents have to work and do not have time to take care of their child, as well as by parents, who are trying to give their children's everything and also to compensate for the lack of attention they are able to give their child through material presents – a practice, that is not unknown in other societies. This claimed effect of the one-child policy was said to create a selfish, self-oriented generation of so-called little emperors and little empresses, for whom the duty of helping family members in their late years is unthinkable.

To solve the problem of the so-called little emperors, some parents reach for 'extreme' solutions. The so called *chiku* (to bear hardship) camps, where children experience real world of life in the countryside, where they need to do some work and basically take care of themselves, are getting more and more popular (Attané, 2012) – and its difficult not to draw a line between those practices and the practice of sending young people from cities to work in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. Some parents, as a method to 'fix' their spoiled children, pretend to have some financial troubles - they change their lifestyle, move to a poorer neighbourhood and move away from all forms of luxury, in the hope of bringing their little emperor or empress back to earth (Xie,2008).

All of this analysis, however, raises doubt and questions. While the one-child policy was supposed to relieve women from the burden of multiple childbirths and childrearing responsibilities, it seems that the need of these women to become perfect mothers who will guarantee the best possibilities for their only child, has not

made it easier for them and it has made it impossible to balance participation in the labour market with the second duty of housework (Greenhalgh, 2010). According to the Report on the Major Results of the Third Wave Survey on the Social Status of Women in China (2011), “care for children under the age of 3 is fulfilled mainly within households. Among care providers, 63.2% are mothers who serve as primary daytime caregivers”. It does not come as a surprise since only 16% of children in urban areas were taken care of by child care centres (Kilburn & Datar, 2002). It is also important to notice the shift in the ratio of public and private childcare facilities. According to the World Bank (2011), “while no private kindergartens were in existence in 1986, 60 percent of kindergartens were private by 2008” (p.40), which makes public institutions more difficult to access. (See Figure 16).

What is more, according to Article 13 of the recently Revised Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly (National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China, 2012) elderly care has also been shifted to the family, as the “elderly shall be provided for mainly by their families, and their family members shall respect, care for and look after them.” Such policies and regulations, indicating the withdrawal of the state from the socialization of care (not only for children), makes it therefore necessary to explore caring services and policies in greater detail.



World bank. (2011). CHINA POLICY NOTE. Early Childhood Development and Education in China: Breaking the Cycle of Poverty and Improving Future Competitiveness. Retrieved from: http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/331181468024281783/pdf/537460Replacem11Grey0Cover010FINAL.pdf

Figure 16 - Share of Kindergartens by Ownership, 1968-2008

What is more, it is crucial to ask if this problem can be solved with the two-children per couple policy. After all, the issue of little emperors is still strictly associated with family size and the lack of siblings (Cameron, Erkal, Gangadharan, & Meng, 2013), not with the new neo-liberal reality of China.

2. 4 Conclusion

What stands out from this literature review is the lack of women's perspective on the effects the one-child policy has had on their lives. While such an 'artificial' way of controlling population (via the control of women's bodies) in order to 'guarantee' development and modernization have influenced all Chinese people, the view of those who were most affected by it should be incorporated into the analysis of the policy, as nobody can understand the problems disadvantage members of society are facing better then themselves.

Although the effects of the one-child policy cannot be unequivocally grouped as favourable or not for all women in each of their life stages, it should be stressed that, as mentioned by Chen (2009), the family planning policy itself is "biased against women" (p.70) as it is "using women as instruments to obtain population and development goals" (p.71). Chen (2009) argues that the gender bias of the one-child policy was caused by "male dominated top-down orientation and the way in which the policy was implemented reinforced women's subordination" (p.73). Women did not participate in the creation of the policy, but only in its implementation. They are the ones responsible for obeying the requirements of the policy and the strict birth control programs. They are often employed in low paid jobs, which do not provide retirement benefits and do not secure their future. They hold the majority of responsibility not only for bringing up perfect offspring but also for taking care of elderly dependent family members. This is just a part of the price paid for development and a decrease in the size of the population. It has caused some to assume not the empowerment of women, but rather a step back in their role in the family and into the traditional division of labour (Milwertz, 1997).

As the policy itself is gendered, its consequences should also be examined through the lens of gender analysis. Although many pieces of work have been

dedicated to the outcomes of the phenomenon, it seems that the majority of them follow the steps of the demographic perspective – whilst making claims about the policy effect on gender issues. In order to provide deeper analysis of the diversified influences of the one-child policy on the lives of Chinese women and highlight the important factor of the state and its influence on shaping gender inequality in China, in the third chapter I will focus on alternative theoretical perspectives, which could reveal a dynamic, changeable perception of the outcomes the policy has had on women in China. Such an undertaking could help to fill the gap in the literature on this, evidently, well, however also quite 'uniformly', researched issue.

Table 3 - Labour market participation according to age, sex and occupation.

	Total		Government Officials, Party Leadership and Corporate Officers		Vocational, Specialists and Technical Personnel		Office workers		Sales, Business and Commerce Workers		Farmers and other primary sector workers		Factory Workers		Other	
	1982	2010	1982	2010	1982	2010	1982	2010	1982	2010	1982	2010	1982	2010	1982	2010
Male	293,661,280	395,972,820	7,286,564	9,497,860	16,331,847	23,910,160	5,127,143	20,724,990	11,088,913	55,844,970	199,722,672	175,542,980	53,836,871	110,016,950	267,270	434,910
Female	227,844,338	319,507,070	844,223	3,188,550	10,125,671	24,999,250	1,661,204	10,206,850	9,832,189	59,879,930	175,657,806	170,111,410	29,532,173	50,860,390	191,072	260,690
General Population	521,505,618	715,479,890	8,130,787	12,686,410	26,457,518	48,909,410	6,788,347	30,931,840	20,921,102	115,724,900	375,380,478	345,654,390	83,369,044	160,877,340	458,342	695,600
Age	Male															
16-19	45,012,206	12,403,550	4,889	24,640	609,666	209,360	253,615	252,010	1,056,062	1,831,900	35,922,305	5,677,470	7,083,090	4,395,130	82,579	13,040
20-24	36,427,362	41,431,560	56,245	325,530	1,790,740	2,051,340	572,798	1,683,310	1,357,954	7,155,960	23,047,475	14,837,450	9,539,136	15,332,820	63,014	45,150
25-29	47,073,854	42,809,160	300,571	850,470	2,925,111	3,896,580	794,775	2,555,970	1,642,743	7,856,480	29,936,623	13,333,210	11,434,886	14,267,340	39,145	49,110
30-34	37,485,433	43,057,720	600,584	1,237,390	2,437,466	3,700,290	773,311	2,665,670	1,339,284	7,549,070	23,928,372	13,670,870	8,384,550	14,185,130	21,866	49,300
35-54	97,837,464	191,933,610	5,408,139	6,151,710	7,644,650	12,044,240	2,438,344	11,099,290	3,892,119	26,807,300	63,074,261	80,571,350	15,332,303	55,032,510	47,648	227,210
55-59	14,512,662	31,770,060	670,170	699,870	550,597	1,456,410	201,620	1,745,150	792,889	2,886,950	11,100,345	20,136,520	1,191,017	4,814,080	6,024	31,080
60+	15,312,299	32,567,160	245,966	208,250	373,617	551,940	92,680	723,590	1,007,862	1,757,310	12,713,291	27,316,110	871,889	1,989,940	6,994	20,020
Age	Female															
16-19	47,906,811	10,697,270	2,641	17,030	710,388	326,600	109,744	142,040	1,252,103	2,263,810	39,935,246	4,741,350	5,826,993	3,197,810	69,696	8,630
20-24	32,956,847	37,882,130	20,521	214,480	1,718,232	3,110,110	261,510	1,468,220	1,680,135	9,015,880	22,861,410	15,351,140	6,369,786	8,692,140	45,253	30,160
25-29	39,783,904	36,726,380	80,251	458,800	2,308,114	4,900,280	380,936	2,032,910	1,781,028	8,740,100	29,139,046	13,755,220	6,063,937	6,808,230	30,592	30,840
30-34	31,093,464	35,993,580	97,548	533,620	1,628,088	4,490,460	267,648	1,665,620	1,342,293	8,387,300	23,692,314	14,092,180	4,048,844	6,790,580	16,729	33,820
35-49	57,296,090	132,916,020	455,644	1,679,090	3,394,958	10,554,270	548,637	4,231,440	2,838,082	26,283,000	43,749,401	67,771,300	6,286,986	22,269,440	22,382	127,480
50-54	9,816,331	23,165,300	120,009	179,270	254,215	1,139,460	66,756	451,150	434,676	2,700,560	8,369,038	16,990,040	568,680	1,690,440	2,957	14,380
55+	8,990,891	42,126,390	67,609	106,260	111,676	478,070	25,973	215,470	503,872	2,489,280	7,911,351	37,410,180	366,947	1,411,750	3,463	15,380

TABULATION ON THE 2010 POPULATION CENSUS OF THE PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA. (2010). BEIJING: CHINA STATISTICS PRESS.

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CHAPTER THREE - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

While in the previous chapter I focused on the existing body of research on the family planning policy, this chapter will elaborate on an alternative approach to studying the one-child policy and its influence on gender inequality, which would be more insightful than the demographic perspective which has, until now, dominated the field.

First, I will explain what demographic research is and why its limitations, especially its tendency to neglect gender, culture, power and widely understood diversity, renders it inadequate for this research project. Next, I will focus on the 'replacement' of the demographic perspective which would be applied for the study – post-structural feminism, which will be reinforced by the life course perspective. I will concentrate on justifying the need to look through a feminist lens on the issue of the one-child policy and the gender inequalities, and I will provide an explanation as to why the post-structural theory was chosen and why it needs the support of the life course perspective. Then, I will summarize the major debates in feminist literature in order to explain the focus points of the research design. The last part of this chapter will consist of the framework of analysis.

3.2 Domination of the demographic perspective

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, women's voices and their understanding of what the one-child policy brought about for their gendered lives is nearly totally excluded from existing analysis. While the main focus of the Western media was placed on the ways in which the one-child policy was enforced (especially during its most 'aggressive' periods of 1983 and 1991), scholars have mainly chosen the demographic approach to explore and explain the consequences of this phenomenon. As the one-child policy has brought a tremendous change in the

composition of the Chinese society, it is unsurprising that demography and its findings have dominated the field. These projects have directed attention to the growing imbalance of the sex ratio, the transition in a very short time into an aging society, the problems of little emperors and little empresses (the 4-2-1 phenomenon) and the fear of the so called 'bachelors army'. It is worth mentioning that it was also demographic projections which made the Chinese leadership implement the policy in the first place, viewing it as the only option for China and its development. The problem which arises here is that the perspective that dominated both the formation of the policy, and the analysis of its effect, caused a situation in which "population becomes demography and something to be recorded and managed" (Widdowson, 2006:149), while "behind the numbers that are being manipulated are real women with human rights and health needs" (Shiva, 1992:5), as well as their own ways of understanding, challenging and internalizing the situation which the one-child policy created for them and their lives.

Bearing these statements in mind, we should now focus on understanding the concepts that stand behind the term of demography and the reasons why an alternative perspective for the analysis of the one-child policy and its impact on gender inequality in modern China is desperately needed.

Demography has a long history that can be traced back as far as the times of the ancient civilizations of Greece, Rome, China and India (Shrivastava, 1980). To put it very simple – it is a scientific study of the population of humans. Size, composition, distribution and growth are the main factors demographers operate with while describing societies (Faafeu-Taaloga, 2003). Demography studies population changes over time, using almost uniquely quantitative research methods (Watkins, 1993) and focuses on empirically measurable variables, such as birth, sex ratio, fertility, migration, education, labour force participation and age. Demography strives for scientific objectivity and hence justifies the generalization of its inquiry and understanding of the correlation between various factors. The error of this uncritical belief in the power of 'hard' science, which is supposed to provide universally valid and objective 'truths', despite the criticism of, for example, Lyotard (1984), who elaborated on the impossibility of using a 'totalizing' paradigm in the studies of heterogeneous societies, is perfectly visible from the example of the one-child policy,

which instead of solving the population problem created countless new ones (see Chapter Two).

These assumptions – scientific objectivity and generalization - put demography in the 'area' of positivist paradigm and hence the belief that "research is or can be conducted divorced from the politics of and social relationships of power, class, gender, and race of the society in which it takes place" (Riley, 1999:386).

The insistence on 'universal assumptions' is inseparably connected to demography's belief in the linear composition of societies. It leads to the situation in which "demographic theory is influenced by this belief that societies exist on a continuum from 'less developed' to 'more developed', and that the one end of that continuum - the 'western' modern end - is better" (Riley, 1999:387). And this incorporates demographic research into the paradigm of modernity (Pieterse, 2010). Modernization and development are typically associated with economic growth and the assumption that being modern is basically equal to being Western (Shils, 1960; Latouche, 1993). The rationalization of everyday life "under the pressures of economic and administrative imperatives" (Habermas & Ben-Habib, 1981:6), focusing on the 'progress' towards a more productive, affluent and efficient society, caused demography to adopt an interconnected and interrelated understanding of this progress. This means that modernization and progress in one aspect of social life would necessarily cause changes in other aspects. One of the examples of this assumption– the idea which motivated the creators of the one-child policy - is the association between the economic affluence of a society with a declining fertility rate and the transition from numerous families – an obstacle for modernization – to smaller, nuclear units of kinship. The persistence of this conviction is astonishing, especially since a lot has been done to point out that these assumptions are wrong (Knodel & van de Walle, 1979). The situation in Nordic countries is probably the best example here. Although considered one of the most affluent societies in the world, they still have the highest fertility rate in Europe (Andersson, 2004). This shows that in developed economic systems fertility rates might increase, and not necessarily decrease. Moreover, it also points to the fact that the issue of fertility growth or decline is not connected to affluence itself, but rather to the distribution of the resources and the state's adoption of family-friendly and gender oriented policies

(Kravdal, 2006). Another, similar example of 'faulty reasoning' and belief in 'economic rationality' and in 'universalizing truths', which Donna Haraway labels as a "false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility" (Haraway, 1988:582-3), causes demographic research to make a direct link not only between economic growth and fertility, but also between education and lower fertility. This reasoning is followed by the claim of the increase of the status of women (Riley, 1999; Boserup, 2007). It does not, however, clearly justify the connection between these indicators, nor pay attention to the ways in which these issues are being negotiated or why less children or better education must mean that all women, at all stages of time, are being somehow 'empowered'. Demography, in other words, overlooks "diversity in the search for convergence" (Tipps, 1973: 215) – an issue which I will focus on more in the following part of the chapter.

Another problem with the paradigm of modernity and demography is that it presupposes that everything that is modern cannot be traditional (Huntington, 1971) – an exclusion that is inadequate, as traditional values and behaviours are present in societies considered as modern (Tipps, 1973). From the point of view of a researcher interested in the policy effect on gender inequality, demography's insistence on the conviction that modernity must mean a better situation for gender equality (Marshall, 2013) is even more problematic. The fact that certain inequalities are not as clearly visible and 'pronounced' as they were at a different, 'traditional' time, does not mean that they do not exist anymore, even if they are "absent from more visible and formal institutions such as laws" (Riley, 1999:388). As summarized by Ewen and Ewen (1992):

> As women moved from the constricted family-dominated culture to the more individualized values of modern urban society, the form and content of domination changed, but new authorities replaced the old. In the name of freedom from tradition, women were trapped anew fresh forms of sexual objectification and bound to the consumerized and sexualized household. (p.73)

3.3 Towards post-structural feminist analysis

The above discussion does not aim, however, to invalidate the usefulness of the demographic inquiry. In the end, these "studies present powerful portraits of the

scale and scope of China's state-mandated fertility transition" (Fong, 2004:4) and pointed out important and urgent issues which Chinese society and the government will have to face in the nearest future. However, an alternative approach, which does not neglect the social context is, as proven in the previous section, necessary for the analysis of the one-child policy's outcomes and their relation to gender equality – equality, which, in the words of Scott (1988), "rests on differences – differences that confound, disrupt and render ambiguous the meaning of any fixed binary opposition" (p.48), allowing new discourses to be heard and to constitute the 'alternative' for the dominant and hegemonic ones, which claim to be the one and only 'truths'.

At this point I think it is necessary to explain certain mutually 'co-dependent' issues. First of all is the question of why, as indicated in the title of this subsection, I want to make a turn towards post-structural and feminist analysis. And second of all, why I insist on focusing on the impact of the one-child policy on gender inequalities. As I have already hinted before, by falling in to the trap of the paradigm of positivism and modernity, demography neglects the social context and factors of culture, diversity, power, class and gender. Hammel (1990) claimed that "the use of 'culture' in demography seems mired in structural-functional concepts that are about 40 years old, hardening rapidly, and showing every sign of fossilization" (p.456). The issue of power, another factor neglected by demography, should be understood not in the hierarchical way, but rather in the Foucauldian interpretation with its omnipresence and changeability (Foucault, 1980). It should point to the importance of diversity and - again – the mistake of generalizing claims of the undeniable link between certain factors, such as education, lower fertility and the better position of women, without taking into consideration the cultural context of a given society. As demographic inquiry focuses on selected variables only, whose mutual influence cannot be simply quantified, it neglects and creates so called 'narrow burdens' (Riley, McCarthy & McCarthy, 2003), which does not allow for an insight on population heterogeneity (Xie, 2007; Heckman, 2001). Post-structural feminism, in other words, "rewrites not only our knowledge of but also our construction of society by inscribing gender in social relations – that is, by articulating the gender differences patriarchy requires but naturalizes "as the way things are," and conceals in the illusion of universality" (Ebert, 1991:888).

But the remaining question is why culture, power and diversity are important in the analysis of the one-child policy and why post-structural analysis, which takes these factors into consideration, is an 'obvious' choice for such an alternative. What is important to highlight here is that substantial social change cannot be 'compressed' by the usage of standardization, which is attempting to explain the differences that exist in the population by "variance of other variables" (Preston, 1978:301-302). We need to move to post-structural analysis not because of the importance of understanding certain behaviours as structurally linked and 'measurable' - for example, the preferences of sons in China because of their roles in prolonging a family line – but because of the importance of understanding the meaning which is behind these behaviours (Riley, 1999:388). When we stop and think about this, trying to challenge the base of a given example, we can ask, first of all, where does the assumption that only boys can carry family line came from? And was Chinese women's preference for a baby boy really associated with prolonging the family line? After all, in traditional China, marriage for women meant that she was no longer a part of her blood family, but that she became part of her husband's family. Would she then think that a baby boy is prolonging her family line? Would she not rather prefer to have a baby boy, because she would know that it would give her more power in her new family structure or, because the boy will remain part of her life even after his marriage, so she could count on him for support in her old age? And one thought aside – if it was really all about the blood line – how would we come up with the concept of patrilineality? In the end, logically speaking, it would rather be matrilocality which would actually guarantee the continuation of the blood line. However, without an understanding of the concrete social context with its culture, power relations and differences, such an understanding of the meanings of behaviours would not be possible. And, without that knowledge, various socially constructed myths and discourses – such as the belief of the connection between lower fertility and development, treating aging population as a threat for an economic system or the assumption of the end of a preference for sons in favour of girls and hence implying their 'empowerment' in China as an effect of the one-child policy – will remain 'in force', putting a shade over existing problems and not really going into the complex reason for their constant existence and reinforcement.

The strength of post-structural feminist analysis lies in the fact that it allows alternative explanations and discourses to be heard and to challenge the dominant ones through the concepts of agency and resistance. As agency in post-structural feminism is not understood as glorified in the modern world idea of 'free will' or 'rational choice', the ways in which it is being acted upon must be explained as a constant process – a process of becoming and a process of changing "in the mutually constitutive web of social practices, discourses and subjectivity" (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine, 1984:117). What is important to clarify here is that the 'creation' of subjectivity of the self is, to certain extend, limited to those discourses which are given the power of being 'almighty knowledges and truths' "by those who are squarely located in and powerfully positioned within the dominant discourses" (Davis, 1991:44). The post-structural approach to the research on the one-child policy can help, in words of Davis (1991), to make it clear "how a person is subjected by discourse" (p.46) of, for example, natural role of women as a carer or her own value based only on youth, and how ultimately illusory is the concept of agency understood as freedom of choice. Adopting post-structural feminist approach on the gender equalities in China understood by Chinese women and the influence of the one-child policy on them allows a deep insight on how the dominant discourses are being internalized. It also helps to reveal the 'scope' of those discourses and the limitation of accessible choices (I will, in the empirical part of this research, show how often women are limited to the 'choice' between what is commonly approved and having absolutely no support for a living) and hence giving a chance for acting upon the agency as understood in the framework of post-structural analysis – giving a 'platform' for those different voices which have not been heard before and creating a chance for them to 'join' the pallet of available discourses. Having this agency gives alternative discourses a chance to resist existing one by, as Cixous (1976) labels it, having an *authority* which

> would not be coercive and would not be located within dominant discourses insofar as it persuaded them to change themselves, to become more multiple, flexible and inclusive of different points of view (…) Agency is never freedom from discursive constitution of self but the capacity to recognize that constitution and to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted (Davis, 1991:51).

Many of those socially constructed myths and dominant discourses are connected to the issues of gender and, as mentioned before, persistence of the structuralist belief that there is a 'linear' explanation of both women's oppression and women's 'empowerment'. This issue is connected to the fact that, in demographic inquiry, research focuses on sex, that being an 'attribute' of an individual (Andersen, 2014), rather than gender as it is understood in feminist scholarship "as a way in which societies, institutions, and individuals are organized and situated" (Riley, 1999:377). And understanding the role of gender as an organizing principle of all societies, as being socially constructed and that it must involve the politics of inequality (Riley, 1999:370-5), would allow a better understanding of the demographic changes brought about by the one-child policy and, at the same time, provide indications of what should or could be done about the existing problems and complex situation of inequality. It must be kept in mind that all the effects of the one-child policy and demographic changes it has caused are all 'underpinned' by the way in which gender is 'carved' into all social, cultural, political and economic systems and that these systems are changeable and constantly working together to 'create' our social reality. And this is the main reason for my insistence of incorporating the post-structural feminist perspective into the study of the one-child policy – and, as a matter of fact, any policy whatsoever. In the end, being a feminist researcher or theorist:

> is itself to engage in the very act of choosing to speak, of discovering the possibility of authority, of using that speaking, that authority, to bring about fundamental changes in the possible ways of being that are available to oneself and others (Davis, 1991:52).

This alternative analysis will, therefore, provide an "insight not only into the manipulation of concepts and definitions but also into the implementation and justification of institutional and political power" (Scott, 1988:43).

What must be remembered is the fact that feminist theory is heterogeneous and we should rather be discussing feminist theories– and it stands for post-structural feminism(s) as well. Although feminists generally agree that there is the problem of inequality which places women in a subordinate position and makes them somehow inferior to men, there is no agreement on what constitutes the situation of this

unprivileged position and what actions should be undertaken in order to assure the end of oppression. To put it simply - liberal feminism voted for equality in the public sphere (education, work, political rights) as a way to free women from male oppression. The radical feminist movement claimed that those reforms are not enough to liberate women. Instead, what is needed is a revolution, a drastic change to the current situation and the abolishment of the patriarchal system, which is the root cause of women's oppression, and, according to some activist, even the root and 'model' for any other kind of inequality and discrimination (Millett, 2000). Marxist and socialist feminists also advocate revolution as the only solution for the improvement of women's subordinated and disadvantaged position, even though these two position did not agree completely for the reasons why women are in this situation. While Marxist feminists consider the economic system of capitalism and the linear system of class being the reason for women's oppression, socialist feminists add to the equation the patriarchal cultural system (Tong, 2013).

Although, even Mao Zedong himself admitted that "despite collective work, egalitarian legislation, social care of children, etc., it was too soon for the Chinese really, deeply, and irrevocably to have changed their attitudes toward women" (quoted in Mitchell, 1974:416), Marxist and socialist feminism cannot be completely forgotten in the context of China. In the end, Marxism (in its form of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought) is still, officially, the dominant ideology in China, despite the economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping. Official Marxist ideology and the market economy make China's situation more complex, as to a certain extent we are dealing with a hybrid of a socialist and capitalist state. And it is exactly this complexity that means that Marxist and socialist feminism are not enough for us to apply to the research of the one-child policy's influence on gender inequalities, as for the equation of the dual system of gender oppression – the culture and market economy – we need to add the element of the state with its top down implementation method of the (inter alia) one-child policy. It is because in the case of China all three systems of patriarchal culture, the free market economy and authoritarian state have the power to create hegemonic discourses (just as one example - the discourse of the leftover women as a threat to social harmony) which have 'normalizing powers' and

which "are constructed and maintained by granting normality, rationality and naturalness" (Davis & Gannon, 2005:318), making people believe and want to pursue these concrete ways of being. What must be stressed here is that discourse in post-structural feminist framework, following Foucault (2012), is "not a language or a text, but historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs" (Scott, 1988:35). But, what is important, is that if we move beyond the structural analysis towards Foucauldian concept of power and 'conflict' which are necessary to give the particular discourse its hegemony, these discourses can also be challenged and resisted. It does also, then, mean that all these factors are changeable and they can sometimes reinforce, and sometimes exclude one another, which translates to the fact that no form of power belongs constantly and unchangeably to a particular group or particular gender. As explained by Foucault:

> When I think of the mechanics of power, I think of its capillary form of existence, of the extent to which power seeps into the very grain of individuals, reaches right into their bodies, permeates their gestures, their posture, what they say, how they learn to live and work with other people (quoted in Sheridan, 2005:216).

It is interesting to notice that this understanding of hegemonic power is, to a certain extent, similar to the concept of power of the sovereign in Confucianism thought – the 'perfect' ruler is not the one who people fear the most, but the one whose rule is not seen to be something imposed, and is considered to be best for the people, who obey it thinking that it is their own 'choice' to do so.

All this renders the application of post-structural feminism with its attention to culture, power, conflict, representation and language (Barker, 2012) indispensable – because, as I have already highlighted many times, what is needed is to challenge, verify and deconstruct the myths created by these 'naturalizing discourses'. The best summary for that 'indispensability' can be found, in my opinion, in the writings of Scott (1988) who, while urging against the usage of the terms *equality* and *difference* as opposition, said:

> We need theory that can analyse the workings of patriarchy in all its manifestations - ideological, institutional, organizational, subjective - accounting not only for continuities but also for change over time. We need theory that will let us think in terms of pluralities and diversities rather than of unities and universals. We

> need theory that will break the conceptual hold, at least, of those long traditions of (Western) philosophy that have systematically and repeatedly construed the world hierarchically in terms of masculine universals and feminine specificities. We need theory that will enable us to articulate alternative ways of thinking about (and thus acting upon) gender without either simply reversing the old hierarchies or confirming them. And we need theory that will be useful and relevant for political practice (p.33).

Post-structural feminism, while in general, opposes the binary thinking in which the male, rational 'side' always implies its 'betterness from the Other' and creates hegemonic normative rules, "does not deny the existence of gender differences, but it does suggest that its meanings are always relative to particular construction in specified contexts" (Scott, 1988:47).

Keeping in mind that we cannot completely omit socialist feminism in the case of research on China, it is important to highlight that just like feminism, post-structuralism is also not a uniform theory. Because of that, we should be aware that we should be thinking about post-structural theories rather than one definite one. Among these theories are some which, even though they reject materialist inequalities as the only reason for women oppression, come somehow 'closer' to structural analysis in the sense of emphasizing redistributive injustice as a big part of the construction of social inequalities – Beck's (1992) risk society theory and Foucault's (1982) analysis of power-knowledge are still focused on concrete, rather than abstract, concepts.

But despite the advantages of the dynamic approach of post-structural feminism, it should be acknowledged that it itself is not enough to analyse the impact of the one-child policy on gender inequalities in China. We have to remember the complex and changeable situation in China in recent years (with its socialist period, Cultural Revolution, opening reforms, China's growth to be a world superpower) and also the changeable character of the one-child policy itself. Because of this, different generations of Chinese women have different experiences and perceptions about the policy, its implementation and impact on their lives. Hence, in order to understand the experience of (different) women who experience the policy at different times and at different stages of their life – and to highlight the changeable character of

different power structures which construct oppression or empowerment - the post-structural feminist analysis should be reinforced by the life course perspective.

3.4 Life course perspective

The importance of the life course perspective lies not only in its focus on the diversity of experiences (between and within lives of different women) but also in the fact that it places tremendous importance on social and cultural contexts, and hence helps to spot "shared experience to provide some commonality in outlook" (Abrahamson, 2016:3; Braungart & Braungart, 1986). This not only helps us to overcome another limitation of the demographic perspective, because women of reproductive age are not the only focus. It also highlights the different consequences the one-child policy brings for women in different life stages and the way in which their gendered selves and the way they understand the one-child policy's influence on their lives has been constructed. And this is exactly what life course perspective, taken away from the positivist paradigm, can do – "it becomes a representative tool that is crafted and used in the process of interpreting personal experience through time" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000:x). And, importantly, this life course, just as gender, is not given, but constructed in time through social interactions, institutions and practices. Additionally, the life course perspective sees women as active agents, who are participating in the construction of these practices and changeable power relations, and whose experience and interpretation of it is vital for understanding the meanings they attach to the process. The assumption of the life course perspective that past events do influence the present and future is necessary to try to 'trace back' the meaning that women have attached to the outcomes of the policy which has been in force for nearly 40 years.

When we stop for a moment and think about the changes in China and in the one-child policy over that time, we will realize that the life course perspective is indispensable in the research of the policy's influence on gender inequality. It would be impossible, in the end, to analyse the experience of an 'upper-class' girl born after the 1980s, who has no children or other dependents to look after against a working

class, middle age women who worked nearly her whole life in state owned enterprise and had to 'reinvent' herself in the new reality of the market economy. Hence, application of the life course perspective will not only render analysis feasible, but will also help to highlight and reinforce the assumptions of post-structural feminist analysis, which claims that gender and gender identity is not once and for all given and that at different life stages (and in different historical and cultural contexts) the changeable power relations might result in a different understanding and internalization of the inequalities women are facing. To give a very blunt example – one might consider the one-child policy as beneficial, because in the reality of the market economy, raising children is very expensive (and having only one 'cuts' costs), but that interpretation might change if the only child passes away prematurely or when it is impossible for that (already grown up) child to financially support and/or care for both her/his own family and aging parents. Similarly, one can 'internalize' the discourse of the advantages of having a son, but verify that internalization in another point of life by realizing, for example, that boys are more expensive to provide for (because you need to buy them a house in order to make it possible for them to marry) or that they may not be as attached to parents as daughters and therefore are worse carers.

It is, then, only with the help of the life course perspective that the myth of progress and development, which were possible, according to a Chinese government official statement, **because** of the one-child policy, is able to be challenged as a tool for greater gender equality. By correlating the interpretation of the experience of different members of different generations of Chinese women (who have experience different forms and strictness of implementation of the policy), I will be able to verify the statement of the policy's influence not only on demographic change but also on changes in the situation regarding gender inequalities. Did the one-child policy really improve the situation of Chinese women? Or are their lives still being shaped by traditional family responsibilities (even with only having one-child), which makes it more difficult for them to transform their capabilities into income and well-being (Ruspini & Dale, 2002)? And, even if we 'a priori' agree that the one-child policy has caused some gender inequalities, does it mean that the two-children-for-all version of family planning would change this?

To finish with more 'practical' acknowledgment – according to Mayer (2009): "Life course/cohort analysis is essential for social policies with a paradigm shift from curative to preventive intervention" (p.414). Joining the life course perspective with post-structural feminist analysis will allow us to see how existing problems are constructed and how it could save a lot of resources if we stop attempting to solve them without knowing the real reason for their existence.

3.5 Important debates in feminist thought

While discussing the need to apply feminist analysis and the life course perspective to the research on the one-child policy, as well as the different approaches of these theories, I have mentioned the role of the state, culture and economic systems in constituting gender inequalities. At this point it seems necessary to elaborate further on these issues in order to understand what kinds of discourses and myths have been created by these systems and the ways in which feminist researchers challenged them. Focusing on the main debates in feminist academia is also important when creating research design. In the end, the aim of post-structural feminist research is to focus on the "possibility of moving beyond what is already known and understood" (Davis & Gannon, 2005:319). But to do so, we need some guidance of what areas of lives to ask about, paying attention to those in which construction and experience of gender subjectivity are most pronounced and play a significant role in the interpretation of experience.

3.5.1 Women, the state and the market

The discussion of the welfare state and its role in achieving gender equality (or in deepening the disadvantaged position of women) has been always present in feminist scholarship, as it is believed that "disadvantages faced by women require collective, political solutions" (Bryson,2007: 83).

In order to avoid the 'insufficient' approach of first and second wave feminists and the debate of women and men's 'sameness' versus essentialist differences, post-structural feminists rejected "the universalizing and generalizing nature of earlier

debates over sameness and difference. Their aim is to think about the differential relationship of various (…) women to welfare arrangements and their varying material and social consequences" (Hunter, 2012:84). This approach does not aim towards the categorization of welfare states' arrangements and social policies as universally beneficial or oppressive for women. It takes into consideration the changeable character of these policies, as well as their influence on the power dynamic between both genders as well as between different women. And it is exactly this assumption that my study on the influence of the one-child policy on gender inequalities in China will utilize. The family planning policy in China has had, as previously mentioned, multiple influences on Chinese women, depending on, inter alia, their age and socio-economic position, and what I want to do is to show how the same policy can make women "simultaneously vulnerable and empowered within the organization of welfare through their multiple identities" (Hunter, 2012:87).

Although the state cannot be classified as "simply good or bad for women" (Mistra & Akins, 1998:277), its important role in creating and re-creating gender stereotypes and inequalities cannot be forgotten (Bryson, 2007), especially in the complex case of China and the 'authoritarian' way of 'doing policy' there. We have to bear in mind that in a period of just thirty years China went through two enormous changes: first, the collectivist experiment of, at least in theory, the egalitarian socialist state of Mao Zedong established in 1949, and then, in 1978, the opening up of reforms and the introduction of the one-child policy, which resulted in the emergence of the 'new state', which cannot be classified anymore as socialist (even if it socialism still dominates the state's ideology), nor (yet) as fully capitalist (despite its flourishing free market economy). The complexity of this situation, and the way in which the recent transformations of socio-political reality in China is interwoven with individual lives, has been appreciated in the relation to the three generation of female factory workers (Rofel, 1999) and private life in rural China (Yan, 2003). While taking from the excellent works mentioned before, this research, as we all remember, will however take a broader aim and examine the urban women's interpretations of the effects of the transformation from collective to free market economy and constant neo-liberalisation of the state's policymaking in today's China and its influence on gendered lives and gender inequalities.

When it comes to the analysis of the socialist state, one of the biggest problems with 'socialist' gender equality was the fact that it was limited to the public sphere only, and women suffered from being "doubly exploited (…) in their roles as producers and reproducers" (LaFont, 2001:205). Although women entered the labour market (not always voluntarily), and occasionally took jobs in fields typically 'reserved' for man (such as engineering), they encountered discrimination and faced inequalities, as they were denied the highest positions and were largely overlooked in the system of promotions, bonuses and wage rates. The political misrepresentation of women was also quite striking. As mentioned by Whyte (1984), there was only one female minister in Mao's China (out of thirty-seven) and, surprisingly enough, it was Chen Muhua, who later became the official advocate of the one-child policy. To compare – in current day China, in the thirty-five chairs' State Councils there are only three female ministers who occupy the position of vice-premier, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Health and Family Planning Policy (State Council, 2016). Although it does signify a change, it seems to be extremely small after 30 years.

The 'fake' importance of the matter of women in the socialist state can be in the bitter - humoristic way summarized by stating the fact that these states did have resources to fund the space race, yet were not able to satisfy the basic, biological needs of women by providing, inter alia, sanitary pads (Drakulic, 2016) or basic equipment that could aid housework, such as refrigerators and washing machines. Despite the collectivization process in China in the early '50s and the assumption that communes will take over the responsibility of taking care of every single aspect of people's lives, such as cooking or caring, and hence relieve women from the second shift burden, women were still performing the majority of devaluated housework by themselves (Hershatter, 2007).

Despite this, it should not be forgotten that the revolution of 1949 and especially the New Marriage Law of 1950, replaced in 1980 by the Second Marriage Law (Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, 2011) brought an enormous shift and positive change in women's lives, by inter alia, raising the minimum marriageable age, forbidding arranged marriages and opening educational and professional possibilities for women – and, at least acknowledging that the 'double shift' was a

problem. However, as mentioned before, it did not solve the problem of gender inequality. Under closer examination we can see that the 'issue' of women in the socialist state, just as many other ideas (in both socialist and capitalist states) has been, as pointed out by post-structural thought, 'hijacked' and used to justify their domination of those who are in power, creating discourses which legitimize this domination and which make it possible to keep reproducing this relationship between authority, power and control. The introduction of the one-child policy, which was supposedly the only way of enabling economic development, is just one example of how the state can use women to legitimize its power.

The opening up of reforms in 1978 ended the era of collectivism. In China, transition happened in the pragmatic form of Deng's "crossing the river by feeling the stones" metaphor (in contrast to the rapid privatization in the post-communist states in Central and Eastern Europe). Moreover, the whole transition was (and is) happening in the spirit of the continuation of pursuing socialism. While in Europe the collapse of socialism was entwined with condemnation of the previous regimes' leaders (and democratization, which allowed at least partial control over the possession of power), in China reforms and transition to the free market were introduced and led by the Communist Party and served as a tool to legitimize its rule despite the decision to implement rather anti-socialist changes. What is more, this transformation, labelled by the ruling elite as socialism with Chinese characteristic (as the term capitalism could not be used in a country where Marxism reminds a leading ideology) marked the leaders of the Communist Party as the biggest winners of 1978's transition (Eyal, Shelényi, & Townsley, 1998). However, we have to keep in mind that the Communist Party in China is not a homogenous entity (Saich, 2011) and that it was the reformers wing that, at the time, benefited most.

The question that we need to ask now is where did this transition from socialism to post-reform China place women and how has the mix of socialism and market development in the past decades affected women's life opportunities? As we already know that women were not present in Chinese political life, we can conclude that they were definitely not in the group of the biggest winners. Wang (2003) claims that in this new reality in which "freedom of mobility joins freedom of discrimination, and opportunities blend with insecurity" (p.167) the "losses suffered by women workers

have been the greatest" (p.164). It can be even argued that the transition has deprived women of the gains 'guaranteed' by the socialist state, which promoted women's and men's equity. These tendencies seem to be deepening as the opening reforms of China and its shift to neo-liberalism are progressing. As we can observe, less and less women are participating in the labour market and the gap between women's and men's salary is higher than in 1990, when a woman earned 77.5% of a man's wages (in 2010 it was 67.3%) Although general figures on women's employment in China is comparable with other developed courtiers (76.3% according to the 2010 census), it includes women who are working in the fields in rural areas. Urban employment of women (20-59 years old) is classified at 60.8%, while in the 1990s it was 77.4%. This drop is even more significant in comparison to the number of 1970s when, according to Jiang (2004), 90% of urban women had paid employment (Fincher, 2014).

A very clear example of this situation was the massive dismissal of female workers in the '90s which was caused by the inefficiency and bankruptcy of many of the state owned enterprises. Women were actually accused by the government of being the reason for the failure of the collective economy. What has been forgotten is that it was the same state which, in spite of promoting gender equality, at the same time promoted gendered job assignments, moving women away from technical and skilled position and pushing them towards cleaning and assistance services. In other words, "gendered training and job assignment in the socialist planned economy provided the foundations for widening gender disparities in the reform era" (Wang, 2003:166). What is more, one of the state's strategies to cope with the uneasiness of the post-socialist transition was "promoting patriotism and nationalist sentiments (…) to inspire national confidence during periods of political and economic upheaval" (LaFont, 2001:212) and the glorification of previous orders (such as a misrepresented version of Confucianism in the case of China, used as an explanation of shifting responsibilities to the individual, conveniently forgetting however that Confucianism promotes collectivism rather than individualism). As a consequence, in the 1980s, a return to women's traditional role (staying at home and taking care of the family) was popularized in official journals and newspapers. However, as pointed out by Wang (2003):

> The Communist Party built its legitimacy in part on its self-proclaimed role as liberator of Chinese women. In other words, maintaining the image of the liberator of women has been a pillar in maintaining the legitimacy of party rule. Just as the party could not openly abandon Marxism, it was hardly free to abandon the powerful signifier of modernity and socialism—gender equality (p.169).

Sending women home 'officially' would have also been in conflict with the one-child policy. Promoting it (the policy) as a tool to liberate women from the burden of multiple childbirth and, at the same time, denying access to the possibilities of the newly emerging market, could have sent a mix message. However, as has been pointed out previously, concepts and ideologies can be easily manipulated. It is important to mention that the one-child policy did not have the reduction (or even stopping) of population growth as its sole aim. A development oriented policy target was also the creation of better quality, better educated and more skilful citizens, as 'required' by the modern world. The Chinese leadership did realize that although the biggest strength of the Chinese economy is manual labour, in order to develop and compete with the most technologically advanced countries, China would require specialists and extremely well educated managers, scientists and economists. But a perfect generation would not create itself out of nowhere. Hence a national campaign for creating perfect mothers, who create perfect offspring was launched. It made women believe that it is their sole responsibility to make their children flawless, well educated, always dressed in the best, designer clothes, with the knowledge of a foreign language(s), acquainted with the rules of savoir-vivre and many others skills, so they will be well equipped in the race for a better future, regardless of the sacrifice required from the mothers side (Greenhalgh, 2010). The state's manipulation of the concept of the one-child policy and promotion of gender inequality can be seen in the data gathered by the All-China Women's Federation and NBS (National Bureau of Statistics) which show that the traditional idea of 'man live outside, women live inside' in 2010 had the support of 61.6% of men and 54.8% of women (Fincher, 2014). This argument might lead to the conclusion that the one-child policy, instead of the promised equality and relief from traditional women's burdens has become a "part of the backlash against women's gains of the recent past" (Fincher,2014:34). The one-child policy (or rather the family planning policy), with all

of its assumptions, is simply treating women as objects of control, with the only aim of reaching demographic numbers and population goals, neglecting the implications for their lives, opportunities and health (Correa, 1994; Hartmann, 1995). Development and modernization at any cost, with maintenance of social stability was and is still the core issue for policy makers. And the question to ask here is how and why do women internalize and perform this 'new version' of the old gendered concept?

The complexity and ambiguity of political reality in China, with its open market, competitiveness and inequalities typical for a capitalist state and, at the same time, authoritarian rule of the state and the Communist Party whose highest members are benefiting from this hybrid system under the cover of promoting socialism and all of its values, makes analysis of policies with clear gendered implication (such as the one-child policy) complex and complicated. With the small group of the leaders who, in terms of Tilly (1999), are hoarding opportunities by "creating beliefs and practices that sustain their control" (p.91), Chinese women are subjected to policies which, instead of promoting equality, legitimize the absolute rule of the Party and objectification of Chinese women and their roles according to the economic and developmental needs of the ruling party. As pointed out by Wang (2003):

> Age, education, geographic location, residence (rural or urban), enterprise ownership form, type of industry, skills, capital and network resources are all important variables that intersect with gender in differentiating women in the turbulent social and economic transformations that are reshaping China. Differentiation and diversification among women, however, do not reduce the salience of gender. Rather, the reform era has brought accelerated gender discrimination and gender conflicts (p.182).

Whyte (2010) has mentioned that the reforms in China caused an average Chinese person to gain more in comparison to other societies, as well as in comparison to the Maoist era. However, "the problem with such statements is that not all Chinese are average" (Whyte, 2010:31). Because of this research's perspective I should probably specify this reflection by saying that not every Chinese woman is an average Chinese citizen or even an average Chinese woman. Another issue to clarify is what can be understood by a gain and can it really be measured?

Zhang Yue, the host of a cancelled talk show which focused on women's issue mentioned that Chinese women's aim since the end of Qing dynasty was to achieve: the abolishment of the tradition of foot binding, access to education, freedom in choosing a marriage partner, access to the labour force and gender equality. "We got the first four. But not the last one", she says (Holding Up Half the Sky, 2012). This statement shows us again the importance of applying a feminist perspective to the study of the one-child policy in China and asking why the 'first four' were not followed by the last one.

3.5.2 Body politics

While discussing the issue of the state as an important factor in shaping gender inequalities in China and its campaign for perfect mothers (which has become one of the 'normative discourses' of the Chinese state), importance must be placed on the debate concerning women and health and especially body politics.

As has already been mentioned, one of the officially promoted rationale for the implementation of the one child policy was the concern for women's health caused by the burden of multiple childbirths. In contrast to centuries long tradition (when bearing many sons was understood as 'empowerment' of women and rise of their position in the family), it was portrayed not as a source of power, but as a source of subordination and a relic of the (pre-reform) past and a danger to China's further development. However, as has already been suggested multiple times, in both socialist and post-reform China, reproduction and control over it was and still is one of the state's most powerful 'tools' to achieve certain goals. Such a situation is, obviously, not unique. Ginsburg and Rapp (1991), as well as a vast body of research (Donzelot, 1971; Faucault, 2012; Greenhalgh, 2010, Jordanova, 1980), point out, "Throughout history, state power has depended directly and indirectly on defining normative families and controlling populations" (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1991:314), especially since the direct association between population size and economic growth prevails. It is exactly this logic, based on the work of the Club of Rome and the dangers associated with overpopulation, modified to the Chinese case by Song Jian, a leading missile scientist combined with the "technocratic policymaking" (Harcourt,

2009) of Deng Xiaoping, which led to an extremely severe reproduction control policy indispensable in the eyes of the reformist wing of the Chinese Communist Party. It was exactly the idea of development at any cost that made the Chinese government engage on a massive scale in a social engineering project and to implement the measures of artificially achieved decrease of birth rates before the actual effects of economic development came to be.

What undoubtedly made the process of the Chinese state's control over reproduction, as well as the process of creating a 'perfect generation', much easier and more effective, was the introduction and popularization of new reproductive technologies (NRT). The benefits and risks associated with their usage have been widely discussed in feminist and health-related academia (Sawicki, 1999; Petchesky & Correa, 1994; Wajcman, 2013). Just as feminist theory is not unified, views about the role new contraceptives fulfil vary. As mentioned by Sawicki (1999), some (Arditti, Klein & Minden,1984; Corea, 1986; Rothman, 2000) consider the new reproductive technologies as "the product of long standing male 'desire' to control women's bodies or to usurp procreation" (Sawicki, 1999:191), while others (Robertson, 1994; Sandelowski, 1991) argue that despite the negative effects, they do also "introduce new possibilities for disruption and resistance" (Sawicki, 1999:197), and hence act as a counterweight to masculine domination and institutional power domination. While in Western feminist thought the debate of the curses and blessings of new reproductive technologies evolves around male domination in the field of medicine and research on these technologies and the unequal access to them depending on a woman's class, ethnicity, religion, age and other factors, in the Chinese reality this discussion must gain another dimension. First of all, we need to acknowledge that the usage of contraceptives for married women in reproductive age in China is not voluntary, but mandatory (that is the reason why I have labelled the one-child policy as being top-down implemented). It is the way in which the government achieves its goals of lowering fertility and limiting the number of children per family, as they still believe that this is the only way to maintain economic growth. I have already mentioned that after the aggressive periods of the one-child policy in 1981 and 1993 the government, under the leadership of the Hu-Wen administration, was supposedly advising Family

Planning Committees to take personal preferences while counselling couples about the methods to prevent unwanted (mainly by the government) pregnancies and refrain from using the 'stick' in favour of the 'carrot'. However, the most used contraceptives (among married women) in 2010 were sterilization (31.7%) and IDU (intrauterine device; 48.15%). Just to compare, the female sterilization level in 1980 was at a level of 39.83% and 46.47% in 1994, while IUD usage in 1980 was calculated at 39.83% (Wang, 2012b). It seems that a couple's preferences for long-term or permanent contraceptive methods went (probably not coincidently), hand in hand with the government's plan of birth limits as well as coincided with the incentives for the couples who would agree to it. The less invasive and short-term methods of preventing unwanted (and, of course, not approved by the authorities) pregnancies such as oral contraception is still very low, although it has grown from 0.3% in 1980 to 0.98% in 2010. Also, the usage of condoms is gradually growing from 2.35% in 1980 to 9.32% in 2010. This last change is, however, caused by the state's campaign of HIV and AIDS awareness, not by acknowledging this method as the primary contraceptive method (Wang, 2012b).

What must be stressed one more time is that this data is taking into consideration only a certain group of women and hence the nearly universal number (87%) of women who have access to contraceptives and at least some form of knowledge about them come from a sample of married women in reproductive age (Hesketh et al., 2005). Young, unmarried women are not taken into consideration at all, though pre-marital sex, especially in urban areas, is becoming more and more common (Farrer, 2014). The lack of education in the field of contraceptive usage among the unmarried youth has led to the phenomenon of abortion rates being "alarmingly high" among unmarried Chinese women. It helps to explain the high percentage of abortions in China (28%) despite, what is believed to be, the universal usage of long term or permanent contraceptive (Sivelle, 2005).

This, slightly fuller analysis, shows that in the case of China and its one-child policy, the mandatory usage of NRTs portrays what Ginsburg and Rapp (1991) describe as the "focus on top-down population control" (p.318), which exploits women and juggles with their health in order to fulfil the aims of those at the top and aid their own success. As mentioned by Wang (2012b), "individual's contraceptive choice

depends not only on individual characteristics, including ethnicity, age, education level, household registration, region, number of living children and sex of the last living child, but also on the strength of family planning policies. A positive coefficient indicates that the looser the strength of family planning policies is, the more likely the individual is to choose condoms or another short-term contraceptive method" (p.570). Hesketh et al. (2005) stated: "For the majority of women, no choice of contraception is offered; 80 percent of women in a recent big study said they had no choice and just accepted the method recommended by the family planning worker" (p. 1171), which, as I have already mentioned, comes with some form of "financial incentives" (Zhang et al., 2015). However, the questions that remain unanswered are: how women in China internalized the state's control over their bodies? How do they deal with the situation in which they can't 'provide' the family with a baby of the desired sex? How do they make a decision to terminate (or not) a pregnancy that is not approved by the state? And one more issue – since the 'chances' of having a baby of the desired sex are strictly limited, what is the reason for a woman's preference for a baby boy or baby girl? How do they justify that preference? And, what is more, can this preference change at some point in their life? And if yes, then why?

But let me come back to the campaign for perfect mothers. One of those who undertake this task is hospitals and health institutions who are "pushing the limits of reproductive technologies to induce eugenic-oriented practices"(Handwerker, 2002:298). In this way, cooperating forces of the state, the market economy and traditional culture, using the nomenclature of Foucault (1980), have disciplined not only the number of children one can have, but also the 'norms' of the quality of these children and their mothers. As mentioned by Handwerker (2002):

> Enforcement of the birth planning policy has led to unprecedented surveillance and regulation of the Chinese social body (population) in general and the female body in particular (p.301).

Surprisingly enough, the government's persistence in limiting the number of offspring of each couple arrived hand in hand with innovative ways of treating infertility, making, in the words of one of women interviewed by Handwerker (2002), the one-child policy the "you must have one-child policy" (p.302). Relying further on Foucault (2012), and his concept of normalization, we can draw the conclusion that

the one-child policy paradoxically made fertility 'demand' stronger than before (Handwerker, 2002). The contemporary situation somehow resembles the traditional Confucian belief expressed by Mencius who said: "There are three things that are unfilial, and the greatest of them is to have no posterity" (Ivanhoe & Bloom, 2009:84), but this lack of posterity is usually pinned to women. This is, in the argument of Handwerker (2002), the big contradiction of the one-child policy and its power of creating subjectivities of Chinese women – although aimed at reducing the number of births, it led to the stigmatization of women who cannot have a child. And what about the experience of women who can, but simply do not want to have a child, knowing that it would be a 'threat' to their lifestyles and a danger to their professional careers?

The 'push' for perfect babies, as well as the state's control over - especially women's - bodies even before pregnancy has become "one of the ways in which eugenic practices have become legitimated" (Handwerker, 2002:307). Women in China are supposed to undergo a premarital examination to eliminate the possibility of some genetic complications, and if such are found then to undergo sterilization, and, if the woman is already pregnant with a foetus with some problems, they are advised to abort it. Women not only have to bear all the health consequences of the usage of contraceptives, abortions and infertility treatment, but also hold the whole "responsibility for superior foetal development" which is believed "to rest with mothers" (Handwerker, 2002:309). However, this responsibility does not finish with giving birth to the perfect, healthy child. The whole process of raising the next generation of perfect, competitive and successful Chinese residents is also believed to be the responsibility of mothers (which will be the focus of the following part), just as the control of fertility and the family's obedience to the one-child policy is. It has been mentioned before that it is expected from mothers who want to have a perfect singleton to enrol their baby in extracurricular classes from the first months of the child's life, provide extensive medical care (highly privatized in the Chinese version of a socialist state), diet supplements, following the belief of superiority of the milk formula over breastfeeding – to name but a few (Attané, 2012). What needs to be highlighted at this point is that this form of disciplining makes women believe that they do not know how to be (good) mothers and hence they need a 'manual' for it.

The disciplining, however, goes much further than that. Not only does it make women believe that the best medicine to treat infertility is, as the doubtful 'logic' that the market economy dictates and the being "the most technical and expensive" (Handwerker, 2002:305) one, but also makes them believe that test-tube babies are smarter than those born through "natural" reproduction" (p.308). Additionally, the media (controlled by the officially 'socialist' state) and health institutions help to promote and reinforce these beliefs (Milwertz, 1997; Handwerker, 2002; Dikötter, 1998).

In these ways, the state's control over women's bodies does not finish with the mandatory usage of contraceptives and a restriction of the number of children one can have, but expands to the 'how' of producing and raising a perfect child. This clearly embodies the Foucauldian concept of subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 1980), that is "a whole set of knowledges that has been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (p.82). Hence, as Handwerker (2002) points out, "high-tech baby making in this cultural setting has become a potent signifier of Chinese 'modernity'" (p.310-1), which also helps us to understand and see the "complex way in which technology is more than just a tool; it is also an organizing principle of human life, with specific implications for women's lives in particular locations" (p.311).

Another interesting phenomenon in China has just started to be explored by researchers. On the one hand, we have just discussed the diversified opinions of feminist theories about the empowering and oppressing potentials of new reproductive technologies and the way in which Chinese state is using them in order to control women's bodies (and, actually, not just their bodies). However, Huang et al. (2016) have suggested that fertility drugs, such as clomiphene citrate (an ovulatory stimulant), are being taken by women (Grether, 2011) in order to increase the probability of twin pregnancy, and hence avoid the punishments and fees of the regulations of the one-child policy. The twin birth rate in China has "more than doubled between the late 1960s and the early 2000s, from 3.5 to 7.5 per 1,000 births" (Huang et al.,2016:467). The phenomenon is more common in urban areas, where the restrictions of the one-child policy are stricter and where women have more

possibilities for access to both economic resources as well as information about the possibilities to increase the probability of a twin pregnancy. Even though the statistical percentage of twins in China was difficult to obtain, especially because of 'fake twins' (children who are not twins but have been registered as twins in order to avoid the consequences of the one-child policy), its significant growth clearly suggest the non-coincidental character of this change (Huang et al.,2016). Not that long ago the situation from a primary school in Henan province was reported – the school (4 thousand students) has 32 sets of twins (32 Sets of Twins in Primary School in C China's Henan Province, 2014)!

These situations reveal the active agent and a form of resistance from the disciplining forces of the state's birth control policy, and the ways in which women, in order to circumvent the regulations and obtain the aims which they have internalized, can use new reproductive technologies. However, the remaining issues are still the decision making process; how do these women make the decision about starting treatment or have a 'hi-tech' baby, as well as the health consequences of these procedures, especially for mothers.

3.5.3 Women, Family and Caring

The issue of perfect mothers who are in charge of 'making' and raising perfect offspring – in other words their responsibility of caring for and caring after children - has been discussed over recent pages. It is important to highlight that the role of women as caregivers is one of the most significant topics in feminist literature. Feminist analysis is not homogenous, and therefore its opinions about caregiving responsibilities and rewards differ significantly. It can be seen both as an oppressive, as well as rewarding and fulfilling task, which brings a lot of positivity to the lives of women. While the first interpretation, typical for some radical and Marxist feminists, neglects the issue of, as Abel & Nelson (1990) put it, "texture of human connectedness" (p.7), focusing solely on the burdens one might experience, the second 'romanticizes' caring seeing it as a task which allows fulfilment, which "shades easily into a celebration of differences that serve as the rationale for women's inferior position" (Abel & Nelson, 1990:7). Both perspectives fail to grasp what post-

structural analysis is trying to capture – not essentialist distinction between the male and the female, but differences in experience caused by social and historical context, as well as the changeable character of power negotiations. In other words – why and how women internalize and sanction their role of 'natural' carers and why the notion of difference (from men) fails to justify it completely (Scott, 1988).

The debate suggesting women are better 'equipped', and hence should provide their families members with care is strictly connected with the distinction between the public and private sphere (Ungerson, 1983). This distinction resulted in the so called 'cult of domesticity', which depicted the virtue of femininity as a subordinate carer of the household (Keister & Southgate,2012). In this way man occupied the public sphere and fulfilled their role as sole breadwinners, while women remained limited to household duties. As mentioned by McLaughlin (2003), the "public/private separation places care outside the consideration of public actors and public dilemmas, but to do so is to deny the possibility that the public can benefit from responses generating empathy, intimacy and care" (p.76). She also argues that the essentialist attribution of women being "morally responsive" (p.82) and finding fulfilment in carrying duties instead of being deprived from other forms of it (Puka,1990), "leaves them open to being the 'natural carers', a role for which there will always be a demand" (McLaughlin,2003:82).

Despite the fact that women have joined the labour market, their 'private' role often remains trapped in the nineteenth century's cult of domesticity – and, in the case of China, 're-trapped' again as a result of the economic reform era and the one-child policy. Women are almost wholly responsible for what socialist feminists labelled as the second shift – domestic work and caregiving duties. The role of women as carers is so deeply rooted in social reality that it can be associated with, as Rapport (1997) calls it, ontological dumping – taking things for granted, without consideration and reflection on not only their origins, but also their justification and reasonableness. Feminist thought, throughout its development, was addressing the issue of associating women with a caregiver by 'default', pointing out the ways in which caregiving might be rewarding, but focusing mainly on the burdens it might cause, especially when undertaken alone (and constituting problems and limitations for women's activities and pursuits). As mentioned by Fisher and Tronto (1990) it was

second-wave feminism that showed the 'biggest' interest in the topic, leading to the emergence of three distinctive images of the caregiver, namely: selfish (caregiving duties regarded as a burden that women need to get rid of), androgynous (non-importance of the topic of caregiving as almost only women perform it) and visible (caregiving values are neglected as its evaluation is based on the value system created under the patriarchal system) (p.35-36). None of them, however, explain what care really is. The problem with this analysis of care is that it neglects power, or material aspects of care, assuming "that with the right motivation caring becomes unproblematic" (Fisher & Tronto, 1990:37).

Although, as previously mentioned, the participation of women in the public sphere is incomparable with the previous century, in modern societies it is still in the majority of cases the responsibility of women to be the caregiver of the household caring for their children, spouse, parents and other members of the family. What is more, not only did caregiving in the 'private sphere' remain the domain of women but also the caregiving responsibilities in the public sphere, where caring is 'translated' into wages, is also dominated by female nurses, kindergarten teachers etc. As Daly and Lewis (2000) put it, even with the emergence of public care (dominated by women), "the ethic of care has remained largely associated with the private sphere which has continued to be seen as something of 'a heaven in a heartless world' (Lasch,1976)" (Daly & Lewis,2000:284).

Abel and Nelson (1990) argue that although the two main feminist perspective on carrying (burden/reward) did not find a common ground, in both public sphere and private life, "most caregivers are members of subordinated groups, who provide care from compulsion and obligation as well as warmth and concern" (p.7), showing that the distinction of the 'classification' of care as a burden or reward and fulfilment "ignores the social and historical context within which it occurs" (p.7).

In the reality of the modern, industrialized world the "idea of carrying as a separate sphere for women's moral and emotional work does not match our daily activities" (Fisher & Tronto,1990:39). Women have access to education, politics and paid employment and, according to the paradigm of modernity, that should be 'enough' to raise their position. At the same time the size of the family has declined significantly and nuclear families have become the norm in China, due to the one-

child policy and it happened, additionally, in a very short period of time. However, as Bryson and Campling (1999) put it, “many women have gained but many have also lost” (p.5). With paid employment emerged the problem of the second shift (housework and caring duties in addition to ‘professional’ tasks). Reduction of family size should have logically led to relief from care duties, however, at the same time, the loss of kinship and community ties resulted in a lack of informal support. What is more, even though families are smaller, the rising standards of housework and caring in general does not necessarily make it an easier task (Bose, Bereano & Malloy,1984; Edgell, 2012). Moreover, as there are more and more single parents, as well as single children, the whole responsibility for taking care of family members falls on one person only. In addition to all of that, the state and its policies tend to ‘transfer’ a lot of responsibility for caregiving to the private sphere. Changes in factors such as demography, economy, society and social norms “have acted to effectively decrease the supply of care at a time when the demand is raising” (Daly & Lewis, 2000:288).

The problem that emerges is that the shift in the private sphere did not progress equally to that of the public. Care remains largely the responsibility of women, as Daly and Lewis (2000) explain “market individualism has always assumed that there would be a private sphere of the family that would provide succour to those who could not compete in the market” (p.283). However, being a ‘natural’ caregiver can “seriously affect women’s economic well-being” (Wakabayashi & Donato, 2005:467). Never mind the fact that women are performing lower range, lower paid and part-time jobs more often than men, they are also the ones who give up employment or reduce their working hours in order to perform caring responsibilities. It can be directly translated into loss of earnings. The long-lasting consequences include “elderly women’s disproportionally higher risk of living in poverty” (Wakabayashi & Donato, 2005:467), as their retirement funds are reduced or, in the case of giving up paid employment completely, non-existent. As suggested by Pavalko and Artis (1997), even temporary withdrawal or reduction of employment (because of, for example, the need to care for an only child) usually results in difficulties in returning into full time employment and better wages.

Care and caregiving responsibilities cannot, therefore, be associated with a burden or gratification only. The individual’s opinion on caring and its influence on

one's life depends greatly on motivation and also on the availability of resources (both abstract like time and strictly material), support of others in the division of carrying out caring tasks and the "degree to which women acquire self-esteem through caring" (Fisher & Tronto, 1990:43). As Fisher and Tronto (1990) pointed out, "one of the most pervasive contradictions involved in giving care of concerns the asymmetry between responsibility and power" (p.43).

Although the majority of discussions regarding women and caregiving is developed in Western literature, with most research conducted in Europe or the USA, the situation in China is not much different. Facing similar changes in demographic structure, family size and, at least in theory, equality in the public sphere, the situation in China has been worsened by the family planning policy, as well as the extremely fast transition from a planned to a market economy, which significantly limited the benefits and security provided by the government and social care. In China, the systems of culture, the market economy and the state with its top-down implemented family planning policy, continue the discourse which "stigmatizes public dependency, and fetishes private dependencies is embedded in current policy development" (Ruspini & Dale, 2002:14).

I have mentioned before the important role of the Chinese state in creating gender inequality. I have also highlighted the specific situation of China, which cannot be analysed fully as a capitalist state (which intervenes too little), as it is officially still aiming towards and promoting values of communism, nor as a socialist state (which is intervening in the top-down, sometimes oppressive method in all aspects of life). The complexity of the situation in China is caused by the fact that we need to put together the concepts of equality of the Marxist theory and gender equality together with the impact of economic reforms and marketization, which, as we have pointed out in the second chapter and the discussion on the 4-2-1 phenomenon, shows clear characteristics of the state's inclination towards neo-liberalism and hence the self-reliance of individuals.

Also in the second chapter, while discussing the issue of an aging population, I have highlighted that the shift from a centrally planned to a market economy has 'complicated' care responsibilities not only towards children, but also towards the elderly and care dependent adults (Abel, 1990). The era of development and reforms

initiated by Deng Xiaoping led to changes to the retirement system. The aim of development and the inauguration of market reforms resulted in destabilization of the old age security system, based on ideas of socialism and collectivism, which guaranteed financial support for citizens (Wang, 2006; Evers & Juárez, 2003). The new pension system includes only those who work in state enterprises and, as a result, leaves many, especially elderly women, who often did not work, or were the first ones to lose their jobs or forced into early retirement as the national factories went bankrupt, totally dependent (Zhan, 2004) and treated as a burden (Xu, 1995; Zimmer & Kwong, 2003). At the end of 2010 only forty percent of the urban population was covered by the Urban Pension System (Peng, 2011). These numbers are but another example of the promotion of the models of self-reliance and, through it, the individualization of risk in 'modern' China and, at the same time, the diminishing role of welfare (Yan, 2010). Despite the latest plans of the Chinese government to increase the coverage of social benefits (China Development Research Foundation, 2012), it does not seem that the problems will be solved soon, because coverage still remains only partial and minimal (Schwartz & Shieh, 2009).

In traditional Chinese society the preference for a son came along with highly valued filial piety that obliged sons to take care of their elderly parents, as well as to carry on the family name and perform ancestor-worshipping rituals. It seems, however, that the responsibility of male children was often limited to financial support, as daughters-in-law performed the majority of actual care duties. However, the Mao's era, constitution and Marriage Laws of 1950 and 1980 (Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, 2011) allowed women to start being active in the labour market and hence become capable of supporting their elderly parents, both financially as well as emotionally. This changing pattern, together with the one-child policy, has, on the one hand, somehow diminished the importance of sons in urban China, and on the other, shifted the majority of elderly care responsibilities to women, who are now capable of financial support and, at the same time, are believed to guarantee better quality of help and care (Sun, 2002). It seems that double-level gendered problem occurs here. As for now, it is more common for a female elderly person to be widowed and hence not having any financial security, therefore becoming totally dependent on her family. The second level states that

caregiving duties will usually fall on women, either the daughter or daughter-in-law, as the state level security in many cases does not apply. It might lead to the creation of a 'vicious circle', because those women who today sacrifice or give up paid employment in order to take care of dependent parents (and children), might find themselves in the future without resources for their elderly years. The fact of being very often the only child and parents of only children, complicates things even further. The new generation does not feel obliged to provide help for their parents, or, as single children with a family of their own at the time of their parents' need for support, they will not be able to satisfy it (Zhan,2004). Although in some circles young adults are aware that they will have to prepare for old age by themselves, the prevailing attitude today is stigmatization of those who decide to institutionalize their parents (Zhan,2006). What is more, access to institutions of a reasonable standard is not easy and limited only to those who are better off financially, or who have 'good' connections (Wang, 2006). As Zhang and Goza (2006) point out, as "China's accelerated aging has outpaced industrialization it has put enormous pressure [on] its still fragile social security system" (p.153) placing, as they call it "a sandwich generation" (mostly women) who have to simultaneously take care of children and dependent parents in an extremely difficult situation. Ms. Liu, a 30 year-old teacher from Hangzhou, one of the interviewee of Zhang and Goza (2006) study, puts it this way:

> Women nowadays seem to face more pressure than before. They have to care for the family and be a wage earner. No one gives you less work because you are a woman. Before liberation women usually only needed to worry about family concerns, not the outside world. Nowadays women have to play multiple roles, such as the wife and mother who care for her husband, child, daughter-in-law, and parents. You also have to be a good employee at your job (p.156).

It seems that the perception of the problem of an aging population would change significantly if addressed by feminist analysis, as the issue we will be trying to focus on is who cares for and about Chinese children, the elderly, and houses, and what the outcomes are - in the view of Chinese women - of these caregiving responsibilities. And, what is more – is having to care for 'only' one child really seen as an easier task? And did the fact of smaller families' sizes and, in theory, the 'empowerment' of

women, translate into a change in the concept of marriage? Can we, in 'developed' China, talk about 'pure relationships' (Giddens, 1992) or Bauman's (2013) concept of liquid love, not based on the need of economic stability, but the 'romantic' concept of love, which might end as soon as it stops being beneficial for the partners? The fact is that answering this question will not only verify the supposedly higher status of women in nowadays China, but will also help to establish whether, because of the one-child policy, China has moved to its post-industrial phase.

3.5.4. Women and social stratification

Another important debate in feminist literature, which needs to be incorporated into the analysis of the one-child policy in China, is the debate of women and social stratification. It can help to, in a sense, complete the other debates of women and the state, body politics and care, show the importance of the factor of women's socioeconomic position and its connection to the female perspective on the one-child policy and the effects it has on women's lives.

As in other debates, feminist perspectives on this issue vary greatly, but all of them have their beginnings in the discussion on class. Liberal feminism has focused only on the situation of white, middle-class and relatively privileged women, neglecting completely women of different races and different socio-economical positions. Moreover, with the dominant model of the male breadwinner, class was assigned to women and other 'non-productive' (understood as non-participating in the paid labour market) family members according to the "man's position in the occupational or employment structure" (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004:14). In other words, the "history of women being granted some benefits by virtue of their maternal role and other derived benefits through marriage and husband" (Daly, 2011:8), have made women visible as class members only as consumers, rather than producers (Bettie, 2003). Class was, obviously, an important (if not the most important) factor in Marxist and socialist feminist analysis. Understanding of class was, however, interpreted only as the relation to the means of production (and a distinction between working class and the class of the bourgeois owners of the means of production), and did not make a connection between class and other

dimensions, which are mutually influential. As mentioned by Bettie (2003), "class was often explored by socialist feminists more at the level of abstract systems (capitalism, patriarchy) than as a cultural identity and subjective experience" (p.38).

From our perspective the mutual reinforcement of the categories of class and gender are of utmost importance. Even though women are more present in the labour market, their positions and salary (the main variables of class belonging) were hugely influenced by their gender and age, rather than class only (Crompton & Scott, 2000). In other words, women, and especially women of colour (in the case of, for example, the United States of America) were not hired for well-paid and high-status managerial jobs not only on the basis of their class, but also on the basis of their gender, age and race.

This situation was complicated even more with the introduction of the model of the adult worker. In cases where both a husband and wife are active in the labour market, and in a situation where the women's income is significantly lower than that of her husband, which class does it place women within? What about the reverse situation? This complex situation of class analysis led to post-structuralists' refusal to examine class as an independent "demographic variable" (Bettie, 2003:37), focusing on it as socially, politically, historically and culturally constructed. Moreover, as post-structural analysis focuses on differences within and between women, the strict categorization of class as the only reason for empowerment or oppression was cast aside. However, material depravity still remains one of the important reasons for social inequality.

While the concept of 'placing' women in the category of class is very complex, in the context of China it is becoming even more complicated. It should still be kept in mind that China is, officially, a socialist country, and hence by definition, a classless society. In a socialist state everybody belongs to the working class, and even the ruling elite is referred to as 'representatives of the people' – but, I will challenge the myth of equalitarianism of the socialist state in the following part as well.

However, it has already been highlighted multiple times that China cannot be classified as a socialist state, as since 1978 it has been moving towards a market economy, not abandoning, however, the authoritarian power of the Communist Party, but rationalizing policymaking more and more in the spirit of neo-liberalism

and individual responsibility. This leaves us in the position of not being able to analyse China as a 'fully' socialist or a 'fully' capitalist state. Hence, the class distinction, whether by Marx (2010) or by Weber (2009) (whose concept of division into upper, middle and lower class falls in the trap of lack of the limit in the division of categories, losing its power of explanation) cannot be applied to China. In addition, as these theories 'search' for structural solutions and classification, they are 'inappropriate' for post-structural research. The concept of the socialist state being classless, or composed only by the working class, is similarly useless. Instead of a capitalist division into classes based basically on the economic capital one owns, the socialist state has 'created' a system of ranks, which depended on one's position in the system of redistribution and hence access to goods and benefits. Those who were closest to that system – in other words those who controlled the redistribution of goods, labelled by Djilas (1982) as a 'new class' – were the biggest winners in the socialist state. In this way, in spite of the ideological egalitarianism of Marxism, the "Soviet-type countries had produced a bureaucratic elite class that exploited rather than served the working class" (Bian & Logan, 1996:739), even though salary per se did not vary significantly between different ranks. Moving beyond the inequalities between nomenclature and 'the rest' of society, Wang (2008) has distinguished two categories of location/industry (which pointed out the differences between urban and rural areas and the rank of production units in China) and biology (among which gender was the most influential area) in constructing social inequalities in the socialist state.

How then can we understand the social stratification in post-socialist China? To solve this problem, we can apply the idea of Bourdieu (1986), who, critical of previous concepts based only on economism, has proposed a more dynamic approach for presenting diversity of social stratification which determines opportunities and life chances. Hence, he expanded the concept of capital in order to demonstrate how we recreate inequality in society. In his analysis, Bourdieu (1986) added to the concept of economic capital (income, material status) also cultural (education, know-how), social (memberships, networks, connections) and symbolic (looks, gender, age, commonly referred to as 'prestige') capitals. In addition, with his concept of field, habitus and distinction, Bourdieu (1984) explained how we place ourselves in a

certain 'class' position through the 'comparison' (of lifestyle, consumption patterns etc.) to others, participating in the constant re-creation of complex societal stratification.

What we need to understand is that different forms of capital "play different roles in shaping social structures in different social formations" (Eyal et al., 1998:20). While in a capitalist state economic capital has huge importance, in a socialist one it can be regarded not exclusively as a benefit, but even as a drawback (especially if not reinforced by social capital). In the socialist state it is social capital (usually understood as Party membership and connections to influential people) that is the capital that matters most.

Having understood the complicated 'system' of stratification in China, which is, as we remember, a hybrid of a socialist state and a market economy, we can see that Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) concepts are indispensable for understanding the position of women in Chinese society. Not limited to the 'traditional' understanding of class, Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) concept can help to highlight how that position might differ at different times and due to different experiences. In the end, different forms of capital are not constant and can interact with one another in various ways. As I have shown in the discussion on, inter alia, body politics, the black children of China, leftover women and care giving, women's socioeconomic position can often be translated to their possibilities of resistance (or compliance) with the one-child policy and their perspective on the influence the policy has had on women's lives, as well as, in the bigger picture, its 'participation' in shaping women's subjectivity.

3.6 Framework of analysis

To provide a short summary of all that has been discussed before and in order to overcome the limitations of the leading perspective in studies on the one-child policy, I have decided to base my research on the combined approaches of post-structural feminist analysis and the life course perspective. The choice of this theoretical framework was, as mentioned before, influenced by the possibility of redefining and deepening the understanding of the outcomes of the one-child policy on Chinese

women's perspective of gender inequality, and, especially, the changeable and 'non-universal' character of these outcomes. Post-structural feminist narrative allows, as we remember, "the diversity of women's needs and experiences" (Fraser & Nicholson, 1994:259) to be focused on, highlighting the inadequacy of structural approaches to the analysis of gender inequality, in which a "single solution on issues like child care, social security, and housing, can't be adequate for all" (Fraser & Nicholson, 1994:259).

As has been mentioned a number of times before, the situation of China is complex, because it is a 'hybrid' of a socialist state and a free market economy. For that reason - and because of the insufficiency of socialist feminism - the discourses created by the forces of patriarchal culture, the market economy and the state with its top-down implementation of the policy will be the 'background' for the process of analysing data. As both the post-structural feminist and life course perspective highlight the importance of diversity of experience, I will analyse data in three age categories, as women experienced the transition points of their lives at different times in history (socialist state, opening reform, post-80's 'affluence') and with different versions of the one-child policy in force. However, I believe that this framework deserves even further 'diversification' in order to escape the trap of "categorical thinking about gender" (Connell, 2012:1675). Based on the analysis of the dominant debates in feminist academia, the dimension of age should be additionally reinforced by dimensions of income and socio-economic background and the number of children or other dependents (e.g. elderly parents) one has and has to care for. These factors are contributing to the ways in which gendered subjectivity is constructed and can have the biggest influence in experiencing gender inequalities.

I believe that such a diversification of participants will help to answer the main questions posed by this research, these being: how did the one-child policy influence the situation of gender inequalities as perceived by Chinese women? And what are the differences and similarities of the experience of women of different age, different socio-economic status, different care giving duties and different experiences of the ways in which their bodies were regulated by many different forces?

In order to facilitate and make analysis clearer, each age group's experience will be divided to four main themes of education and employment, family and intimate relationships, childbearing and body politics and care. Choices of these themes were dictated, on the one hand, by the debates in feminist academia, and, on the other, by the existing body of research on the one-child policy and the outcomes it supposedly has on China and Chinese women. In the end, all of these factors – better education and employment opportunities, changes in family relationships due to its smaller size and the 'easiness' of the second shift, the possibility to control the reproductive system and relief from caring responsibilities because of having only one child and the constitutional amendment of responsibility to care for parents of both sons and daughters – are supposed to translate to a more equal position for women in society. But is it the case in a post-socialist country with a developed market economy and the top-down implementation of the family planning policy? Did 'developed' China really advanced in terms of gender equality?

By focusing on the issue of education and employment, the ways in which Chinese women internalize or challenge the myth of better education and working opportunities for girls as the result of the one-child policy would be able to be verified. I would also ask how the lack or having a brother influenced those opportunities. In that way I will be 'verifying' whether the one-child policy did really 'empower' women in the labour market and whether this 'empowerment' clashed with the family life and traditional gender roles division. By discussing those issues in depth, I will be able to 'show' the way in which Chinese women internalize this situation and even explain it as beneficial for themselves, or how different experiences lead to the construction of resisting this powerful discourse.

The main point of analysing the theme of family and intimate relationships will be related to the issue of the one-child policy's influence on the change of the concept of marriage. Assuming that, because of the one-child policy, Chinese women are better educated, more financially independent and relieved of the burden of multiple child bearing and raising, it is important to verify whether they understand personal relationships still in terms of economic stability, or rather in terms of 'romantic love' which lasts just as long as it is beneficial for both partners. And, since the discourse of leftover women is becoming more and more powerful in China, why

do women want/don't want to marry? How do they construct their understanding of the importance of marriage? And whom do they consider to be the most valuable partner?

In the theme of childbearing and body politics, I will focus on analysing the experience or perspective women have in connection to the one-child policy and the state's strict control of the number of children one can have. I will verify the concept of sex preference of the baby, focusing on the meanings behind the claims of preferring a baby boy or baby girl, and the experience of having limited chances to get the 'wanted one' due to the one child policy and the decision making processes with which women 'rationalized' their actions and choices (and experienced their consequences).

The theme of caring will focus on Chinese women's view on who should care for children, the house, elderly members of the family and how their views of the outcomes of 4-2-1 phenomenon are constructed and how they internalize the 'traditional' role of women as a carer.

By 'tracing' the understanding of these issues, the analysis provided by this research will not only verify the myths of the influence of the one-child policy on gender equality in China, but will also allow Chinese women's voices to be heard. And their voices, interpretations, internalizations and challenging of their gender subjectivities are crucial, because nobody will ever be able to understand their situation and their problems better than they do themselves. What is more, only by hearing them out and understanding the situations in which they found the one-child policy, operating in and alongside the system of a patriarchal culture, market economy and 'authoritarian' state, to be beneficial and in which they felt disadvantaged by it (and why), will allow the possibility of establishing policies which could lead to an actual improvement in women's issue. And that is all that a feminist researcher can ask for.

CHAPTER FOUR - METHODOLOGY AND RESERCH DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

In previous chapters, the consequences of the one-child policy, deriving from the demographic approach, were introduced, and an alternative approach to the research in this field was proposed. By using post-structural feminist analysis and the life course perspective, this research aims towards the understanding of the implications and effects the one-child policy brings to the lives of Chinese women from economically developed cities at different life stages, challenging at the same time the powerful discourses which have dominated the research on the topic.

In order to find the 'answer' to the research questions, research methods must be chosen and research design clearly prepared. Therefore, this chapter will focus on choices: choices of methods, participants, research tools, data gathering and analysis, as well as justifications for the choices made.

Firstly, I will focus on the quantitative versus qualitative debate, and, subsequently, the issue of quantitative and qualitative analysis, epistemological debate on positivist and interpretivist paradigms and, at the end of this section, the discussion surrounding feminist research. Next, I will discuss research design, focusing on explanations for the choice of research methods, participants, data collection and analysis. The last part of this chapter will be dedicated to the limitations and potential problems of this research design and possible solutions for overcoming them.

4.2 Quantitative versus qualitative debate

As social sciences are 'composed' of multiple, often competing theories, it does not come as a surprise that the methods of gaining knowledge, as well as the dispute of what can and cannot be regarded as knowledge, vary greatly. When discussing methodology and methods appropriate for particular research, many factors must be taken into consideration and decisions on how to collect data, analyse it and

'transform' it into valid knowledge must be made. In fact, social science researchers are faced with 'choices' throughout the research process, from its very beginning till the end. Choices are being made even before research 'officially' begins. What interests us and why, what do we want to find using the research, how do we want to conduct it, how will we make sure that it will 'create' valid knowledge and contribute to what is already known, what theoretical stand will we adopt - these are just a few of the many questions that a researcher has to face and is facing during the whole process of research. Of course, none of these choices can be made at random. All parts of the research must be coherent, logical and result from each other. The same rule is relevant for the choice of tools applied for data gathering. As Bryman (2012) pointed out, "the practice of social research does not exist in the bubble, hermetically sealed off from the social sciences and the various social allegiances that their practitioners hold" (p.19). Choices of the tools depend on the many standpoints the researcher had adopted before, especially the theoretical framework he/she has chosen. But we have to keep in mind that the 'inseparable' dependence of method (tools) on theory tends to be overrated, usually because of the confusion and mistaken interchangeability of terms such as theory, method, methodology and epistemology. In order to clarify all of these concepts, they should be investigated one by one.

4.2.1 Quantitative analysis

According to the traditional classification of scientific space, quantitative research is oriented towards the description or explanation of studied phenomena (Mouton & Marais, 1996). These aims are usually achieved through the application of relatively formalized approaches such as surveys or experiments, which are subjected to many forms of standardization, among which scales and controlled observation might be mentioned (Mouton & Marais, 1996), but do not have to be limited to them. According to common belief, the application of quantitative research produces 'objective truth', commonly associated with hard sciences. A quantitative researcher is hence somehow an 'outsider' in the research process which has a more linear character, following the pattern of posing a research

question, choosing methods, collecting data and, in the final stage, deducing answers to the initial problem. Mouton and Marais (1996) characterize this quality as the "inclination to impose a system upon phenomenon" in which the "researcher attempts to transpose a certain structure onto a phenomenon" (p.163). As can be seen from this description, quantitative analysis does share a lot with the positivist paradigm. However, as stated by Bryman (2003):

> quantitative research (…) can be seen as linked partly to positivism and partly to a diffuse and general commitment to the practices of the natural scientist. While all of the characteristics of what is conventionally taken to be positivism can be divined in quantitative research, not all of its preoccupations can be directly attributed to positivism. Rather, it seems more sensible to see some of them as a manifestation of a vague commitment to the ways of the natural sciences (p. 42).

In other words, what should be highlighted is that fact that quantitative methods, even though they 'require' the application of 'scientific' rules, must not be limited to quantitative research only. After all, data produced by surveys or statistics is also a subject for different possible interpretations and can be used in qualitative analysis as well.

4.2.2 Qualitative analysis

The qualitative approach to research "tends to deal with highly complex problems" (Mouton & Marais, 1996:162). The purpose of qualitative research aims not to explain or describe, like in the case of quantitative research, but rather to unearth the deepest possible understanding of the studied phenomena, to "penetrate to the innermost nature" (Mouton & Marais, 1996:168) of it. The most 'popular' qualitative tools are participant observation, interviews, focus groups, case studies and ethnography (Marvasti, 2004). Bryman (2003) includes the following characteristics of qualitative research: aiming not towards the perspective of the researcher, but the point of view of the participants of the research, description (in the case of ethnography), contextualism, seeing social life as a process, a lack of structure and a lack of straightforward concepts before data gathering (p. 61-8). Research, which adopts qualitative analysis, does not seek an underlying structure,

but considers the specificity and uniqueness of the work and the implications of the context for data collection and analysis. Being much less formalized than quantitative approach, qualitative research might also use data gathered on an unplanned occasion, a somehow 'spontaneous' moment, especially when applying the method of participant observation - it is possible, first of all, because of more flexible 'rules' and much weaker stress posed on the control of the data gathering process, as well as because of the role researcher him or herself fulfils. As mentioned previously, quantitative research is characterized by the clear separation of the researcher from the studied phenomena as well as the studied objects. Inversely, qualitative research requires the active participation of the researcher in the process. It is strictly connected to the aforementioned aim of qualitative analysis towards deep understanding, rather than providing a straightforward answer to the research question. In order to understand the studied phenomenon and its subjects, that is the participants of the research, mutual trust and familiarity are necessary. That may probably be the reason for some people identifying quantitative methods with 'doing a job' and qualitative methods as 'living a life'. The interpretative, rather than observational, character of qualitative research, makes it also non-linear. While the starting point for both quantitative and qualitative research is similar and is composed of posing a research question (although the quantitative methods ask 'why?', rather than the qualitative research questions of 'how'?), in qualitative analysis the research question is followed by approaching participants, getting to know them, understanding them and applying their perspective to the research and its results, which brings us back again to the research question. But, again, the application of a qualitative method (such as, for example, in-depth interviews) does not automatically 'make' the research qualitative. An easy example is the word count in the interviews conducted, which is basically the quantification of these interviews.

4.2.3 Epistemology: positivist vs. interpretivist

In order to understand the mistaken tendency to make a clear-cut division between quantitative and qualitative methods and their 'appropriateness' only for qualitative or quantitative research, we have to highlight that it derives from the

confusion of philosophical and technical issues. This then leads to the problem of distinction between epistemology and methodology of the research and false 'affinity' of quantitative methods to positivistic epistemology and qualitative methods with an interpretivist paradigm (Bryman,1984). This mistake caused the assignment of opposite characteristics for each of the methods. Bavelas (1995), critical of this construction of dichotomies in the qualitative versus quantitative dispute, complied a set of polarities, in which the two methods of research are typically associated with: numbers/no numbers, parametric/nonparametric, statistics/no statistics, empirical/not empirical, objective/subjective, deductive/inductive, hypothesis testing/exploratory, experiments/not experimental, laboratory/real world, artificial/natural, not generalizable/generalizable and internal validity/external validity. The only problematic dichotomy is good/bad, as it is 'disputable' on which side, quantitative or qualitative, should it be placed (Bavelas, 1995:50-51). However different they might be, Bavelas (1995) argues, none of these methods should be identified as better than the other. Each approach and each perspective has a different aim in mind and serves different purposes. The only thing that could be discussed as 'better' is epistemology itself – positivist or interpretivist, but not the research method.

Simply speaking, epistemology determines what can be considered or accepted as valid knowledge. The disagreement in social sciences about the epistemological standpoint derives from the conflict based on the 'object' of the enquiry. In social sciences it is society, human beings and their behaviours that are being 'studied'. Some scientists do not think that this should determine necessity for an alternative approach to that of natural sciences, while others recognize such a difference and acknowledge the 'uniqueness' of the objects being studied and believe that it should not be treated the same way that objects of hard sciences are.

Positivist epistemology (associated with natural sciences) is focused on explanations of behaviour and seeks to treat social phenomena as "objective facts that value-free researchers can precisely measure and use statistics to test causal theories" (Neuman, 2007:42). Bryman (2012) distinguishes five principles which can characterize the positivist epistemological standpoint, namely principles of: phenomenalism (the assumption that knowledge can be gained only via the senses),

deductivism (the conviction that the theory serves as a source of hypothesis that can be later tested), inductivism (the premise of gathering "facts which provide the basis for laws"), objectivism (meaning that research should be value free) and superiority of scientific over normative statements (Bryman, 2012:28). This paradigm, popular and valued for its 'scientificness', mirrors the still privileged opinion of the equation where numbers equal objective truth and hard facts, uninfluenced by any external factors, and which, in addition, can be replicated.

Interpretivist epistemology (with post-structural feminism and the 'version' of the life course perspective adopted in this research's framework) differs significantly from positivist epistemology, because of its main assumption - the objects of inquiry of social sciences differ from those of natural sciences, and therefore cannot be 'studied' in the same way and need alternative logic and procedures. Also, instead of focusing on explanations of behaviour, interpretivist epistemology pays attention rather to understanding (Bryman,2012) of behaviours and ideologies, accepting the changeable and often self-contradicting character of the interpretations given by the participants of the research. This paradigm 'resigns' then from the hard science perspective, assuming that human beings and their lives cannot be compared and 'measured' in the same way as natural phenomena. Researchers who adopt the interpretivist paradigm think that people construct their own reality, hence what is needed is the knowledge of how those constructed processes were and are internalized. In other words, as those 'constructs' are not constant, but rather constantly changeable, the role of the research is to reflect the process and understand the way research subjects, in a particular place and particular time, think about their reality (Neuman, 2007). Because of that, research does not aim to generalize and universalize its findings, because social reality cannot be regarded as homogenous and is 'nontotalizable' (Lyotard, 1984).

Having elaborated on the differences between epistemological paradigms and the reasons why methods chosen for a piece of research should not follow the mistake of the division between quantitative-positivist and qualitative-interpretivist, we should answer the question of what should actually determine the choice of method for a particular piece of research. And the answer to that question is actually

very simple. Method(s) must be chosen on the basis of what is wanted to be known. In other words:

> methods should follow from question [because] different questions require different method to answer them. The way a question is asked has implications for what needs to be done, in research, to answer it. Quantitative questions reacquire quantitative methods to answer them, and qualitative questions require qualitative methods to answer them (Punch, 2005:19).

The best way to illustrate this concept is probably to use my own research as an example. I have adopted post-structural feminism reinforced by the life course perspective as a framework for this study, but it was not 'the only' reason for choosing the method of in-depth interviews. I have chosen this method because of what I wanted to know. And it was Chinese women's interpretation of the discourses which evolved around the one-child policy and their impact on gendered lives and gender inequalities. And in-depth interviews were simply the best tool to understand how their perspectives were constructed and what events and experiences influence them the most.

In summary, the differences and distinctions are found on a philosophical and epistemological level of data analysis, not on the technical level of research tools. Just as I hinted at before, it is just as possible and appropriate to use a survey for research based on a positivist paradigm, as it is for research based on an interpretive paradigm. Similarly, one could apply the qualitative method of in-depth interviews and then conduct a computer-based word count analysis. In that case a qualitative method would be paired with positivist epistemology- it could not be, however, called in-depth analysis in an interpretivist paradigm. Methods and their tools do not contradict any of the epistemologies. What must be remembered is that everything, even the 'scientific' paradigm, is a form of interpretations – a different interpretation, nevertheless, still 'only' an interpretation.

4.2.4 Feminist research

Research, focused on gender issues, that applies the feminist theoretical framework, assumes 'naturally' that women are somehow misrepresented,

mistreated or neglected in light of the phenomena studied. These assumptions also create some specifics for feminist research practice (Kelly, 1988), because particular questions are being asked, the researcher holds a particular position during the whole research process and, generally speaking, the whole has a particular 'final goal' in mind (Letherby, 2003:5). The assumption of perceiving reality as being "unequal and hierarchical" (Skeggs, 1994) is typical for feminist research. Feminist research tends to highlight this position and premises in order to stress its stand and aim. It also has a tendency towards the non-exploitive understanding of women's lives, not objectifying its participants and trying to be beneficial for both the researcher and research participants. From this perspective it can be considered as cooperation for mutual benefits rather than a simple 'task' used for data gathering. Feminist research is also focusing on filling the 'void' of traditional, male stream research (Haralambos, Holborn, Chapman, & Moore, 2013), which tended to portray women (if it took them into consideration in the first place) as passive agents who are "not male" (Letherby, 2003:6).

These specifics of feminist research do not however imply the existence of a single method identified as appropriate for it (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). Something similar can be said about the life course approach, which is also characterized by methodological pluralism (Giele & Elder, 1998). However, as mentioned by Letherby (2003), "for many feminists, feminist research is feminist theory in action" (p.62) - it is considered as both theory and practice, aimed to 'produce' results that are useful for fostering an understanding and change in women's lives, on both individual and 'border' levels. But it does not seem feasible for a foreign researcher, who is not involved in community life, to conduct action research in mainland China. Even though I have focused on the matter of interpretation only, it does not mean that my research cannot be feminist. My final goal is to evaluate the influence of the one-child policy on gender inequalities – and even if I do not 'impose' any raising of consciousness among Chinese women, it does not mean that such research does not help in achieving the ultimate (though quite far reaching) aim of a more equal world. Despite not conducting action research, I have applied 'other' implications of feminist research, in which the researcher is not neutral and does not treat him/herself as a data collecting machine nor the

interviewees as data producing machines, but instead considers emotions and attitudes as important and supportive in trying to overcome the limitations of androcentricity, overgeneralization, gender insensitivity, sex appropriateness and familism (Sarantakos, 2005: 64-5).

The fact that feminists set the concept of gender "at the centre of research" (Sarantakos, 2005:60), has led to a lot of criticism of feminist research, labelling it as not being objective and hence, not valid. As Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983) mentioned, the research which applies a feminist perspective as its framework could face the problem of the:

> impossibility of creating a research process that completely erases the contradictions in the relationship between the researcher and the researched; the difficulties in analysing change as a process; the tension between the necessity of organizing the data and producing data which reveals the totality of women's lives; and problems of validity, particularly those raised when the research process becomes part of the process of change (p.423).

But does really creating a bond with a research participant make a piece of research less objective? And, importantly, all of these kinds of critiques are being made based on the assumptions of positivist paradigm. What must be remembered is that paradigms, which establish one's epistemological positions, cannot be judged against each other, simply because they operate on two completely different levels. What we should rethink, however, is whether any kind of research is actually neutral. In the end, the topic, the questions that are being asked (and not asked) and the choice of factors taken into consideration, are all underpinned by certain 'un-scientific' and 'non-objective' beliefs (Stanley & Wise, 1983).

Although I have already challenged the assumption of the objectivity of positivist research, I would like to return to the issue of the emotional connection of a researcher with research participants. Although I agree that reflexivity is necessary in order to avoid the 'overuse' of a researcher's position of power (England, 1994), I do not belief that informants should be treated like 'data producing machines'. Opening up and discussing often difficult events requires a certain form of closeness. And, what is more, showing actual interest in what an interviewee has to say (and not which of the given answers he/she is choosing) might lead to a mutual 'advantage' – participants might highlight issues which the researcher had not considered before,

while at the same time getting an opportunity to 'let go' of their feelings (Oakley, 2005). It is really difficult to fully emphasize how much simple sharing might do. Often during my fieldwork, I have experienced gratitude from participants, who have admitted that the in-depth discussion has taken some weight off their shoulders. Some thanked me because, as they said, I was the first person (!) to show interest in their lives, opinions and experiences. One of my research participants got back to me weeks after our interview just to inform me that she traced back and met with her childhood teacher who helped her a lot and whom she had not seen or hear from for nearly 40 years. Because of these stories I strongly belief that emotional bond is not an obstacle for research, but it can actually open new depths for it instead.

4.3 Research design

Having gone through the main debates regarding research methodologies and the discussions on feminist research, I will now move on to the more detailed descriptions of the methods chosen for this particular piece of work. I will elaborate on the choice of: particular research methods, research participants, data collection and data analysis, and, at the end of this section, discussion the limitations of the research design

4.3.1 Research methods

By adopting a post-structural feminist theoretical position and asking questions of interpretation of the influence of the one-child policy on Chinese urban women, I have chosen in-depth interviews as the main method of data gathering. I believe that the approach of dialogism is one of the most credible tools for this. As argued by Coulter (1999), dialogism and cooperation between all sides involved in the research might lead to the better understanding of the studied problem. I am particularly fond of the method proposed by Ann Oakley (2003), who postulated the feminist approach of interviewing women, distinct form the mainstream approach used by researchers, which often tend to ignore the "sociology of feelings and emotions" (p.

251). Oakley's ideas to some extent equate with the idea of Bakhtin's' (2010) aspects of dialogism - polyphony, chronotype and carnival. The approach of dialogism would contribute to the research by using the interviewees own language, experiences and influence other people had on the situation they went through (Coulter, 1999). Oakley (2003) argued that non-hierarchical and unstructured interviews (allowing interviewees to ask questions as well), based on partner-like approach research will be more informative, and they will aid the researcher, but also the interviewees.

Taking into consideration the limitation of time and resources, I modified Oakley's approach slightly and applied semi-structured interviews instead, which was helpful as it made sure that I covered all the themes I wanted to focus on in data analysis during the discussion. Nevertheless, I wanted research participants to feel free to express their experiences and thoughts. But, having a 'backup' in the form of an interview guide, necessary not only for the data analysis process, provided also, in my opinion, more confidence for the researcher and help for the participant, at least at the initial stage of interviewing process. Having some additional questions prepared in case of the conversation 'getting stuck' was of extreme help, especially since I did not have any prior relationship with the research participants. However, I did not interrupt if the responders were eager to talk and did not require additional 'encouragement' in the form of further questions. In making my decision I was also convinced by Gubrium and Holstein's (2002) concept of respondents as 'vessels of knowledge', flow of which sometimes need to be encouraged by asking questions. I also believe that this approach leads to the collection of more in-depth data, as I could 'dig for more', encouraging participants to elaborate on a particular issue, as well as solve some problems when misunderstandings occur. This method made misrepresentation of the participant less likely to happen, especially in these particular research settings, in which the native languages of the researcher and participants were not the same. The flexibility of the interviews also allowed for the flow of the conversation to be adjusted depending on each of the participant's personality, mood, age, particular situation and it enabled the most significant experiences of their life course to be focused on.

4.3.2 Selection of interviewees

While conducting research in China and among Chinese women, the great diversity among them was taken into consideration. Because of the limited scope of this research and its focus on understanding the interpretations of the one-child policy of urban women who live in the economically developed cities of Guangzhou and Shenzhen (Guangdong Province), the perspective of women living in rural areas (which takes into consideration the difference between urban-rural settings in China) and other less affluent regions must be perforce omitted. Nevertheless, I understand the term of 'urban women' as women who have been living in big cities for at least a couple of years. Because of this vast understanding of the term 'urban' I did not exclude in this research female members of the so called 'floating population' – migrant workers who live in the cities, but do not have urban *hukou*, which means they are still being subjected to the regulations of their places of origin and, what is not of less importance, they are not entitled to any form of urban social care systems. However, I believe that migrant women (not only those of the 'floating population') do constitute a part of urban reality and excluding them from this analysis would be following the tactic of the Chinese government, which means pretending that the problem does not exist. For example, in the case of Guangzhou city, in which the majority of interviews took place, migrant workers constitute 37% of all the inhabitants (Ngok, 2012). It seems that such a number cannot be simply overlooked.

To highlight the changeable character of the influence of the one-child policy on the life of Chinese women, participants were 'divided' into three groups based on their and the main 'role' they are currently 'fulfilling' . This choice was dictated by the incorporation of the life course perspective to the theoretical research framework in order to highlight the differences of perception of the one-child policy's influence at different life stages. Such a 'division' has shown not only the changeable character of these influences, but also the different attitude towards fertility restriction of women of different ages, who face or faced the problem at different times in history and with different 'emotional baggage'. The incorporation of the life course approach was, as mentioned in the previous chapter, dictated by the will to portray differences at different life stages - what might have been considered as a

privileged at one point (for example, the supposed education possibilities for girls strengthened by the one-child policy) might be considered as a burden in another (like the dependency ratio caused by the 4-2-1 phenomenon). What is more, such a division was also necessary because of the changeable character of the one-child policy, which during its nearly 40 years of being in force, has taken many different forms.

When it comes to the division of the participants to the three groups, I have drawn from the research of Fowler, Gao and Carlson (2010), who divided three generational groups of Chinese citizens affected by the one-child policy. The first group contains young women, who are not married and do not have child/children of their own yet – they are the children of, as labelled by Fowler et al. (2010), the first wave of Chinese singletons. The second group is composed of women who have been married at least once (hence could have at least one 'legal' baby) – this group, the first generation of the one-child policy's singletons, is often labelled as the 'sandwich generation' as it has to face the burden of caring for both their own children, as well as aging parents. The third group would contain the first generation influenced by the one-child policy, that is women who were of reproductive age right after 1980 – mothers of the first generation of children born under the one-child policy, who themselves grew up in big families and went through the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution as well as opening reforms which significantly changed the reality of China and who are currently retired. It is important to note here that biological age is of secondary importance. What matters in the dividing groups are the experiences of, for example, being a mother, a professional worker, carer, etc. Because of this, I considered the biological age as flexible and disobliging, understanding the term of 'generation' as a sociological rather than demographic phenomenon (Mannheim, 1970).

In addition to generational difference, participants were also chosen, in the case of the middle-aged and elderly group, according to the number of children and other dependent family members they have. Realistically speaking, it was difficult to approach women who gave birth to children who are still not registered. Nevertheless, differentiating participants to those who have none, one or two children, was helpful in revealing the discourse of the 'easiness' of childcare in the

new reality of the small, nuclear family. Similarly, dividing participants according to whether they do or do not have to care for elderly parents or other family members was helpful in portraying the changeable character of the internalization of the one-child policy's, supposedly beneficial for women, discourses.

Another distinction was focusing on women with higher and lower income and the socioeconomic position strictly connected to it. Again, because of the Chinese reality and tradition, I took into consideration family income rather that the individual income of the woman. This choice was dictated by the discussion about the costs of childrearing in China, which is highly influenced and to some extent artificially elevated by the campaign for perfect mothers who must produce perfect offspring (Attané, 2012; Greenhalgh, 2010), as well as the theoretical importance of material deprivation as the significant factor for evaluating the gender inequalities and the ways in which the state's top-down policy can be challenged.

The inclusion of the generation of young and single women, who do not have children yet and who are supposed to enjoy the possibilities of the latest 'relaxation' of the policy, which allows all couples to have two children, might seem unnecessary. It might be suggested that the question of the impact of the one-child policy is, in their cases, irrelevant, as they still have not experienced it from the point of view of mothers and family carers. But, what we have to remember is that the changed form of the policy does not imply that the state's control over family size is over and that the youngest generation of Chinese women will enjoy 'freedom' of reproductive choice. Hence, the focus in this group was placed on the exploration of perception rather than first-hand experiences. How do these young women see the one-child policy, and the educational and employment chances which the policy supposedly brought, how many children do they want to have (if any) in the future and why, how do they understand the concept of marriage and how are they planning to deal with the expectations of being a carer of elderly family members were all focused on in this group.

As for the number of participants, ensuring the 'highest' diversification of the interviewees, I have interviewed between 8-9 women from each age cohort, differentiating them also (in each cohort) according to the number of children in their

family and their income. I have completed 25 full in-depth interviews, which, in my opinion, constitutes a group that is representative enough for data analysis.

4.3.3 Data collection

As mentioned before, data was collected from semi-structured interviews, as "they allow more fluid interaction between the researcher and the respondent" (Marvasti,2004:20). I have conducted singular, in-depth interviews, each of which lasted at least one and a half to two hours. Nevertheless, what I respected most were the needs of the interviewees. When a particular women wanted to share more or continue her story, I did not, whenever possible, stop her, allowing her to share as much as she wanted. I have decided for lengthier rather than repeated interviews, believing that the discussion on the effect of the one-child policy on women's lives will not, unless initiated by interviewees themselves, touch upon their most personal and intimate issues and hence there seems to be no need to build a deep trust relationship, which would necessarily require more time. Also, adopting singular interviews allowed me to conduct more interviews with women of different backgrounds, adding, at the same time, value to the post-structural analysis in which "differences […] matter" (Ahmed, 2004).

Each interview, after obtaining informed consent from the participants, was audio-recorded and transcribed. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese with the help of a Chinese native speaking research assistant. In order to guarantee confidentiality, research participant's names have been changed to pseudonyms (using the most popular Chinese female names). What is more, interviewees were also informed about the possibility of not even using their real names during the interview. This information was given before audio recording began. Also, names of places which could lead to the identification of the respondents have been changed, in order to entrench their anonymity. As to ensure their comfort, all participants were aware that they can refuse to answer questions or even withdraw from participation in the research at any time, according to their own will.

4.3.4 Data analysis

By adopting post-structural feminist analysis reinforced by the life course approach, data analysis of this research focused on challenging the taken-for-granted myths of the one-child policy's implications on gender equality in current day China and the ways in which those myths are being internalized and reproduced by Chinse women in their daily life interactions and experiences.

Data gathered in the research process was analysed using domains. The main themes include education and employment, family and intimate relationships, childbearing and body politics and care. The choice of these groupings derives directly from the operationalization of the theoretical framework of the research, on which I have elaborated in the previous chapter. It is because of the one-child policy that we are talking about more possibilities both in education as in women pursuing careers (Fong, 2002; Qian, 2004), the dramatic change in the Chinese family (Chen, 1985; Goh,2011), role changes (Goh, 2011; Rosenzweig & Zhang, 2009), issues related to contraceptive usage and pregnancy termination (Nie, 2005) and the problem of the 4-2-1- phenomenon and the overwhelming care responsibilities of women (Zhang & Goza, 2006; Zhan, 2004). Each of the themes will be discussed separately for the three groups of interviewees, allowing the deeper understanding of differences in interpreting the outcomes of the one-child policy not only at different life stage, but also different stages of policy development.

What must be highlighted is that while the purpose of this research was to establish whether the one-child policy had a positive influence on gender equality in China today, I have not 'imposed' my interpretation of the term on the research participants. In the end, many of the interviewees do not share the same conclusions as I present in the following chapters. In fact, sometimes they seemed happy and satisfied with how the situation is and the way things are done. However, my framework does not call for making judgements and imposing them on others. It only shares and reports the experiences of the interviewed women and my own position towards them.

4.4 Limitations/problems

Like every research design, this study also faced some problems whilst being conducted.

First of all, the selection of participants was, to some extent, limited. I attempted to 'diversify' them as much as possible, but I had to face the limitation of not being able to reach certain women. As I had to effectively rely on my own connections and the connections of my research assistant, I was not able to interview women who have illegal children, who do not have economic or social capital to use to 'validate' those births or women who have a very strong position in China's power structure and/or hold a high level of Party membership.

Another difficulty which arose was a result of the fact that I am not a Chinese native speaker. Although I have been living in Chinese speaking countries for over four years (two years in mainland China and two years in Taiwan), where I have been studying Chinese thanks to scholarships granted by the Chinese, Taiwanese and Polish Ministries of Education and I received an international certificate (T.O.C.F.L. level 3) acknowledging my skills in speaking, writing and listening in Mandarin, I still faced some difficulties. Local differences of dialects, often emotional and very fast discussions, together with my limited skills, meant that communication with research participants was problematic at certain points. In order to minimalize this issue, and to avoid misunderstanding or misinterpretation, I hired a research assistant – a female, Mandarin and Cantonese native speaker, who is also fluent in English. It is important to notice here that her responsibilities were strictly limited to logistics and technical issues, such as scheduling interviews, their translation (if necessary) and transcription. The process of data analysis and interpretation was my responsibility only.

Having the help of a very dedicated assistant who was familiar with feminist academia helped a lot. It solved the language problem and provided certain comfort to the research participants, who were not just left alone in the room with a 'foreign stranger'. It should not go unnoticed that my own identity and involvement - as a female and foreigner researcher focusing on mainland China and gender issues – did surely influenced my project. While I believe that feminist research done by man is

equally valid as the one done by women, as it can offer yet another perspective and another alternative discourse to challenge the existing ones, in case of China, being a woman myself made it more feasible for me to get 'an access' to interviewed women and gain their trust. This in turn allowed me to discuss the events and experiences of their lives. As it will be shown on the following pages of this thesis, the gender division in its broadest sense possible, is still quite 'rigorous' in nowadays China. The topics of sexuality, bodily functions, relationships – are still often considered 'taboo' and not something to be discussed in public. It was hence much more conformable for my research participants to open and speak to somebody who they themselves identified as somebody who might understand certain 'female issues' much better than a man and hence it made them less ashamed and constricted in sharing their stories with me. Funnily enough, being a female 'helped' me to develop the interest in the issue of the one-child policy to begin with. A person who inspired this project years ago, a young Chinese woman, who became my very good friend, approached me because she needed help of a foreigner teacher to teach English in her school. One of the requirements – not only from her, but from the parents of students themselves- was for a teacher to be a female, as is still vastly believed in China that women make better teachers when it comes to primary education (as they are, as I will demonstrate multiple times, considered as better carers). If I wasn't a women, I would hence most probably never get a chance to become close with my friend and surely she would have never shared her story with me – a story which made think that there is so much more to the one-child policy than popularized issues of imbalanced sex ratio and aging population. It was because of my friend, craving for a girl while giving birth to a son and her deep feeling of guilt after her son was born that I realized how complex the top-down policy's influence on women in China is.

When I comes to being foreigner and not Mandarin native speaker, despite the limitations I've mention before, I strongly believe that, in the end, it can be considered an advantage. First, as I am not Chinese and I didn't grow in Chinese reality of family planning policy, there were some aspects of it I might have paid more attention to, because I was not 'exposed' to some dominant discourses which Chinese women experienced on daily basis. It is a very 'what if' kind of situation, but

if I were not a foreigner, certain aspects, questions and reflections might have gone missing, because I will simply overlook them as something so 'normal' and natural for me that it won't even cross my mind to focus on its 'deconstruction'. Also, I found that being foreigner, who, however, showed deep interest and relatively deep knowledge of Chinese history, made women who participated in interviews even more open. They often mention that as I am not Chinese I might not understand certain issues and they felt the need to explain in more detail their stories and their points of view. It has made our discussions even more informative and reflexive – both for me as for the research participants, because as we all realize – be it by writing up this thesis or by talking about certain events in life or certain points of view – explaining clearly the thing that we find 'obvious' is often the most challenging task of all.

It all shows that sometimes something seen as a disadvantage can be turned into a clear advantage – but it is conditioned by the way in which we approach it. Sometimes being an outsider allows one to focus on certain issues that were disregarded by other researchers due to their 'commonness' and being seen as something normal. But I also think it is important to mention that certain 'qualities' and approaches are more much meaningful that the labels of being a foreigner or even being a woman. Genuine interest, compassion, being respectful and not being judgemental – and honestly about what, why and how we are conducting the research - can brake all the other divisions away. I believe that the women who participated in my research gave me a possibility to add one more voice to the vast topic of Chinese women, the one - child policy and gender inequality. And after conducting this project I have realized more than ever that every single voice counts and matters.

CHAPTER FIVE – THE GROUP OF YOUNG AND SINGLE WOMEN

5.1 The group of young and single women – Introduction

As I have said – every voice counts. In the following chapters I will focus then on analysing the voices of women who agreed to participate in my research. Using the framework of post-structural feminism and the life course perspective, I will explore the impact the one-child policy had and has on Chinese women and their understanding of gender inequalities under the main themes of education and employment, family and intimate relationships, childbearing and body politics, and care. Avoiding the trap of the positivist paradigm, I will not regard the policy as a force which is operating 'individually', but as one which is 'cooperating' with the systems of culture and the market economy. Moreover, in order to highlight the importance of the experience of different women in different times and different points of their lives as a tool facilitating the deconstruction of many myths regarding the one-child policy and its effects on women and gender equality, I will divide the data analysis into three groups of women: young and single, middle-aged and married and elderly and retired. While those names clearly make a reference to age, I feel it must be stressed again that biological age was of secondary importance when dividing research participants into their groups, as I have placed the commonality of their experience as the most important factor. That is why the group of young and single women includes girls who are not married and do not have children yet, while the middle-aged and married group focuses on those women who are already mothers and wives. This is also why the age line becomes a little blurred, because a 33-year-old single woman would be placed in the young and single group, while a 35-year-old mother of two in the middle-aged and married group, even though her age is far younger than my understating of 'middle aged women'. As for the elderly and retired group – this is where women who are already retired and have relatively grown-up children were placed, even though, again, sometimes their age is close to some women whose stories were analysed in the middle-aged and married group..

The young women whose stories were told in this chapter are the ones who were supposed to grasp all of the benefits of the one-child policy. They are well educated (especially in comparison to their mothers and grandmothers), their mothers were supposed to have more time and opportunity to bond with them as they were relieved from the burden of multiple childcare. They are the generation in which boys outnumber girls by far and hence, as vastly believed, they have an advantage of, to put it in the terms of the neo-liberal perspective, being in demand as the 'supply' is not big enough. They are also the generation which is supposed to suffer from the issues of an aging population and the 4-2-1 phenomenon, as care of elderly family members entirely will be placed on their shoulders.

As I have explained before, I will focus on the themes of education and employment, family and intimate relationships, childbearing and body politics, and care. First, I will verify the common belief that the one-child policy has led to better education and better job opportunities for young Chinese women. Next, I will ask whether the one-child policy has brought improvement to the family relationship, the division of housework and whether the theory of pure relationships (Giddens, 1992) can be applied to present day China, which would imply a big change in the concept of marriage. Then, I will explore the vastly popularized belief of the one-child policy and the end of the son preference in China, focusing also on the opinion of young Chinese girls on selective abortions and the existence of 'black' children. Finally, I will discuss the problems related to the issues of caring – the attitude towards taking care of elderly parents, the emergence of the so called little emperors and empresses and the demands placed on mothers to create a new high quality generation of Chinese citizens.

5.2 Participants introduction

An'ni (33) – the 'classic example' of the leftover women. An'ni comes from South Central China, but has been living in the city of Guangdong province for nearly ten years. Born with rural *hukou*, in a farming family, she changed it to the urban one after she became the first in her family to graduate from university. Her older brother

and sister have already settled down and her younger brother followed in her footsteps and studied at university as well. An'ni and her younger brother were 'violations' of the one-child policy – however, her parents were very eager to have two sons. Currently An'ni is the owner of a small international company which she started by herself and she has recently been joined by her younger brother. She has been the only one of her siblings that has been helping her parents financially for years, acknowledging that it will not be her with whom they would like to live when they become older, as the parents have very traditional belief regarding daughters and sons. She claims she will get married only if she meets somebody with whom she will feel good and be happy with – and will never do it just for the sake of not being single.

Dantong (28) – from Western Guangdong, moved to the city nine years ago. Her parents used to work in education sector. She has an older brother, but is not sure in which way her parents 'tricked' the system, but she is pretty sure they did not have to pay a penalty fee for her. Dantong completed a university degree and is now working as a social worker and 'specializes' in helping senior citizens. However, she has experienced gender based discrimination while searching for a job. She is to get married next year. She is planning to have only one child, preferably a girl, because the economic situation does not allow her to raise more children or to provide an apartment in case she had a son. Dantong is also hoping to avoid the fate of her mom, who worked full time and was the only one who took care of the house and children, as the father was enjoying his free time. She is hoping that one day she will be able to open a flower, wedding dress or coffee shop – a place which will make people happy.

Heyue (22) – from the southern part of Guangdong province, came to the city over five years ago. Her parents run a small private business, but her mother was not working when Heyue and her siblings were small, especially since Heyue suffered from serious health problems. She has two younger brothers, for whom parents had to pay a penalty as they were born without a permit. Her parents were willing to pay because they believed that having a son is a must. The older of the boys quit studying

after high school, the youngest one is still a high school student. Heyue came to the city to complete her university degree and is currently working in one of the city's social centres. She is single, but has a definite plan to get married and have a family. She considers the one-child policy to be unfair as it only affected people who did not have money and connections – everyone else could avoid it pretty easily.

Li Yan (26) – from the outskirts of the city of Guangdong province. Being the third daughter in her family, she was given away for adoption by her biological parents when she was a couple of days old, while they adopted a baby boy at the same time. Li Yan knew she was adopted by her foster mother, who has been working as a cleaning lady, since she was in primary 5, but she did not let her know that. She saw her biological parents for the first time last year. She is a lesbian, but her foster mother does not know about this and has even prepared a dowry for her. Li Yan does not want to have children and she does not want to get involved in a 'fake' marriage. She has a collage diploma. She used to work in an NGO, but quit because of the low salary. She is currently unemployed, but wishes to become a chef.

Pingwan (21) – from the urban area of the Southwest China. Came to the city in Guangdong five years ago in order to study medicine. She is a single child whose parents are teachers. She feels proud that her parents raised her as if she was a boy, thinking that this is what makes her be strong. She is deeply involved in LGBT organizations, trying also to challenge the misconception of the dualistic approach to understanding gender 'appropriate' characteristics. She experiences a lot of bullying, especially in her home town, from people who tell her she should think about marriage before graduation at the age of 28. But if she marries, she wants her partner to be as independent as she is. She would prefer to have a girl if she can have only one child, but is worried about the prejudice that society has towards women.

Wenhui (21) – from the urban area of Central China. Came to the city in Guangdong province five years ago. She is a single child. Both of her parents work as teachers. She herself is a university student of history (although she wanted to study the economy) and she is about to graduate - she reflects that teachers do exert the

concept of gender adequate professions and subjects, encouraging girls to study liberal arts. She claims she is at a bit of a loss concerning the next step in her life. She has not found a job yet and does not know what kind of job she could do. As her colleague is starting a private business, she is considering joining her, even though her dream would be to live with a partner in the remote village, far away from the bustle of the city. She has a very romantic view on love based on partnerships, but admits that she does not know what she is going to do when at the age of 26 she starts to feel pressure from her parents to marry. She considers having a child as something that is natural, but thinks that having one is more than enough because of the financial costs involved. She is the only one of the interviewees who wants to have a son, because she would be too worried about all the possible dangers for a girl.

Xiu Ying (21) – a single child from a very well off family. Her mother is a teacher and her father is the manager of a big company and he travels very often for business. She was born in Southern China, but grew up in the cities of Guangdong province. She pursues a degree in media-connected major. She wants to find a job in her field, but is also very aware of gender based inequality when it comes to job hunting – an issue her teachers warn students about. She recently became very interested in the issues of feminism and gender equality. She is very critical of the one-child policy, sex selective abortions and the killing of baby girls performed by families who desperately wanted to have a son. She is thinking about marriage and having a family, and she is the only participant who declares that she would not mind being the one who provides a house and car to the relationship and would not have economic requirements towards her future husband.

Zhang Wei (23) – from the eastern region of Guangdong province. She came to the city in 2009 in order to complete her science degree at university. She is a single child from a 'working class' family. When she was younger she was constantly worried that her parents will have another child and hence will stop loving her. Zhang Wei was about to graduate at the time the interview was conducted and she had already accepted a job in her field which she found through campus recruitment. Her

parents really want her to marry and she has given herself a time-limit of the age of 25 to wait for true love. In the future she would like to have a daughter, because she believes that society has lower requirements for girls than it does for boys. She is very 'supportive' of gendered stereotypes based on the biological differences between sexes.

5.3 Education and Employment

Starting from 1986, basic education (including six years of primary school and three years of middle school) became compulsory – otherwise Deng's Four Modernization would not have happened. This happened at a time when the first children born under the one-child policy were reaching school age. According to the statistical data, enrolment in primary education in China now is nearly universal – and reaches the same figure of 99.8% for boys and girls (China Statistics, 2016). The latest data points, as well, to the fact that more than half of university students are females (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014). This data leads to many assumptions of increased educational and work opportunities for singleton girls, who did not have to compete for family resources with their brothers, hence achieving higher education and better prospects for their future work.

In the following part I will explore the issues of girls' access to schools and the connection between better education opportunities and the one-child policy. This part will be followed by the analysis of the assumption of better job opportunities for well-educated Chinese singleton girls in the new market economy, as well as the gender inequalities they are facing in the process.

5.3.1 The educational miracle of the one-child policy

Xiu Ying, 21-year-old student, who comes from a privileged family, had no doubts that the one-child policy has really helped Chinese girls to get an education and hence has opened a world of new possibilities for them. She said:

> It [the one-child policy-MN] helped by promoting female status. [If] you only give birth to a girl, [that] girl can obtain more resources [for] education, [can have] bigger growth. (Xiu Ying, p.20)

Similarly, Zhang Wei, 23, a graduate of the science department of one of Guangdong's universities, who is about to start her first job, also points out that the one-child policy enhanced education opportunities for women in China, connecting it to the emergence of the so called leftover women – successful, independent and unmarried. She said:

> For example, if there were many children in my family, I might not have had a chance to study [and that way] I would not have the chance to become a so called leftover woman because of a lack of resources. Family planning controlled the quantity of children, allowing better growth for girls. (Zhang Wei, p.31)

As these women both mentioned the issue of not needing to share resources, it seems that this idea and the fear of it is based not only on the experiences of the previous generation. Zhang Wei, who was always afraid about having a brother, told me a story about her girlfriend and her brother, who attended the same school that she did. She recalls that when the time to enter high school came, there was a possibility to pay a fee which would guarantee entry to a better school than the exam score allowed. Zhang Wei remembers that although the brother's school work was worse than that of his sister, her parents paid for him to go to the better high school. However, when her time came to enter high school, her parents did not do the same. And if they had, Zhang Wei underlines, she could have gone to an even better school than her brother did. But, she also mentions, she cannot rule out the possibility that the financial situation of the family might have changed over time and that they simply could not afford the additional fee for their second child. But, as Zhang Wei mentions:

> But this situation has caused great harm to my friend, because her results were better than those of her older brother. If the same amount had been spent on her, the outcome might have been better. She told me that story. I was really very thankful that in my family there is only one (child), because I also couldn't eliminate [the possibility of being –MN] in this kind of situation. (Zhang Wei, p. 45-46)

But An'ni, who according to Chinese norms definitely 'qualifies' as a leftover woman, being 33 and the owner of small international company, had more luck than Zhang Wei's friend. Even though she has an elder brother and sister, as well as a younger brother, she did not have to give up her chance of higher education. However, she seems to be still quite positively surprised and astonished by it. Her parents, who come from a rural area, had no money to pay for a tutor or an 'admission fee' to go to better school. But, as An'ni recalls:

> I had good grades at school. My parents wanted to send me to university, which was unusual as I was a girl. (An'ni, p.2)

Even with the consent of her parents, she still felt guilty when she became a financial burden on her family, which, as An'ni admits herself, was rather poor. In the end it was An'ni's teacher who convinced her that the fees might be paid in instalments. She decided to take her chance, as anyhow, after graduating, she would give some of her earnings back to her parents. She mentioned that it is customary in China to 'repay' parents for the financial burden imposed on the family by educational expenses. However, this custom becomes more doubtful when An'ni told me that after her younger brother had graduated from university, he was not obliged to do so. An'ni summarizes:

> No, it's only been I. But it is because I had relatively more money. (An'ni, p.5)

But it was not only An'ni who did not have to compete with brothers for a chance of further education. Heyue, who has two younger brothers, is until now the only who has graduated from university – her younger brother quit school after high school, and the youngest is still a high school student. Also Dantong, who has an older brother, has, just as her brother did, graduated from an undergraduate university program. None of them felt in any way that having brothers limited their chances. It was just a matter of whether you passed the exam or not.

Less children at home, rapid urbanization and free and mandatory education for nine years has undoubtedly increased young Chinese girls' opportunities for education. But, it is important to mention that the one-child policy was not operating alone in this area. The rapid modernization of China, as I have mentioned before, completely changed people's lives. The generation which went through the ordeal of

the Cultural Revolution and centrally planned economy of Mao's China suddenly had to reinvent themselves in the new, market oriented and competitive China. Their experience told them that the only way for their children to 'survive' in this new competitive world was education, because otherwise their only option would be low paid factory work. The stories told by these young girls definitely highlight the fact that they consider the one-child policy to be a tool which guaranteed them the best education possible, but even those of them who had brothers did not experience a lesser chance of going to school, because schools were free and mandatory and parents simply wanted their children to study, no matter whether they were sons or daughters. And what is more, the examination process was relatively fair and 'gender blind'. That's why Dantong (not a single child) said:

> Yes, so Chinese parents are really great. They think that if you can go to university, then they will try as much as possible to help you to graduate. When you graduate from the university, they would feel that their aspiration has been fulfilled, they would feel that they have fulfilled the biggest responsibility of raising children. (Dantong, p.12-3)

However, the choices of university majors were sometimes recommended to these girls, mainly by their parents, according to the persistent belief in biological gender differences which the one-child policy has not changed, or even challenged. This is why, for example, Dantong's parents wanted her to become a teacher, because it will make her fit into the position of a perfect wife, who would assist her husband and educate the children. Furthermore, such a job is relatively respected, not stressful, provides longer holidays and, finally:

> There is one more. It's just that they think that when a girl works as a teacher it's easy for her to get married. (Dantong, p.11)

5.3.2 Graduation and then… labour market discrimination

Putting the benefits of university education aside, I was curious to know about the possibilities these young Chinese women have in the job market. After all, it is claimed that the one-child policy and widened educational opportunities directly translate to the better competitiveness of women in the labour market. And,

following the state's advocacy, these girl singletons, citizens of good quality, were supposed to be a part of the future elite of the country, as the socialist era slogan of women holding half the sky is, theoretically, not dead. Following this logic, it should be exactly like Zhang Wei said, when asked about the biggest benefit of university education on her life as she explained that it is a pass to a better life, better job, possibility of having more choices, as well growing spiritually by getting to know oneself more.

But, unfortunately, it seems that the reality is not that bright. While I was discussing the opportunities of future employment, gender inequality issues emerged a number of times. Pingwan and Xu Ying claimed that they did not feel gender discrimination while at school, but they both stated that there is a huge problem of gender based discrimination in job hunting, as well as when it comes to some representative positions in the students' union. But it seems that the composition of a university's student union is not the end of the problem. According to Pingwan there is the same kind of prejudice towards female doctors. She claims that all of the most respected specializations are dominated by men, and the 'soft' options – like paediatrics – are the specialties with more women. But it seems that gender segregation does not end at the level of specialties. As Pingwan told me, it is even worse when it comes to being a director of the hospital. She told me that her school is affiliated with seven or eight hospitals, the heads of which are all man. And then, she adds that even in the university's quite long history (as it was founded in the 1920s) there has never been a female president. But, the big problem that she sees is the fact that other students, especially girls, do not think about this situation as something problematic. She said:

> The discriminative prejudice of society towards women… Because my co-students had already got used to this structure of the society, they just think that women need to be taken care of…they also believe women should do something rather relaxed, raising kids at home and so on. (Pingwan, p.19)

Xu Ying also became aware of gender discrimination while at university. Many teachers warned the students about the post-graduation situation in China saying that even if girls are more outstanding than boys, they will not get the job – a boy will. And Xiu Ying accepts it as a fact that cannot be changed even by the emergence

of some successful women, as they are an exception rather than the norm and with being of such a small number, they cannot really make a change. However, in contrast to what Pingwan and Xiu Ying regarded as unfair and disturbing, Zhang Wei not only acknowledged it as something normal, but went even further and supported it. She started by saying that women in her generation have had many more chances when compared to previous generations, as men's consciousness towards girls become better and, as Zhang Wei said, that makes them (men) willing to give women a chance. As she continued, she said that there was not a lot of gender inequality thanks to the efforts of outstanding men. She even claimed that the reminisce of it can be used in women's favour. When I ask how, she said:

> For example, some people say… this comparison is not very appropriate… we have a bucket of water… women were considered to be unable to move this bucket and the man would do it. But when we talk about today, as a woman, if you manage to move this bucket it's extra credit for you. If a man cannot move it – its penalty points. Originally my expectations toward that guy were like this, and expectations towards the girl like that. But at this time women… Because of this inequality, as a result, under the same circumstances, women are better off. Do you agree? (Zhang Wei, p.42)

Well, I definitely did not agree. Zhang Wei was clearly, in my opinion, confusing the issue of biological differences with gender equality. To a certain extent she made Ann Fausto-Sterling's (2008) 'Myths of Gender' come to life again. Zhang Wei has vividly presented how the actual form of gender inequality might be taken as common sense and 'rationally' justified. It just shows how deeply embodied these myths are in people's minds and how they are reproduced even by its biggest, but not exclusive, victims – women. It became even more pronounced when I asked about differences in salaries and discrimination when it comes to promotion, as Zhang Wei said:

> Zhang Wei: I think I understand the way the boss thinks. That is if both of you have the same skills, one is a woman and one is a man, I would choose the man.
>
> Martyna: Why?
>
> Zhang Wei: Because there are so many fussy issues about women. Although I am a woman I would argue that. But the boss… First of all, each month there are those couple of days, [when women's]

> work efficiency might be lower than that of a man's. I give you the same job, but that man can complete it better. If I hire that man I have absolutely no misgivings of that kind. (Zhang Wei, p. 43)

But while the majority of these stories and ideas were the assumptions of this young girl, Dantong has actually had first-hand experience of gender based discrimination in job hunting, which shows that Zhang Wei's point of view is commonly shared. She told me:

> At the time we graduated and went to look for a job, we could come across the situation that some companies were limited to [hire –MN] boys only and, after that, for example when I graduated and went for an interview, they would ask me…they'd ask 'So, when are you planning to get married and have kids?' this kind of questions. The company would consider the cost of employing somebody for a job, so actually you can come across what is called sex discrimination in looking for employment. (Dantong, p.13)

She even experienced the situation when she was told directly that she was not hired because she was a girl. Dantong told me:

> When I was looking for a job I went to one company. I was competing for the same position with my male classmate. Right after the interview the leader told me that he actually thought that I was more outstanding than that boy, but the office already has too many girls, so they need a man. He told me this in a very straightforward way, but actually I also know I am more outstanding then that boy, ha-ha. (Dantong, p. 13- 4)

5.3.3 Unequal outcomes of equal education

It would be unwise to argue that universal access to education is not a success and often a beginning of a step forward when it comes to the issue of gender equality. But in connection to the one-child policy, the two myths constantly repeat – the first claiming that it was the family planning policy that allowed better education for girls and the second claiming that this, together with reduced caring responsibilities because of having only one child, made Chinese women more present and competitive in the labour market. When it comes to education – not even getting into an issue of what kind of education it is and whose values it is trying to reproduce - it seems that the fact that Chinese girls are getting higher education than ever is a result of the mandatory education policy and relatively fair examination system.

Those girls who do have brothers, who did not go to university while they themselves did, explain it simply by the fact that their brothers did not have good enough grades or did not score well enough in the exam. The crucial issue is that with free and mandatory access to education, no matter the number of children, parents would always be eager – especially in the reality of the market economy – to send them to school, unless the survival of that family relies on the additional labour force of its youngest members. And what is more – how much is a claim of improved education opportunities because of not having brothers really worth when you live in a 'fear' that if you had a brother it would have been different? And as for the issue of employment – the young women I spoke to usually do not have much the first-hand experience, as the majority of them are studying or just starting their adventures in the labour market. However, while the numbers show that more and more girls get into university and the gender parity index for enrolment in tertiary education shifted from 0.85 in 1993 to 1.15 in 2013 (World Bank, 2016a) - at the same time women's participation in the labour market is getting smaller and smaller. According to the World Bank (World Bank, 2016b), in 1991 73% of women were employed, but in 2013 this number dropped to 64%. It seems then that there is some contradiction in what the Chinese government claims to be the outcome of the one-child policy and its proclaimed success. This becomes even clearer after exploring the experiences of the generation of women who have already become mothers, many of whom gave up paid work in order to become full-time mothers, putting an end to another empty claim that caring for one baby is not difficult, nor time consuming at all.

5.4 Family and Intimate relations

Education and employment are definitely very important parts of life. But traditionally in China, it was the family that mattered most. And since family composition has changed dramatically during the lives of the three generations of women I have interviewed, the youngest women's situation is as different as it could be when comparing it with their mothers and grandmothers'. It seems crucial, then, to explore whether the one-child policy has improved family relations (as,

supposedly, everybody's burden has been reduced, hence there is more time and opportunities for spending quality time together) and whether it has change the perception of the institution of marriage.

In this part I will focus on the young women's relationship with their parents and the way in which the household duties responsibilities were distributed in the family. After that I will move to the issues of marriage and the requirements the youngest generation of Chinese girls have of their future husbands, trying to answer whether we can talk about Bauman's (2013) liquid love and Giddens's (1992) pure relationships in present day China. In short, I will try to explore how much has changed in, what we can call, the marriage business.

5.4.1 Less children – better relations with parents?

The relationship between generations who, at least partially, require such different things from their daughters in comparison to what their mothers had expected from them, could not be a simple or easy one.

Pingwan and Zhang Wei both grew up in fear of having a brother. Pingwan heard the stories about abortions or giving little girls away in order for parents to have a son from a young age, only to learn, when she was older, that her uncle wanted to do exactly the same with her. Zhang Wei has worried all her life about whether her mom would have preferred to have a son instead of a daughter. And she only dared to ask when she was sure that there was no chance that her parents could have had another baby. Zhang Wei recalls:

> But my mom… I've never worried about my dad not loving me, I was more worried that my mom doesn't love me. Because in x region women who didn't give birth to a son might be experiencing a lot of stress, for sure she had a lot of stress… I think my mom had this way of thinking, she wanted to give birth to a son. Moreover, I think… it seems my mom hasn't love me that much, she never said the words 'I love you'". (Zhang Wei, p.4)

At this point it is extremely important to point out the pressure that Zhang Wei's mom must have been experiencing. First of all, there is a thousand-year-old tradition in China which determine women's value based on her ability to give the family a son,

or preferably many sons, because, after all, many sons meant a lot of happiness; they were a source of manpower, continuation of the family line and a guarantee for the future. The position of women who gave birth to a boy, despite whether she was a concubine or rightful wife, changed drastically in that women's favour. She gained respect as she was fulfilling her destiny. It seems that in the region where Zhang Wei was born, not much has changed, and the one-child policy, which strictly limited women's possibility to have a son, put women under more pressure, highlighting perfectly that the top-down implementation of such a policy, together with the unchanged system of the culture, cannot bring much change to people's minds. In the end, no matter if we talk about ancient or recent times, it seems that in that region's society it is still women who are blamed for 'producing' a baby of the undesirable sex. And it is still a son who is considered to be more 'useful' for the family.

An'ni, who has both a sister and brothers, and, as the owner of a small business, is definitely the most successful of her siblings, yet she does not feel special. Even though she has climbed up from the bottom of Chinese society system, she does not feel appreciated by her parents. She is, in the eyes of her parents, 'just' a girl. A successful one, but still – just a girl. When I made a statement about her parents who must be really proud of her, she simply said:

> I don't think so…How should I put it…Because I haven't given them…Although I have helped them a lot, for example when there was a need to build a house at my home…And they think I have helped them a lot and they feel grateful. But they have never said they feel proud. It's because they still think I am just a girl, you know? Hahahahah… Because later they can't live together with me. In their way of thinking they simply can't live together with a daughter. So it doesn't matter how good you are. Therefore, no matter how good you are doing, for sure, it makes no difference. (An'ni, p. 8)

After hearing those stories, it did not come as a surprise to learn that these girls do not share their private life events with their parents. Even Pingwan, who has a relatively good relationship with both parent and takes pride in being raised by them as if she was a boy, keeps her personal issues and newly emerged activity in feminist organizations secret. However, maybe this is connected to what makes her proud - if she was treated as if she was a boy, then she had not been encourage to share her

personal troubles with her mother and father, finding rather a solution for those worries herself. After all, the still strongly supported stereotype of masculinity clearly states that 'real' boys should not cry and complain, but remain strong and independent. Nonetheless, it seems that the one-child policy and the smaller number of children in the house did not really influence too much child-parent relationships.

5.4.2 No way out… of housework

To a certain point something that is related to the relationship with other members of the family is the issue of the division of household duties. The main focus here is the verification of whether the one-child policy changed the gender division of labour within a family and family relations which, I believe, cannot be improved unless the workload is relatively equally shared by family members. As family is the most important unit of socialization, it is the place where children learn how to do certain things and who does them. And, most probably, these lessons will influence their future and will be repeated in their grown up lives. What they will learn will become their habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) – the way they think they should act, without challenging those assumptions.

While discussing the issue of the one-child policy and its impact on Chinese women, the topic of the second shift, work done in the house aside on top of paid employment, is crucial. After all, one of the government's justification and rationale for introducing such controversial control over Chinese people's fertility was explained as a tool to relieve women's burden of multiple childbirth, childcare and extensive housework. Women blessed with such a freedom were supposed to be more flexible and competitive in the labour market. It is, therefore, interesting to see whether this policy, especially in comparison with the socialist commune assumption of taking over all domestic and caring duties (which, in the previous chapter, we have shown to not work well in practice), enabled Chinese women's self-cultivation, self-development and set them free from the everlasting burden of domestic chores.

All of the girls who participated in my research reported that it was the mother who did and is doing almost all the housework. Xiu Ying and Pingwan hardly helped, as studying was their only responsibility. Even though, as Pingwan mentioned, her

father used to help with housework, he stopped doing this pretty quickly as he would wash dark and light clothes together and prepare unpalatable dishes, making Pingwan's mother angry. Pingwan has summarized the division of the housework in her home by saying that she and her dad take the position of being 'happy to partake but not prepared to do any work' - they obey Pingwan's mother orders, giving her the feeling of being in charge, not having however to be burdened by household duties. In Zhang Wei's house her mother did not have a decisive voice, but was still doing all the housework. When Zhang Wei asked why it is always women who are responsible for cleaning and cooking, her mom would say that it is not worth quarrelling over such a 'trifle' thing as housework, because the only outcome would be a negative influence on the household. She believes that if the man wants to help with domestic chores, it is like a blessing from above, but if he does not willingly want to help out, then the woman must do it. Zhang Wei's mom lived according to that conviction. She would go to the market in the morning to buy ingredients for the meals and cook. After that she would go to her work and on the way back pick up her daughter from school. Shopping, cooking, cleaning, child-care duties were all on her shoulders and her shoulders alone. But, as Zhang Wei mentions, her mother did not complain. She did not complain when her husband had a job and income and her daughter had good results in school, nor when she was the only provider for the whole family and when Zhang Wei entered the difficult teenage 'rebel' age. Even at the time when Zhang Wei's father was not working and stayed at home all day, her mother would still perform the majority of household duties. Zhang Wei summed it up by saying:

> Zhang Wei: But she could not say to her husband: 'you are not working now at all, so all the work is on you'…she could not have said these kind of words…
>
> Martyna: Why?
>
> Zhang Wei: Because maybe she thought that her husband has a face [to lose-MN], maybe her feelings toward her husband were also that she wanted to change this situation. If you say these kind of words, you will make him [feel] very disappointingly unsuccessful, so the husband's temper may become even worse, so is there a need [to say that]? Just handling the things in silence is OK. (Zhang Wei, p. 9)

The biggest problem which occurs here, aside from the fact that we can barely talk about the division of housework, is that except in An'ni's case, where she did participate in the household chores a lot, the rest of the girls do not appreciate the difficulty of their mothers' situation. Pingwan considers her mom as being obsessed with cleanliness. Xiu Ying, whose mother was taking care of the siblings and the house from the age of nine, as both her mom and dad were working outside, and continues to do so to today, summarizes this situation:

> According to what she [mother-MN] says it was definitely not that hard… Maybe tiring, but not reaching the level of pain (…) She had to raise her little brother and sister, cook, take care of siblings and housework. She already got used to handling housework. (Xiu Ying, p.4)

And when I spoke to Dantong, who is getting married soon, I wanted to explore whether she has thought about discussing the issue of housework with her future husband. She has not, but she thinks that she might just create a schedule, dividing the work between the two of them, even though the division has not been clear-cut yet. I did not want to break it to her that it might be too late to discuss such things after marriage and it seems to me that she might end up in exactly the same situation as her mom and one that she wanted to avoid so much – a situation in which she is the only one responsible for the house and a child. She confirmed this by saying:

> I think that family is more important than work. If there was to be some conflicts between house and work, I will choose the family, I will not choose my job. (Dantong, p.25)

She finished the topic by saying that she will be more than willing to facilitate the promotion of the husband, by giving him time and space to work, so he can climb the ladder. This left me without any doubt – there will be no sharing of household duties in that relationship.

After hearing those stories, it became quite clear that the number of children is not only of second but of virtually no importance when it comes to the discussion of the domestic burden, the standard of which is constantly growing. Having only one child did not change nor value, nor the fact that all domestic and caring duties are still considered to be the responsibility of women. Most of young women did not share any housework before getting married – quite the opposite, as we will see later,

in comparison to older generations. However, it seems that they are not prepared to deal with the issue, or even conscious of it. After they will enter the life of a married woman, they will not know how to break through this problem, just as their parents did not. They will follow the old way - after all, they are still believed to be 'naturally' equipped to do so.

5.4.3 Marriage with a skilful Mr. Right – still a must

While during the school years' parents and girls' biggest concerns were academic achievements, as they did not need to worry about any domestic duties, when they grow up a new issue comes into being. After the goal of receiving the best possible education is, at least, partially achieved, a new worry for both parents and young women emerges - marriage. Marriage is essential, as having a baby without a marriage certificate is illegal – and having a baby is a must as well. It is also crucial, as it is still considered a tool for climbing the social ladder and ensuring oneself a comfortable life. With the existing conviction of men outnumbering women and hence there being a scarcity of girls of marriageable age, the one-child policy singleton girls should be able to pick and choose according to their will. What is more, they are supposed to have a flourishing career path wide open. Did they, then, thanks to the one-child policy, become more independent and less reliant on men?

Without exception, all the young girls feel that there is pressure to get married. This pressure, which is obviously socially constructed, keeps placing the role and value of women as becoming wives and giving birth to children. For many people in China, women who are not married are, as I have argued in previous chapters, classless (Bettie, 2003). What is more, the 'value' of a woman declines as she ages. Pingwan and Zhang Wei's cases show very clearly the phenomenon of the rice bowl of youth (Hanser, 2005; Zhang, 2000). Zhang Wei, currently 23 years old, has established a deadline for marriage and her pursuit of searching for true, romantic love at the age of 25. The older she gets, the less self-confidence she will have, especially if she is going to work in an environment with many young women around. As she claimed herself:

> So, maybe at the age of 30, I will just say… Arranged marriage, finding a man with more or less good qualifications… If the whole family would say 'you have to marry!', I would likely marry (him), not caring about whether I like or don't like him. (Zhang Wei, p. 23)

But Zhang Wei's case was rather extreme and other participants of the research seem to be less 'desperate'. However, it was not until I spoke with Wenhui that I thought that maybe I have found a girl whose concept of marriage is more similar to the idea of Bauman (2013) and Giddens' (1992) 'pure relationships'. She told me:

> To me, marriage means having a partner to discuss things together, completing things together. When confronted with life's situations, you can think that there is one person with whom you can talk, and you and him together can overcome them. For me it is a kind of feeling of security. If you choose a person with whom to spend your life, you can trust that person. (Wenhui, p.8)

As she was telling me about her dream of a long relationship which eventually would finish in a proposal, maybe even when they are both old aged, she suddenly reflected that her parents are expecting her to marry when she is 26-27 years old. And when I asked how she would deal with that pressure, she said:

> If they would say it in a tough way, just like 'how come you are not married at …. years old!' If it's in this form, then I would be even less obedient. But if it is a worrying, gentle form, that it seems… For me it is very difficult to resist this kind of pressure, and very easy to follow it. (Wenhui, p. 11)

The most decisive voice of not wanting to get married at all came from Li Yan, who openly admits that she is a lesbian and she will never decide to have even a 'fake' marriage (a marriage between a lesbian woman and a gay man), in order to satisfy her foster mother, who has already prepared a dowry for her. Her situation is particularly difficult, because when I asked about her future she said:

> I can't get married, and also I cannot come out of the closet. Getting married is the system of maintaining social stability. I can't tell my mom I am homosexual. Even if she keeps on pressuring me, I will still not get married! (Li Yan, p.11)

But the pressure of getting married is not the only worry, because whom to marry is also of significant importance. While we were talking about the desirable characteristics of their future husband, the issue of him possessing skills kept returning in the stories of the majority of the girls. Even though they mentioned the

importance of good looks, mutual respect and filial piety, the topic of skills almost always was in first place. Quite soon I found out that 'having skills' meant the ability to make money, which can secure the purchase of a house and a car. Zhang Wei, who claims that what is most important in life is to find true love as it helps to overcome every other obstacle, said:

> If I find somebody who is [already] 30 years old, I could also pay attention to those issues [having a house and a car – MN], because it is the reflection of his skills. [If] you work hard, more or less everyone must have [those] material foundations. Whether you drive a Mercedes or Toyota, it depends on each person. (Zhang Wei, p.25-6)

An'ni told me a story of her friend which shows even more clearly how important economic 'skills' are for many Chinese girls. Her friend married a man who is six years younger than herself, and, according to An'ni, despite the fact that the couple has a child already, the husband is like a child himself. To make things clear – the woman is 33 years old, the man is 27. According to An'ni, there was a very big reason behind their marriage. She said convincingly:

> An'ni: The reason she wanted to get married with this boy is that he is a Shenzhener. He in Shenzhen… His parents have two apartments in Shenzhen.
>
> Martyna: Ah, so maybe it's related to that…
>
> An'ni: It's very related. Actually she doesn't love that person. Maybe she can stand him. Don't you know that many Chinese marriages are like that? Many marriages are like that". (An'ni, p.8)

The only person who claimed that she wouldn't mind if her future husband was poor and could not provide an apartment and car was Xiu Ying. She said that she would not care if it was her who would be the one who earned the money for those things. But again, as Xiu Ying was from the richest family of those girls I spoke to, it might be easier to allow herself this kind of thinking. It seems that many other girls simply cannot afford to think that way and the one-child policy did not change much in the way in which they think about marriage.

5.4.4 The business of love

The one-child policy has caused probably the speediest change in family composition ever witnessed in the history of human kind. Yet, all of the promises of the policy seem not to have had much of an influence on family life and the concept of marriage. The girls who grew up as single children do not seem to have better relationship with their parents, who work all day and only demand from their daughters that they study well and who are often completely unaware about what is going on in their children's lives. Also, the concept and attitude towards marriage is far from the idea of pure relationships. There are, certainly, women who get married later or do not want to marry at all – but they often suffer from social ostracism being labelled as 'leftover' – a nickname that does not really create a strong, appreciative connotation. And it does not even matter what you achieve yourself – you can be independent, rich, successful, and even happy – but you still did not fulfil the role that society expects of you. Many girls still think about marriage as something unavoidable and as a way to achieve financial stability and be able to get a house, a car and money to raise their children. And it seems that the competitiveness of the market economy has somehow penetrated the 'love business' – looks and age are the biggest bargaining chips here. It has been widely considered that young Chinese women – singletons, the little empresses of China, are 'gold-diggers' – that is what makes them 'picky' when it comes to their choice of life partner. But what I have realized after the talks with my research participants is that those universal comments might be another example of 'ontological dumping' – something we have been told so many times that we no longer question its rationality and logic. I started to wander whether the one-child policy really 'empowered' Chinese women making it possible for them to have more requirements when it comes to their future husbands – or rather has it caused a step back, making marriage usually the only option to satisfy certain economical demands. Maybe those women want a man with an apartment because they have been told and they have realized that they will not be able to earn enough money themselves? Taking into consideration the discussion about gender discrimination in the labour market and, in the next chapter, the experience of middle-aged women who quit their jobs because the lack of their

salaries did not make much of a difference to the family budget – this step back becomes even more pronounced.

5.5 Childbearing and body politics

Since the one-child policy has become, as I have mentioned in previous chapters, the you-must-have-one-child policy, I wanted to explore the attitude of the young generation of Chinese women towards having children, especially since just over a year ago (29 October, 2015) the policy has been relaxed and each household is now allowed two children. This issue becomes even more intriguing, when we take into consideration the fact that since the policy was relaxed in 2003 allowing families where one of the parents is a single child to have two children's, it did not bring any significant influence on the fertility rate of urban Chinese (Levin, 2014).

Another important issue is the topic of the proclaimed preferences to have daughters, in opposition to the traditional belief that having a son is a must. And if that claim was true, I wanted to find out what constitutes this preference and why it tends to be connected with the one-child policy. What is more, if young Chinese women would really prefer to have a daughter, I was curious to find out what their view was on the ways in which women's bodies were controlled, especially during the strictest years of the one child policy, when many black children were born and many selective abortions were performed in order to guarantee male offspring.

5.5.1 Only one girl is not a problem

It is important to stress that the discussion about childbearing and body politics with the women of this group can highlight only the perspective these young girls have on the issue. Not being mothers themselves yet, they do not have first-hand experience to share. When discussing the desirable size of their future family, many of the girls who I talked to said that they would like to have two children, but are leaning towards having one child only, as they mention the cost of raising a child in the city is extremely high. Cram schools, food, clothes and extracurricular activities

cost a lot and, as Zhang Wei pointed out, in the current climate of cram school craziness in China it is very difficult to not send a child for some extra (expensive) studying time.

The research participants were also quite unanimous when it came to the discussion of the sex of the baby. With the exception of An'ni, who claimed she did not care whether she had a boy or a girl, Li Yan, who does not want to have children at all and Wenhui, who said she would be worried constantly about the safety of her daughter because of the possibilities of kidnap and rape, the rest of the interviewed girls said that if they have a baby, they would prefer it to be a girl. Zhang Wei explained this preference by saying:

> In China, the existing pressure in life for girls is a little smaller, and also everybody's expectation happens not to be so high... You can be yourself a little more - for example [if] I only want to open a coffee shop I just go and open it. As long as I can just provide for myself that's fine. I don't have to be like a guy, who must make money, must buy an apartment, must have a career. Girls can let go of themselves, relax a bit, [their] life might be a bit easier, relaxed… Many hope that their own child will be able to [have] a free and easy life. (Zhang Wei, p.28)

After saying this, she continued to explain that if a woman does not have a career, she can just get married and nobody will criticize her or think less of her. But if a man does not have a career, is not successful and marries, it can be called into question and discussed by other people, which will put even more pressure on him.

The reason for Pingwans and Xiu Ying's preference to have a daughter was connected to the fact that they believe in closer relationships between mothers and daughters. As Xiu Ying's dad was almost never at home, since he was travelling a lot due to his job, it does not seem to be very surprising that she appreciates the mother-daughter relationship as the more stable one. But, it seems important to mention that at the same time Xiu Ying stresses that she worries about becoming the same kind of mother her mother was to her – scarifying everything for her child and carrying only about her future daughter's academic achievements.

However, it was Dantong who expressed very strongly the 'economic values' of having a girl. She said:

> I don't know whether you've heard, but there is now a saying that having a girl is like having an outside money investment, and having a boy is like accumulating your savings and property. It's just that having a girl is attracting outside investment– you don't need to consider too much, spend so much. But having a boy – right after he is born you have to consider so many things. [You have to] consider that later maybe you have to support him and get him an apartment etc., but for a girl – she just needs to find somebody with an apartment and that's it. So there is this way of thinking. I myself would prefer to have a girl, because I do not have the resources to buy an apartment for my son, ha-ha. (Dantong, p.23)

Dantong has uncovered yet another aspect of the preference for girls – they are cheaper. All you have to do, in the end, is to make sure they marry well. And I strongly belief that this deconstructs yet another myth surrounding the one-child policy. Female singletons are not treated more equally, even though they are perceived as being more 'wanted'. They are, instead, still being taught that they cannot achieve things themselves – they need to have a man for that.

5.5.2 Whom to blame for black children and selective abortions?

When we were talking about the desired number and sex of children, the conversations often shifted towards the problems caused by the one-child policy – black children without a *hukou* and selective abortions. While the majority of girls blamed the one-child policy and its implementation for the occurrence of these phenomena or the pressure of the family for women to have a son, Zhang Wei's opinion shocked me the most. While she argued that the one-child policy was necessary because of overpopulation, she highlighted that what was really important is the quality of people, not their number. And it is because of the lack of that quality that there were so many problems with the implementation of the family planning policy. According to Zhang Wei, a mother of good quality will not have a black child. She said:

> If she wants that child to become a black child, it's because her inner quality does not meet basic requirements... Just like with the problem of floating population - why is there this problem? (Zhang Wei, p. 38-39)

A little disturbed, I asked about selective abortions and the pressure on women to give birth to a son. But Zhang Wei was merciless, saying:

> I think that part of [selective abortions -MN] is because they [women -MN] also wanted a son, and part [was a result of] the family's demands, but no matter what the reason, all [selective abortions] happened because this woman had some issues. (Zhang Wei, p.39)

Zhang Wei continued explaining that she cannot understand how a woman can turn her back on a baby of the same sex and she concluded saying that what needs to be corrected is the point of view of these women. When I asked what choice these women had while forced by the family to have an abortion or pressured into having a son, Zhang Wei said that they should have figure out a way to avoid it from happening. Arguments like the fact that many of these women had no money, no job and no support if they decided to move away and become a single parent did not convince Zhang Wei. She insisted that if they did not resist, it means that something is seriously wrong with them. With them only, but not with the system or the conviction that women are responsible for, for example, the sex of the baby she carries.

5.5.3 Reasons really matter

The stories, told by these young women, point to the fact that despite the relaxation of the one-child policy, the cost of raising a child generated by the force of the market economy will lead to a situation in which many girls will decide not to have another child, even if they would like to. What is more, despite the promising fact that girls might be considered preferable to boys in China today, we should pay closer attention to the reasons that are ending the thousand-year-old tradition of a preference for a son in Chinese culture. Girls are more obedient, society demands less from they, they do not need to be successful as long as they get married. This deeper insight allows us to understand that the preferences for girls does not point to the fact that the status of girls is higher. It seems, quite the opposite, that traditional gender norms are being constantly reinforced. The deeply rooted and unchallenged conviction of women as those who are ‘solely’ responsible for

everything regarding childbearing and ignoring completely the lack of any support for these women causes the processes of individualizing their problems and putting the blame on the mother for having an abortion or giving birth to a 'black child'. And the nearly universal conviction of the preference for girls is not the answer to the problem at all.

5.6 Caring

After discussing nearly 40 years of the one-child policy and its influence on Chinese women and the ways in which their bodies (and minds) have been subjugated to the demands of the state, we will move on the issues connected with the topic of care – one of the most significant debates in feminist academia. The one-child policy is connected with the problems of having an aging population, the 4-2-1 phenomenon and the emergence of so called little emperors – singletons, who are spoiled by all the grownups in the family. As the young generation of girls whom I interviewed is the one who grew up without siblings and hence have nobody to share the burden of caring for elderly parents with, I thought it crucial to explore their attitude towards this potential burden. This issue will be followed by another question I was curious about - the young women's opinions of little emperors and empresses, as without a doubt some of them are themselves, and the one-child policy's campaign for perfect mothers.

5.6.1 The issue of elderly parents and no help

Before going any deeper into this discussion, it must be clearly said – the majority of the parents of the girls that I interviewed are still young and self-sufficient. This is important to underline, because actually none of them have any experience in caring for an elderly person and all they could give me is their perspective on what they might do when their parents need constant care.

As I found out, many of the girls did not talk about the issue with their parents. One of the reason is, as I have pointed out before, the fact that sharing personal

worries with mothers and fathers is not a popular tendency. Another one was pointed out by Zhang Wei, who mentioned that it is considered to be bad luck and should not be talked about until necessary. Li Yan has not discussed the issue with her foster mother either, but she is worried about her expectations for Li Yan to make money. Li Yan's mom, who was working without a contract, has paid money for private social insurance in order to get some retirement benefits. However, it will not be enough in a case in which constant care is required. So when I asked what Li Yan would do if her mom needs constant care, she said:

> Maybe I won't be able to care for her… You ask what if? I would ask someone…or friends to care for her, [and] give her some money" (Li Yan, p.16)

As Li Yan's relationship with her foster mom is a very difficult one, it might not be very surprising that she is rather reluctant when it comes to the prospect of taking care of her. However, it seems that there is no real plan – Li Yan does not have a job or income and she claims she will never get married. She is now searching for a job as a chef, which as she admits herself, is very low paid. So what will happen to her foster mom is a big unknown, as she will not be supported by the state or by her daughter. And, even if Li Yan was in a better financial situation, we have to remember that even the arrangement and management of a hired caregiver, while it relieves a significant burden, is not an easy job and requires a lot of time and effort.

An'ni is in a 'better' situation, because as she claims, her parents cannot even consider living with her as she is a girl. Her parents are being taken care of by An'ni's older brother (or rather his wife), the only one of her siblings who is still living in the village they were born in. And An'ni, as she mentioned, does not mind sending him some money to help with the burden of care. Similarly, Zhang Wei cannot imagine living together with her parents – but not because they do not want it. As she said, when they get old she will consider getting another apartment in the city for them. She said it will be very convenient, but when I asked why she swept me, not the first time, off my feet:

> [Living - MN] in one city… for example today I finish work late, I just can call to my mom and ask whether I can come to her house to eat dinner. (Zhang Wei, p. 33)

When I pressed Zhang Wei harder asking about the case in which her parents need help, not the other way around, she claims that taking care of elderly parents is not easy for a girl, who already has her own family, so she would think about hiring a nurse to help with the burden, as she considers the option of nursing home to be cruel.

These stories point out that the young generation of Chinese women is not ready for the task of caring for their elderly parents. They hope that hiring someone to do the job will solve the problem. But in the later part of this chapter I will prove that, actually, it will not, because the value of caring will not change, and nor will the fact that women will be performing it. And, the assumption that the state has no role in providing any form of support and socialized care will become even stronger. It is just as Heyue, who knows that her parents will be living with her brother, said:

> To be honest what I worry the most about is my mom and dad, when their health will get bad…I myself don't know to whom would I be married and where I will live. Also, it's just that nowadays there is no guarantee of son's filial piety, or that the women he will marry will be obedient to parents. That actually worries me even more – when my parents are old and living together with my younger brother, what if the daughter-in-law is not obedient? This is what still worries me. (Heyue, p.10)

5.6.2 Little empresses and their makers

Funnily enough, the same girls who have everything, as they do and did not need to share any resources with siblings, and do not have any caregiving or household duties, deconstruct the assumption of the emergence of the so called little emperors/empresses as a result of the one-child policy. Pingwan associates this problem with the way parents raise their children. She said:

> It still has to do with the way of how parents educate [a child – MN]. It's just that I think even though there are two, three kids in the house, if the parents' way of educating [them] is the same, some children can still be very naughty, not knowing how to respect [parents-MN]. If there is only one child, and parents' way of educating is right, it can still become a sensible child. (Pingwan, p.27)

Xiu Ying, who admitted that her mom had sacrificed everything for her, had yet a different attitude, considering the issue of little emperors/empresses as a 'short-term' problem. She summarizes it by saying:

> I don't think it is a big problem. It's just that little emperors will grow up. After all, they will need to work and society will just teach them that they cannot be little emperors. I don't think it's a big issue. (Xiu Ying, p.21)

Even though these young women do not recognize the issue of the little emperors/empresses as a big problem, nor would they admit that they might be considered as such, even though they never had to do any housework and had no responsibility but to study, when they speak about the expectations towards children's mothers, they have actually described little empress makers (Greenhalgh, 2010). Zhang Wei mentioned that she must give her child all the best and she always used the singular form of 'I', never mentioning the role of the partner. She admitted that what society wants is not always compatible with her desires – as she wishes, for example, that she would not have to send her daughter to a cram school- but there is no way to get out of something that everybody is doing, as such an action might potentially harm the child and his/her future. Xiu Ying, whose mom gave her the best, told me with a bit of a scared voice:

> What I worry most about...is that I'd become the kind of mother that my mom was… Sacrificing her life, caring about my grades...But she didn't pay attention to my way of thinking or what I like... She thought this is not important. She thought my score (school results) are the most important, because that can determine my life (Xiu Ying, p.17)

When I asked what kind of mother Xiu Ying's mom was, and what kind of mother society might require her to become, Xiu Ying explained:

> They [society- MN] would require [for] mothers to sacrifice everything for the child, would think that a mom shouldn't have her own life or desires. (Xiu Ying, p.15)

And when I ask about the demands of fathers, she says:

> Just that [they] are capable of making money, supporting the family. (Xu Ying, p.15)

Wenhui also acknowledged the socially constructed demand for mothers by saying:

> I think that society towards me… Just ought to, must…eee… be a wife who is perfect in her traditional roles, and mother… Oh, right! I think that, for example, she'd need to take care of all the child's basic needs, protect the baby, cannot let work interfere with picking up a child. I think this exists. What is more, when kids have all the necessities and safety, if a problem emerges, mothers are criticized first. For example, my parents, they are two people, [but] if there was any problem with certain aspects of me, my dad would criticize my mom: 'look how you raised her!' One of my classmate also mentioned this problem – if something about the son or a daughter is not good enough, the father criticizes the mother 'Look how you raise'… (Wenhui, p.12)

But it was An'ni who mentioned that if she becomes a mother, she does not want to dedicate herself completely to motherhood, but wants to remain herself and keep following her dreams. And what is more, she believes that if mothers do not do this, it can influence children a lot. She said about the perfect mother of today's China:

> Whether you yourself are happy or not is not important. But it has a very big influence on the kids, because they can sense it. (Anni, p.10)

What An'ni meant and highlighted is the deconstruction of the myth of that it is mothers' sole responsibility to care and sacrifice everything for their children as the best way and the best solution for those children. As An'ni has pointed out, it is actually not the best solution for anybody – not for mothers, not for children and not for other members of the family. Because, as I have mentioned before, if the burden is not shared, there is no option for better interpersonal relationships and the happiness they can bring. It is as simple as that.

5.6.3 Future carers deficit?

The discussion on caring duties and requirements towards mothers was perfectly summarized by Xu Ying, who said that in comparison to Mao's communist era, the current Chinese government does not need women's participation in the labour market to the develop economy, so women are again encouraged to go back home and, as she said, they should not fight for men's jobs. It seems that despite the

liberating assumptions of the one-child policy, the market is trying to push women back to their homes and their position of natural carers. But it seems that many of these young women have no such plans – they grew up without any responsibility, they have obtained a good education and they have dreams that go beyond the role of mother or caregiver. But unfortunately, as their dreams and ambitions contradict those of the government and the market, it seems more then possible that nothing will change when it comes to caregiving. With the state withdrawing completely from this responsibility, somebody will have to continue to do the job. And tradition and culture, together with the low value of such work, indicates that it will still be women who will take the burden.

5.7 Conclusion

The picture that arises from all the stories told above seems not to be located in the gender equality 'area'. And to be honest, it moves quite strongly in the opposite direction. The one-child policy was supposed to increase opportunities for the new generation of Chinese women. It was supposed to relieve them from the burden of extensive housework, childbearing and child care. It was supposed to be another step towards gender equality.

But these opportunities cannot, however, compete with the needs of the market. Even though girls have equal access to education (because of the mandatory education system rather than the one-child policy) and, thanks to a relatively fair examination system, outnumber boys in universities, it is unclear as to what extent or how long these educational benefits will last. We are now facing the discourse of leftover women, constructed by the Chinese media, which is in turn controlled by the government, in order to prevent young, educated women from remaining single and childless, labelling them as selfish yellowing pearls. What China needed was a cheap labour force, an elite of 'professionals' and the continuation of free domestic work performed by women. And it seems that that is what it is getting. Without challenging social norms which label women as those who are supposed to stay at home and education which helps to reproduce this belief, no matter how many girls graduate

from university, the employment situation of women will not improve, not to mention the glass ceiling and access to the top jobs will continue to become thicker and thicker. After all, what it is all about is what will benefit those who control economy the most. And, in the neo-liberal perspective, it is not higher number of people who have to be paid wages as this will translate to smaller benefits for those in power (at least in the short time perspective). Changes in education opportunities only will not therefore improve the situation of women, especially if they are not followed by changes in policies regarding employment and maternity leave, if the attitude towards the division of housework remains the same, and, especially, if girls are told again and again that their position in society can only be established by having a husband at their side.

Another issue that should be highlighted is the fact that it seems that these young women might not use the chances that the recent relaxation of the one-child policy has guaranteed. They will probably have one child only, because economically speaking, two children becomes too much of a burden. In this aspect, the government has shot itself in the foot. With the one-child policy and the desire for citizens of better quality in a market oriented economy, it has created a well-oiled machine - mothers willing to sacrifice everything for they precious singletons, cram schools and preschools that are making huge amounts of money, Chinese craziness, as one of the interviewee called it, to send children for as many extracurricular activities as possible, giving them the best clothes and foods – and the impossibility of the majority of parents to afford all of this for one child, never mind two or more. While this might have been considered as an advantage when the policy was still being strongly enforced, nowadays it seems that it is potentially a very big problem. The 'desperation' of the government and its need for people to have more children is clearly visible in campaigns against leftover women, and at least just as much with the sudden policy relaxation. But, it seems that it was easier to force people not to have children than it is to force them to have more. To be very blunt – it is easier to control something that already exists than create it out of nothing.

What is more, without a radical change in aspects of caring and work policies, not to mention the gendered division of labour and blaming women for decisions about their own fertility, it seems that ‘high quality’ women might be very reluctant to

adapt to the needs of the new government. After all they were taught that they should give their baby only the very best. And that is what they are going to try to do, but only in case when they are going to decide to have one. And from the stories told- many might never reach this decision.

CHAPTER SIX – THE GROUP OF MIDDLE-AGED AND MARRIED WOMEN

6.1 The group of middle-aged and married women - Introduction

The women whose stories I will tell below, who are now in their 30s and 40s, have been living on the edge of two worlds. The majority of them still have some experience of the 'socialist' past before the opening reforms of Deng Xiaoping, and all of them have been faced with the challenge of reinventing themselves in the new reality of the market economy and the withdrawal of the state from welfare provisions. What is more, they were the ones who were starting a family when the one-child policy was at its strictest. All of the women I interviewed were already married and had children. This is the main reason why the issue of caring penetrates through all the themes and topics I touched upon with them.

The first part of the chapter will focus on access to education (for both these women and their children) and the issue of accommodating a full-time career with motherhood. In the following part, I will pay closer attention to the influence of the changed family structure, wondering whether the presumed benefits of the one-child policy on women did really improved the quality of their relationships with their husbands and children and the general concept of marriage. Next, I will concentrate on the most 'popular' topics connected to the one-child policy. I will discuss the issues surrounding the desirable number of children, verify and explore the claims of the supposed shift to a preference for girls and ask about the women's experiences with contraceptive methods, many of which were forced on them in the top-down implementation model. In the last part, I will focus on the issue of caring. I will bring up the experiences of (un)shared housework, caring for elderly parents and the measures which the women of this 'sandwich generation' are taking in order to care for themselves, which will be followed by an overall remark and conclusions of the whole chapter.

6.2 Introduction to the participants

Beilei (31) – from the urban area of the East China province, arrived to the city in Guangdong in 2008. Comes from a very affluent family – her parents are business people and, as she said, own a lot of real estate in her hometown. She has a younger brother and sister. All of them are university graduates. She claims her parents did not display any kind of boys' preference, yet all of the family's assets were inherited by her brother. Beilei used to work in a landscape planning company, but quit her well-paid job (which she liked a lot) after having a son, who is now 4 years old. For two years she lived with her parents in her hometown so they could help her to care for the child and then for one more year with her parents-in-law when her husband's mother fell ill and needed somebody to care for her. Now Beilei is preparing to have a second baby, hoping it is a girl so her husband's dream will come true. She herself thinks that having a boy is better, because it gives a guarantee of support in the future.

Jiaqing (43) – from a minority village in southwestern China. Her parents were farmers. She grew up with five sisters and two brothers. She started to work at the age of 20 in the farm of her parents, then got married and had two children – a daughter and a son. She stayed at home to care for her children. Jiaqing came to the city in Guangdong in 2009 and is working as a janitor at a community centre. Her daughter studies at university, while her son graduated from vocational school and is still living with his parents at their cost. Jiaqing shared with me a story of the customs in her village, when people 'exchange' children between themselves in order to get one of the desired sex, or take in abandoned Han baby girls found on the side of the road.

Lanmeng (31) – from the rural area of Gunagdong. She has a brother and a sister. As she was born without a permit to 'replace' her deceased sister, she was 'shifted' between many relatives' houses and for years did not know who her real parents were. She was terrified she would be discovered and people often mocked her saying that one-child policy officials came to the village to look for her. She claims that

because of the one-child policy she felt like a fourth-class citizen and she never had self-confidence. She did not have good grades at school, but managed to go to college for kindergarten teachers and she was offered a position in the best kindergarten in the area. However, because of a 'love scandal' – the ex-girlfriend of a boy she met three times found her after years and slapped her, she lost that chance. She was dragged to the police station and the school accused her of bringing their name into disrepute. After that and not getting an official graduation diploma, she moved to work in a kindergarten in the city. She got married soon after and now has a 5-year-old son. She is very disappointed with her relationship with her husband, who does a manual job, because he is unwilling to help her with anything, even if she feels really bad. She always wanted to have a daughter, but is too afraid to get pregnant again, because she worries it might be another boy.

Li Fang (38) – from a rural area of southern China. Her parents were farmers. She grew up with a younger brother, who was born after the relaxation of the one-child policy, when people in rural areas were allowed to have a second child if the first was a girl. She came to the city in Guangdong as a migrant worker, without any contract or benefits, after graduating from middle school. She was fired – without any note - from many factories when the additional workforce was no longer needed. She stopped working and become a full-time mother after she married at the age of 20 and had two children – a girl and a boy. Her husband works in the renovation of houses, but also does not have a contract. This makes their life in the city difficult – without *hukou* and official employment, they have to pay for their children's school, medical services and rent an apartment.

Meng Zhu (35) – from a rural area of Central China, born without a permit, so her parents had to pay a hefty fine when she reached school age. She has an older sister. Meng Zhu was the first person in her village to go (and graduate) from university. She followed her future husband to the city of Guangdong soon after graduating. She worked as an engineer and as a customs clerk, but quit her job because it was impossible for her to combine work and the care of her daughter. Meng Zhu wants to make use of the policy relaxation and have a second child, but is afraid that she

will be perceived as the baby's grandmother when taking him/her to kindergarten. She is also very worried that it will not be easy for her to go back to work. She even regrets going to university, saying that if she stayed in her hometown, her life would be more relaxed and also she would be just a short distance from her parents if they needed something.

Pei Shan (46) – from the rural area of southwestern China. Her parents were farmers. She has two brothers, one of whom died. She started to work in a factory at the age of 14. She got married at 22 and started a private business together with her husband. She only has one daughter. As she suspected the sex of the baby during the pregnancy, she wanted to terminate it and try again to have a boy, but her husband told her not to do this. She got pregnant again and knew it was a boy, but because at that time their business failed, her husband told her to abort the baby. She moved to the city in Guangdong when her daughter was very small and had many temporary jobs as a cleaning lady. Just recently she has managed to get a legal job as a cleaning lady in one of city's hospitals, which allows her to support her daughter who is currently studying at university. She is the only of my respondents whose husband helps a lot with the housework and childcare.

Siyun (31) – from an urban area of southern China. Both of her parent work in a public transportation company. She is an only child. She obtained a university diploma in engineering. She moved to Guangdong after graduation and after getting married at 25. She quit her job in order to take care of her son, who is now 7 years old. She is not planning to have another child, although her husband would really like for their son to have a sibling. However, for her giving birth to a baby is too painful and harmful for the body, so she does not want to have to go through it again. She is also very against forcing women to use IUD, especially since her mom faced quite serious health problems because of IUD malfunctioning. She has probably the best relationship with her husband of all the women from this group – they talk a lot, he respects her decisions and helps her with the housework, even though he is working full time, as he is the only provider for the whole family.

Xinmei (48) - grew up in northwest China, where her parents moved from Guangdong after graduating from high school. Her mother was a factory worker and her father was a logistic department manager in another *danwei*. They also had fields and animals, so there was a lot of housework to do. Xinmei has two older sisters and a younger brother. She went to technical college in southwest China to study machinery and got a job in Guangdong after graduating. She did not like her job much, but she worked in the factory's workshop for nearly 10 years. After that, feeling the pressure from parents and against her own judgement, she got married to a man who worked in the Chinese army. She moved to the city and quit work after she had her daughter, because she could not work and take care of the baby at the same time. When her daughter went to school she wanted to continue working, but it was impossible for her to find a full time job, so she has been doing a lot of different casual jobs since then.

Ziyue (34) – from the East region of Guangdong province, moved to the city after finishing junior high school. She has two older sisters. She also had a younger brother, who died of cancer nearly 10 years ago, leaving her parents completely devastated. She worked in services sector, but quit her job after having children. She has a son and a daughter. Her husband works as a public security guard and never helps with housework. She feels very reluctant toward her parents-in-law who not only spoiled her husband beyond reason, but are also very unfair towards their children. She is planning to go back to her hometown because of the children's *hukou* – in the city she has to pay for school, healthcare and everything else. But, she is also afraid of moving, because it will mean living with her parents-in-law, who will expect her to do everything.

6.3 Education and employment

Discussing the issues of education and employment with the women from this group is of extreme importance. The majority of them grow up in larger families than the ones they have now and almost all of them were subjugated to the birth control policy, which allowed them to have one or, in some cases, two children. As the one-

child policy was supposed to reduce the burden of multiple childbirth and ensure women's competitiveness in the labour market, it is interesting to see whether this was really the case. What chances of getting an education did these girls have? Did they transfer their experiences to their children? And, finally, did being a mother of only one child (or a maximum of two children) really help them to have a better career?

6.3.1 Access to education

While we were discussing the education opportunities of young Chinese women, I have pointed out that the nearly universal access for both boys and girls to primary and secondary school can be associated with mandatory and free of charge education, rather than with the introduction of the one-child policy. Nevertheless, it is undeniably true that nowadays Chinese women have more chances for going to school and university than ever before. But as for the mothers of the younger generation, the situation was different. Before 1986 school attendance was not compulsory, and before that China was trying to deal with the disastrous effect the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976 had on education. At that time China was also still predominantly a rural country and many girls could not study as much as they would have liked to. This actually marks an interesting gap, because this group of women was the only one who have experienced so clearly sex discrimination related to access to education. Neither the younger group, nor the older, shared similar experiences with me.

Jiaqing, who is now forty-three years old, was born in a rural area of southwestern China and had seven siblings – two brothers and five sisters. She recalls that in her village many girls did not even get a couple of years of primary education, as they were considered as someone who, after marriage, will be given away to the family of their husband. Jiaqing remembers to this day that her family encouraged her brothers to study, but their attitude towards the girls was quite different. She told me:

> Jiaqing: Hmm, all of my older sisters said… before they only went to primary school and when we got to the junior high, then they say we should not study too long. Studying too long will make it too hard for mom and dad, who will not get any reward [from that – MN]… For example, working in the farm…there will be no help for them… then I got really angry and I just said 'oh…OK, when you later give birth to a girl, you won't let your daughter go to school? Is that possible?' I just asked like that.
>
> Martyna: After you said it, what was their answer?
>
> Jiaqing: There was no answer, everybody was silent.
>
> Martyna: So your parents and elder sisters said that girls should not go to school too much. What about your brothers?
>
> Jiaqing: Brother all [went] to study.
>
> Martyna: So they didn't say anything [like this –MN] to your brothers?
>
> Jiaqing: No. (Jiaqing, p. 3-4)

Interestingly enough, when I asked Jiaqing about the tradition of treating girls unequally to boys, she said that this practices did not exist in her house, which points to the fact that women are often not aware of the existence of gender inequalities, even though they are very obvious and even acknowledged, but not understood as something that is wrong and unfair. A similar thing happened to Li Fang, whose brother was allowed to study on, while she was told by her parents to quit school, even though her brother's marks were lower than hers. When I asked whether she wanted to study more, she said:

> Of course I wish I could [study more-MN], but the condition in our family didn't allow it and my score was not that good… It wouldn't allow me to go to vocational training school. They [parents – MN] just though that for a girl to study that much, when there is no money… Just forget about it. Just like this. (Li Fang, p. 6)

The case of Meng Zhu is quite exceptional. She has only one sister, which for a rural area in itself was also quite exceptional, and, as she mentioned, became the source of a lot of gossip, especially since her family's financial situation was quite good. She recalls that her father was some kind of pioneer in the village – he was the first one to learn to operate the tractor and the first one to go to work outside, bringing presents for his daughters. Interestingly enough, these achievements of Meng Zhu's dad cannot be associated with his education, because he only studied

for a couple of years in elementary school. Her mom's education was also very superficial, as it was the time of the Cultural Revolution and her mom was marked with the 'undesirable' ancestry of a landlord's family and could not continue education despite her very good results at school. As it happened, Meng Zhu's results at school were so good that she became the first person in the village to go to university. But the beginning of her education was clearly marked by the one-child policy. When she reached school age, her parents sent her to school but the school was unwilling to enrol her. This was the time when Meng Zhu found out the importance of the *hukou* she did not have, as she was born without a permit, hence denied official registration and recognition. It was not until her parents paid the fee, and her mom underwent the ligation procedure, that she could start to attend school normally with other children. Meng Zhu's parents did support her throughout the education process, even though they did not really understand what the consequences of sending their daughter to university might be. It is true that she did not have a brother to compete with, and her older sister's results at school were not good enough to let her study in high school. However, Meng Zhu's parents were also not sure about sending their younger daughter to high school, which was a necessary step on the way to university graduation. Her mom and dad were worried about the fees and about the situation in which she did not have a score high enough for her to be accepted by a university. In that situation, they were thinking, she would have wasted three years of studying in high school, which would not prepare her for any job. However, her teacher's opinion happened to be decisive. Mengzhu recalled the visit of her teacher to her house, as she was telling me her story:

> At the time my parents' standpoint was to let me go to vocational secondary school and becoming an office worker and that would be just fine. But at that time I remember my class teacher, she came to visit my parents saying that their child is studying very well, is university 'material' and they should not hold me back. At that time, the point of viewing things in our village did not consider university students looking for a job and so on. It was thought that going to university was a very glorious affair. Because at that time the viewpoint in the countryside was very narrow, they didn't consider that much and didn't understand things like the state's policy… Because at the time we were going to university, there was no more job allocations, and you had to find a job totally by yourself. To be honest, if at that time my parents would have

> known that, they might not have let me go to university, because, after all, for a rural household the costs of studying at university are very big. (Meng Zhu, p. 14)

But, what has to be highlighted is the fact that these women do not have the similar attitude that a girl's education is a waste of time. Among those who have two children, not only is there no 'discrimination' towards girls, but their daughters even get better schooling than their brothers. While many of the participants' children are still too young to make this claim universal, the example of Jiaqiang stands out – her daughter is a university student, while her son graduated 'only' from vocational school. Why then these women did not get the same chances as their children? Was it because many of them were born in rural areas? Or was it because they had brothers? Probably it all mattered to a certain extent, but the most important factor was stressed by Ziyue, who said:

> At that time the opening reform [of Deng Xiaoping – MN] just started… At that time, it was more expensive to study for us. Studying in middle or high school was 500 RMB for a semester, for a year it was approximately 1000 RMB. (Ziyue, p. 3)

Just to portray the scale of the cost it is useful to mention that the personal average annual dispensable income in urban areas was, in 1980 established at 1,109 RMB, and in 1990 at 2,013 RMB (China Average Salaries & Expenditures, 2008). With her simple sentence, Ziyue has solved a 'mystery' and supported my claim that with free and mandatory education – no matter the financial situation, being a rural or urban citizen or having siblings – there is much less gender inequality when we talk about access to schools. The elderly cohort, which grew up in the 'real' socialist period had that privilege and so does the generation who started school after 1986.

6.3.2 Employment versus motherhood

It has been said over and over again that with the introduction of the one-child policy, women, relieved from the burden of multiple childbirth and childrearing, were allowed to get better education and better jobs. Getting school diplomas did certainly open new possibilities for young women, widening their choices of future employment from the previously limited choices of farm or factory work. However,

looking at the data I managed to collect, it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to show how the one-child policy improved these women's competitiveness in the job market. To be honest, none of my respondents could be considered a successful business woman, even though among them were big companies' accountants, engineers and teachers. It seems that for many of them, despite their education and position, becoming a mother was the end of the aspiration of any career.

Si Yun and Meng Zhu, both university graduates and engineers, quit their jobs because they found it impossible to work and fulfil their responsibility as mothers, even though they have only one child. Meng Zhu returned to her work after maternity leave, sending her newly born daughter to her hometown for her grandparents to care for. She was working as an engineer and later as a custom declaration clerk, hoping that this lower paid job would allow her to have shorter working hours. But even with the new position, being a working mom in the city without any family around to help was almost impossible for her. As she said, the requirement to work overtime goes in contradiction to kindergarten's opening hours, and adjusting to the kindergarten's schedule had a negative influence on her work performance and salary, because, clearly, she could not work for as long as other workers. She said she did not even have time to consider sending her daughter for some extracurricular activities. She told me:

> Because… To tell the truth, at the time my child was in kindergarten, it wasn't like in other families, who allow their kids to go for many cram classes and bring them to play and so on… it seems that we didn't have time to do it… Every day [I] was just considering whether I can leave the office earlier today to go pick up my kid, as the timesheet card was so rigid. I could only consider that, there was no way [for considering – MN] anything else. Because of the kindergarten… Ordinary people like us finish work at 6, arriving home around 7. But there is no kindergarten that you can trust to take care of the kids until that time. This is a very real problem, so this is the reason why there are many full time mothers now. (Meng Zhu, p.17)

In the end, Meng Zhu quit her job and tried, after the recommendation of her husband, to engage in some out-work, but as she was unsuccessful, she has now focused totally on her role as a mother and housewife. Originally she was planning to go back to work next year when her daughter is big enough to go back home from

school on her own, but, as she is trying to have another baby, that will be probably impossible. Now, planning to become mother for a second time, it might be difficult for her to go back to full-time employment, even though she would like to. She told me:

> Even if [it won't help] to share the burden of supporting the household's, it's also about realizing self-worth. Especially, when you go to work, you can be in touch with many people, which helps your inner social circle. For these two years when I stayed home it really felt like I have no friends, seemed like there really were few opportunities to speak. And then, getting to the real problem, the gap between me and my husband becomes bigger and bigger. (Meng Zhu, p.23)

In the cases of Meng Zhu and Si Yun one could argue that they quit their jobs because that was their choice and because their husbands' salary was good enough to support a family of three or four people. What is disturbing here is that they both admitted that their salary did not make a huge difference to the household budget, so quitting their jobs did not have a significant impact on their living standard. Si Yun herself explained:

> I've already faced it [the choice between work and motherhood], I've already chosen. Making money… it can never finish. Life is nothing more than three meals a day… whether you eat simple food or exotic delicacies, this is what the choice is about. If you choose simple food, your level of consumption is relatively low, you won't have to spend a lot a lot of money and in that case you won't have to work like if your life depends on it. That you don't have a lot of income is true, but you have time to accompany the child when it slowly, slowly grows up. You have to sacrifice something to gain something. In my life I only have this child, so I want to use all my effort to grow together with him. (Si Yun, p.7)

But for Li Fang, who used to work as a migrant worker without a contract and whose husband is also does not have a full time job with all the benefits this entails, moonlighting from time to time is not a choice, and the lack of a second income is definitely more noticeable. Her family does not have urban *hukou*, so they have to pay high rent for their apartment, very high fees for their children's school and full price for any medical services. But when I asked her whether she was or is thinking about getting a full time job, she told me she can't:

> Because we [women –MN] need to balance the time we have with family… It's not that good to have a full-time job, because it's not easy to ask for a leave of absence. (Li Fang, p.11)

6.3.3 You can never have it all?

I have already pointed out while discussing the influence of the one-child policy on the youngest generation of Chinese women that access to education was enabled just as much by the one-child policy, as it was by making basic education free and mandatory. Women of the middle-aged and married group were disadvantaged (especially those in their 40s), but it should be acknowledged here that one of the limitations of my research might play a role here. As I have stated, my research focuses on urban women – that is women who have been living for a significant amount of time in urban areas. Many of the participants of this age cohort grew up in the countryside and that factor could have influenced the fact that some of them had less chances to go to school than their brothers did. However, this argument loses strength when we take into consideration the rural origins of the participants of this cohort, as well as the remaining two, who did not suffer such discrimination and even got higher education then their brothers did– even if they were from very poor and uneducated families. This is why I still feel entitled to my claim, which can also be supported by the fact that the children of these women, whose chances were limited because of gender inequality in schooling, do not have a similar experience.

Whether education, even at university level, led to the empowerment of Chinese women is doubtful. Or a rather more correct way to describe it would be to say that that empowerment was very limited and temporary. Women did, in fact, obtain access to the job market and were allowed more options than working on the factory floor or in the farm. However, judging by the stories told by my respondents, even with a university diploma women were still stuck with low paid jobs. What is more, after becoming mothers, many of them had to face a choice between work and motherhood, as it was impossible to do both if you did not have grandparents on hand to help with caring for the baby while maintaining a full time job. What is most striking, however, is that the decision to quit the job, for those professionally educated women who were 'lucky' to marry men with good jobs and salaries, was

not a difficult one from a financial point of view. How low must their salaries have been, compared to those of their husbands (and it has to be stressed that I am not talking about very affluent families), if quitting their job did not reflect much on the living standard of the whole family?

6.4 Family and intimate relationships

With the one-child policy's supposed relief from multiple childbirth and all of the related responsibilities, access to education and the job market, it seems that the world would be completely open for Chinese women. They should have had more quality time with their husbands and children. However, it seems that together with the introduction of the one-child policy we have witnessed the shift to the market economy, urbanization and the need for mobility, which have resulted in the privatization of the family, making it anti-social and isolating women from the outside world, just as I have shown in the previous part of this chapter with the stories of women who quit their jobs in order to be mothers. Whether they found 'compensation' for that in their inner world is the matter I will focus in the following part.

6.4.1 Marriage (un)changed

After talking with young women, whose stories were told in the previous chapter, I did not 'expect' that we could talk, in the case of China, about pure relationships (Giddens, 1992) not based on the idea of economic dependency, but I was a bit surprised that many of the women I spoke with in the middle-aged group did not pay a lot of attention to whom they would marry. They said that they did not think too much about it, and usually the recommendation of friends or family and their acceptance was more than enough. Marriage, for them, remained the 'natural' course of events and the only option. What is more, they got married much earlier than the women I will talk about in the next chapter.

Pei Shan, who got married at the age of 22, explained that there was not much deliberation about whom to marry, especially in the countryside. When I asked about her choosing her husband she said:

> [Why did I-MN] get married with that person? At that time, in the countryside, there was not much consideration of it. As we were working all day, we didn't think that much, did we? We were dating for two years… It was him who raised the issue of marriage (…) It was not until after getting married that I thought that my husband is not bad. He is a hardworking person, very capable, just that he didn't have a lot of culture, as he studied very little. (Pei Shan, p.9)

It was not only Pei Shan who had a problem of answering the questions about why she married and which of her husband's qualities convinced her to tie the proverbial knot. Lan Meng, after some consideration said that the thing she paid attention to most about was the age of her future partner. She chose to marry a man she had known for only half a year. He was five years older than she was and she was counting on his maturity. As her childhood was very disturbed because of the one-child policy and she has always had a feeling of being a neglected child, she thought that she would finally have somebody she can rely on and who will spoil her a bit. She even went against her parents will, as they did not approve of her choice by 'using the strategy' of getting pregnant before the marriage. She escaped from the paternal family, hoping that her fate would change. But the reality was not as bright as Lan Meng was hoping for. She barely has any relationship with her husband, who she finds to be moody, unwilling to help and childish, as he constantly plays computer games. Just as when she was a child, she finds herself in a situation in which she has nobody to talk to. She confided in me:

> It seems that in this world I cannot find one person [who] is fond of [me]. Even now, I think there is no one to whom I can, in a natural and relaxed way, tell what is inside my heart. Now, if I have any opinion, I will post it on QQ or WeChat [messaging apps-MN], but after publishing it they [people who she had in the contact list –MN] all say I shouldn't express my true feelings and that it can affect me as I am a teacher (…) Also when I am in a bad mood and tell my husband what is wrong with me, he doesn't listen. He thinks I am this kind of person who loves to complain, bringing negative energy to other people, not capable of bringing positive energy. (Lan Meng. P.18)

The only person who seemed to be in a satisfactory relationship with her husband was Si Yun. Many of the aspects of her relationship were quite untypical. She was not afraid to make a first move towards the guy she liked and told him openly that she liked him. She was the one who decided about having only one child, even though her husband would like to have a second one. Quite unusually, and in the scope of my research – uniquely – was that her husband was the one who took care of the contraception in order to not risk the health of Si Yun with the ligation procedure or IUD implementation. Si Yun told me that the decisions they make are always discussed between the two of them and that they like and enjoy the time they spend together.

The story of Xinmei, who was the only one of women I spoke to who didn't want to get married, is also interesting. When she started to work, the majority of the people in her office were already married and they were saying how much they envied her freedom. Listening to the complaints of how difficult it is to work and take care of the family, Xinmei thought that she might just go back one day to her hometown to take care of her parents – in the end, as she says, this is family as well. She did not want to take all of that responsibility of having a family on her shoulders, so she did not plan to get married. She said:

> So I didn't want to settle down so quickly. I was just constantly delaying it, delaying it so much that later I could not delay it more, because my parents kept on rushing me… Oh, having heard that I was thinking that if I don't get married, my parents will never feel relieved. Whatever! Somebody introduced me to someone, it was appropriate, so I just settled down. Just like that, ha-ha." (Xinmei, p.13)

But, as in the end not getting married would be deemed inappropriate, she submitted to the demand of her parents and, as she told me, slowly she was trying to get used to her husband, even though their characters, as she knew from the very beginning, were not really well matched. And later, when their daughter was born, she found it even more difficult, because taking care of the child and the house was too much for her to take. Even though it was 'just' one child.

6.4.2 Relationship with children

Having less children, but more tools and money than their mothers could have ever dreamt of, we could assume that the quality of the relationship of the new generation of mothers of the one-child policy with their perfect child(ren) would have been one of the highest quality. Women, still considered primary carers, spend as much time as they can and invest in their children as much as they can. Some of them have even given up full time paid employment in order to be there for their offspring – but, as I have mentioned before, sometimes they just did not have another choice. However, from what they told me, it does not seem that the relationship between them and their children is deeper or stronger.

For example, Jiaqing does not know much about her daughter's life. She said it was her daughter who wanted to study at university – she made that decision herself and, according to Jiaqing, if she wants to quit it is also up to her and she, as her mom, will not interfere. One could consider Jiaqing to be giving her daughter a lot of independence. When I asked her whether she would like her daughter to marry, she also said it is not up to her. This was quite unusual, as traditionally, marriage in China is the most important passage of life. And then Jiaqing said:

> [My] daughter is studying so much now, and maybe she is thinking [it] over herself: what kind of job to find, when to find it… But she hasn't spoken about anything with us. But she told us about her younger brother… [that we] have to make him learn to have an independent life by himself, not letting him depend on us and so on.(Jiaqing, p.13)

The communication between her and her son (as she mentioned that there is basically none between her children and her husband) is not much better. Her son graduated from vocational school over six months ago, but he is not searching for a job. He still depends on his parents' money, claiming that he wants to develop himself. When I asked whether Jiaqing talked with him about it, she said that she told him to get a job that he would like to do, not just any job for the sake of being employed. When I asked what he said, she told me:

> He also didn't answer, nor did he react. (Jiaqing, p.12)

Even though Li Fang thinks that her relationships with her 12-year-old son and 17-year-old daughter are good, when I asked for some details I found out that the enthusiasm was a bit exaggerated. First she told me that there is almost no contact between her husband and her children and that her children depend on her more. She said:

> Li Fang: Whatever the situation or problem is, [they] immediately come to me. I'm taking care of many things, [but] their father cares a little or says that you have to solve this little issue yourself. He is rather boorish.
>
> Martyna: What kind of problems do the kids come to you with? Can you give me an example?
>
> Li Fang: In which difficult situations… Let me think a moment… For example, when they don't have some things and there is a need to go and buy it. When they feel sick, when they don't understand, they'll also come to me. (Li Fang, p.23)

Li Fang later told me that her children will also come to her with more personal problems, but the only example she could come up with was when her son spotted his friends leafing through some, as she called it, 'anatomy book', and he didn't understand what it was. She told him that it is normal for growing boys to be interested in such things and to go to look at this book himself.

Although what Li Fang described is not a bad relationship per se, the dynamic of it becomes clear when I asked whether her children help her with housework. She said that they rather do not, and even if she asks them to wash dishes or go out to buy some things, they will just not respond or tell her that they are tired. And when I asked her what she is doing is these kind of situations, she said:

> [I'll] just let them rest, and do it myself. (Li Fang, p.25)

Li Fang's children, as well as her husband, think about housework as her responsibility and something that she always ought to do. This kind of attitude does not seem to mark a relationship of good quality, though, just as I pointed out in the chapter on the young and single women – if the burdens are not shared, there is little leeway to improve any kind of relationship, no matter how many people (or, in the discussed case – children) are involved.

6.4.3 Better off… but lonelier

After listening to these stories it becomes quite clear that the one-child policy and the assumption that women, relieved from the burden of caring for big families, hence having more time and being more independent, would have better relationships with their closest family – their husbands and children – is far from being reality, even though they were all financially in better situation than their parents were. These women married young and, usually, not because they were really in love, but because not-marrying would be something unthinkable – there simply was no other option. They had children almost right away and are now facing a situation not only of the work load that is often beyond the capacity of one person, but what is even more important, it seems that they are facing this situation alone and have nobody to talk to. Their husbands are working and, it seems, do not want to be bothered by such 'trivial' issues and the children turn to them when they need money or something to be done. Their situation seems to be like a vicious circle. Giving up their jobs and becoming totally dependent on their husbands and trapped in the family, these women have dedicated their lives to their closest relatives. But exactly by doing that, they have consolidated their position as "ONLY" carers in the household power structure, a task that is not respected or valued not only by their husbands but also by their children.

6.5 Childbearing and body politics

With the one-child policy in force when the women in this group were becoming mothers for the first time, it was essential to explore how many children, giving that there would be no restrictions, would they want to have and whether the claims of the end of the centuries long preferences for a son has ended, as many studies claim, without however exploring what this switch might actually mean. This issue became even more interesting as in the middle of my field work the Chinese government issued a one-child policy relaxation, which, as for now, allows all couples to have two children, without any other requirements.

6.5.1 The desirable number and sex of children

The majority of my respondents – with the exception of Si Yun, for whom pregnancy and childbirth were so painful that she explicitly refuses to have a second child – thought that having two children (and no more!), one boy and one girl, is the best option.

Meng Zhu always wanted to have two children, but she was not willing to pay the 40.000 RMB (over 6.000 USD) penalty or give birth in secret. Now, as the policy is relaxed, she can finally make her only daughter less lonely. And, according to her, that loneliness is even bigger because of her child's sex, because parents in China are more protective of girls and do not allow them to go out to play. She said:

> Because she is a girl, […] she can never find a playmate in the neighbourhood. There are many boys playing together in the neighbourhood, but she does not have a playmate because girls are [supposed to – MN] play with girls… [there are] no girls to play with, so she appears to be very lonely." (Meng Zhu, p. 24)

However, while preparing for her second pregnancy, Meng Zhu is really worried about the age difference between the children and, even more, about her age. She is only 35 years old, but is worried about the way she will be perceived by others after having a second baby. While, for example in Hong Kong and Europe the average age of first pregnancy is around 30 years old (World Factbook — Central Intelligence Agency, 2013), Meng Zhu said:

> What I am afraid of the most is that at the time the [second – MN] kid will go to the kindergarten, will I be, after all, a mother or a grandmother? (Meng Zhu, p. 25)

But while Meng Zhu does not care about the sex of the baby (neither the first one, nor the second), Lan Meng, who already has a 4-year-old son, has always dreamt of having a girl. She said:

> Having a girl…[she] will [be] more thoughtful. Even if at this time she doesn't understand things… Just like me before, when my mom and dad were scolding me, in my heart I was thinking that later I will become a daughter mixed with criminal underworld, who won't give them any money I make. But after that, since I've engaged in pre-school education, I obey my parents very naturally. Even though in my heart I remember that they were not good, but

> it seems that I just can't hate them. What's more, when a daughter takes on a role of the mother, she can learn about all the difficulties from her own experience, wiping away all the hatred, because mothers really are great. (Lan Meng, p. 39-40)

Lan Meng's dream of having a daughter is so strong, that she is too afraid to try to have another baby now, as the policy was relaxed. She said:

> I'd like too, but I am scared… Scared that I'll give birth to a boy again. But I also feel… My workmate's first child was a girl, and then she got pregnant again and was hoping for a boy. She went to find out… She learnt it was a girl, and she just aborted her… in forth month… I think it is very cruel. (Lan Meng, p. 40)

Jiaqiang, mother of two – and she also considers it the perfect 'amount' of offspring, despite the fact that she grew up with seven siblings - also thinks that having a girl is better, but she explains it in a slightly different 'economic' way:

> Because daughters understand parent's hardship better… then [they know] what to spend money on and what the money shouldn't be spend on. On the whole, they [daughters] understand it all. (Jiaqing, p.10)

Although Beilei though that having a son is better, as according to her, a son is a guarantee of having somebody to rely on in old age, Pei Shan's case was the most extreme. She wanted the son so much that she even considered abortion during her first pregnancy as she knew it was a girl. She said:

> I said it very straightforward that I don't want it, I said I don't want that girl. But my husband said that no matter what it is [boy or a girl], he wants it. That's what he said. (Pei Shan, p. 20-1)

Her situation got even more complicated, because she actually got pregnant for the second time, but as her pregnancy coincided with the bankruptcy of the business of her and her husband, she was told by him to abort it:

> Martyna: Did you discuss with your husband the issue of whether to have the second child? You wanted it, but your husband said…
>
> Pei Shan: Right, after I got pregnant again… it was a boy… My husband…he also said he doesn't want [a second baby – MN], so we just aborted [it], didn't have it. (Pei Shan, p.16)

However, with hindsight, Pei Shan now believes that it is easier to raise a girl, because she does not need to worry about buying an apartment in the city to make it possible for her to get married.

6.5.2 Body under control

The topic of the ways in which the body of women, subjugated to the restrictions of the one-child policy, and controlled by the state, women's families and by themselves is strictly connected to discussions related to the desirable number of children and the preference of daughters or sons. While the stories told above about family demands, abortions performed at the request of the family or planned after the discovery of the unwanted sex of the baby were already shocking, the story of Jiaqing went even further. We started by discussing the issues of birth control and its accessibility in the countryside. Jiaqiang, who grew up in the mountainous countryside of southwestern China and who belongs to one of the minorities, told me that before the one-child policy there was absolutely no knowledge about and no access to any birth control. This is why she and her peers grew up in families where having seven or eight children was a norm. She has highlighted that no women wanted to have so many children, but they were simply not able to control it. This is why, according to her, the one-child policy benefited the women in her village, raising also the standard of living for the whole family. When I asked whether the same effect could have been obtained without the policy, but just by introducing methods of birth control to the people, she said:

> It could, if only it wasn't painful… Not giving birth to children - that would be enough. (Jiaqing, p.41)

Jiaqing talked a lot about the pain, as after giving birth to the second child she underwent the ligation procedure. It was mandatory for one person of the couple to do it after the 'quota' for children was used. As her story goes, I found out that, at least in rural areas, it was always almost women who needed to have the operation, which is much faster, less painful and risky when performed on men. Jiaqing told me this happens because man, after the procedure, cannot work hard in the farms. Although evidence tells us this is absolutely not the case, she did not question it, which is a clear cut example of how illogical and irrational anti-women discourse can be socially constructed and widely believed. However, when recalling her traumatic experience from the hospital when she underwent the procedure, after which she had to stay in the hospital for a week (!), she became utterly outraged when she told

me that there was a case of a couple, in which the wife was 25 and the husband 63 years old and the operation was still performed on that young women. She was extremely angry, saying that women should be allowed to use the IUD, so in case of losing their only son (and it should be highlighted that she meant sons only), the families will still have another chance to have another one. But Jiaqing's story becomes even more interesting when I asked her about the issue of selective abortions. In her village having a son is a must, as people live off farm work, and do not have advanced tools and technology, therefore for certain task physical strength is necessary. But, as Jiaqing tells me, women did not want to undergo abortions, because they considered it very harmful for the body. However, they found another way to ensure the desired option of having a boy and a girl. Two boys were also not wanted (although it was better than two girls), as the land is scarce and having to divide it between two people would have meant that none of them can actually make a living. What happened in the area where Jiaqing was living can be shortly described as 'baby exchange'. A couple who had two girls would find a family which has one boy already (hence wants a girl) and give the daughter away to get another chance of having a boy. Jiaqing says it was very common practice in her area when she was young. But there was also another way of getting a daughter. Jiaqing told me that this other way was:

> Just adopting Han [dominant ethnic group in China-MN] babies to bring up. For several generations we were adopting and bringing up Han children. We have a very big heart. Just… For example, we are Zhuang [ethnicity], you are Han, and then you, Han, give birth to a baby, [but] you have too many girls, you don't want it, so you will leave her on the road and leave money, some food together with her, then put an open umbrella there… We will see it as very pitiful, and we will take care of her. Then, after taking her in, they [biological parents-MN] will know who took her, and then when she grows up they will come to search for her, but their kid cannot stand them. (Jiaqing, p. 33)

Both I and my research assistant had not heard about such a practice before, so we asked Jiaqing to clarify. She told us that for mothers to give up their daughters was always a traumatic experience, especially if they stayed in the same village. We have also discovered that the big heart of the Zhuang people has its limits and, unfortunately, many little girls were left on the side of the road to die.

While the story of Jiaqing is quite extreme, it was not the only one which showed how, on the one hand, the one-child policy has clearly clashed with traditional Chinese culture and, on the other, how it can sometimes be reinforced by the forces of the market economy – just as in the case of Pei Shan, who aborted her desired boy after her husband's 'recommendation', because financially they would not be able to care for two children. Also Li Fang, whose first child was a girl, experienced a feeling of control over her body, because of her husband's family desire to have a grandson. She said:

> Li Fang: Family was saying that the second [child] must be a boy… Thank heavens, for my sake, [that] I happened to have a boy.
>
> Martyna: But you yourself, when you were pregnant for the second time, did you think a lot about wanting to have a son or a daughter?
>
> Li Fang: I was thinking a lot about it during the second pregnancy.
>
> Martyna: Why?
>
> Li Fang: Because if I had a daughter again, family will pressure me to have more children to get a boy. (Li Fang, p. 21-2)

But there were also different kinds of pressure, less violent than forced abortions or abandonment of children of the undesired sex, which Si Yun pointed out, while expressing her rage about the nearly universal use of IUD, which she thinks is very harmful for women's bodies. She said:

> Why would I use it, it's too inhumane! It's causing too much suffering for women. My mom talked with me once… at that time she was having an IUD. One time the IUD fell out or something like this… anyway she wanted to fix it… She said it was like walking through hell, she told me. She told me that when she tried to push it back…It inflated…At that time she said she had no idea how to take it out…Said that it hurt like dying. What is more the [IUD] ring always moves together with flesh, when taken out, it hurts a lot a lot. In addition, let's say you put the IUD for contraceptive reasons, but for the sex life, when the skin is touching a skin, the diseases are very easy to spread. Right? I also spoke with my husband, as he is very open minded in this aspect… he is not a male chauvinist, he empathizes a lot with his wife and he can stand using a condom. But I think there are very few man who can stand a situation like this. (Si Yun, p. 14)

6.5.3 One or two, it doesn't really matter

One of the justifications for introducing the one-child policy was connected to the issue of women and health. It cannot be argued that multiple childbearing, especially when pregnancies happen one after another, is destructive to women's bodies, just as pointed out by Jiaqing, where in the countryside women were giving birth to eight children in a row. With the one-child policy, even when we consider the exceptions from it and its violation, women were having much fewer children than before. But the problem, already discussed multiple times, was that in connection with Chinese culture, the one-child policy put a lot of pressure on women as well as subjugated their bodies to the control of many parties. With limited births, the not extinguishing desire for a son and grandson become even stronger. In order not 'to fail', many women decided to have an abortion or give away their child of the 'undesirable' sex to other people, in order to give themselves another chance to give birth one more time. What is more, when we hear today about the preferences for baby girls in the cities, especially since having a son is connected with the huge expense of providing him with an apartment, this does not really change the pressure and expectations that are put on future mothers – a pressure sometimes they put on themselves. It is also worth mentioning that the two-child policy does not change that situation much. There is a strong preference to have both a girl and a boy, and, as my respondents said, even if the pressure during the first pregnancy is smaller, it grows with the second one. For as long as there is any imposed number of children, especially when it is done in a top-down manner, and without any collateral adjustments that would allow for adaptation to the changing reality – such as the lack of a pension system while restricting the number of children one can have – the pressure on women will not cease to be a shadow that hangs over them.

6.6 Caring

The issue of women and care giving is so omnipresent that it is not easy to separate the exclusive section on caring duties. Caring, called the labour of love, penetrates through to the discussion of employment and the problems of reconciling

it with being a mother, education and limited access to it when it is expected that girls help with the income of the family and so on. But there is still some aspects of caring that were not touched upon in the previous stories. In the following part I will explore whether the one-child policy has reduced the burden of caring for women. As families are smaller, does it make it easier to handle housework, even though its standard is higher and higher and the giant conflict between care and work still exists? Another issue is how do the women of the 'sandwich generation' perceive the role of caring for their parents – and in the future for themselves – since the state is offering much less support in comparison to the socialist era and hence does not protect one's 'golden years'?

6.6.1 The myth of reduced housework

With the one-child policy in force, the future of Chinese women was supposed to be much brighter. They were (supposedly) relieved from caring for many children and this new form of nuclear family, together with technological advances and access to domestic appliances, was supposed to make housework much easier and less demanding. However, this myth can be easily dispelled when we take into consideration the fact that the standards of both housekeeping and childcare have rocketed (Bose et al., 1984), while women remained, in the majority of cases, the only ones responsible for them - of course in addition to their day-time employment.

It becomes clear with the example of Lan Meng, who is still very young, has a stable, eight-hour job and 'only' one child to care for. But when she started to talk about her day, it is apparent that she basically does not have not a single moment for herself. And she is just one of many women I interviewed who face similar issues. Lan Meng leaves her son at kindergarten at 7.15 in the morning with the guard at the gate, as she starts her work in the kindergarten very early. She picks him up in the evening, goes to the market to buy some food, goes back home, makes dinner, cleans, helps her son to take a shower, puts him to bed and read stories for him. When I asked about her husband's involvement, she told me that if she asks him directly he will help a bit, but:

> he will be moody, kicking things on his way [to do it-MN], just as if he wanted to ask why he has to do it. If this is something I have to do every day, why do I make him do it? He is just very chauvinistic, thinking that all of this are women's affairs… For example, helping a child to take a shower, preparing food, all of these are my responsibilities. Our Chinese men are just like this. (Lan Meng, p. 21)

What is even more extreme is the case of Ziyue, whose husband does not do any housework and if she asks him to, her mother-in-law immediately interferes and does the work herself. As her mother-in-law was getting angry and annoyed when Ziyue asked her husband to hang the laundry, the question on which I would ponder in the following part of the chapter was – how on earth can these parents think that their son will actually take care of them in their old age, as Chinese tradition mandates?

A big contrast to the experience of Ziyue is the example of Pei Shan. Her life was not easy, as she went through a financial crisis when the business she established with her husband went bankrupt and she had to do a lot of low paid cleaning jobs in order to make ends meet. But when she talks about housework, it shows clearly how much the equal division of these duties can help to relieve the burden from women's shoulders. When I asked whether her husband helps with housework, Pei Shan said:

> Yes, yes, yes, my husband is very hardworking! He even washes clothes, [he] is doing everything in the house. Because we have very little farm work to do, he is doing it [housework- MN]. In general, it was quite relaxed after we got married… just raising a child, and all the housework he would do. My husband is very hardworking. (Pei Shan, p.17)

What Pei Shan said is crucial to understand that limiting the number of children – especially in the new reality when the standards of care and housework are so high – is not the way out to unburden women and create gender equality. What helps, though, is a change to the gendered division of labour. It is a pity, however, that Pei Shan's example and experience is quite unique.

6.6.2 Caring for elderly parents

While talking about the one-child policy, one of the negative effects that is pointed out is the fact that the generation of singletons (and, as a matter of fact, singleton's daughters) will have to care for at least their parents, whilst having jobs,

children, husbands and households to look after. The majority of the respondents in this group did have siblings, so the issue of having to help their parents was not considered by many of them, especially those who have a brother, as a big problem, at least for now. None of my interviewees' parents were in very bad health at the time of our conversation. Some of the parents had already passed away, some were living together with my respondents' brothers (and their wives), but the majority of them were still in good health and often still doing some farm work or taking care of their grandchildren full time.

The person who was most preoccupied by the task of taking care of her parents was Meng Zhu. She has a very good relationship with both of her parents and has only one older sister. She is worrying about her parents' future, even though, for now, they are still quite healthy. Meng Zhu, who was the first in her village to go to university and become a professional engineer, now regrets her decision to pursue higher education. One of the reasons for this is the fact that had she gone to the vocational school, she would be living and working closer to her parents. She worries about what will happen to them, as they still live in Central China, while she and her husband are settled in Guangdong. As she considers trying to go back to paid work after caring for her daughter for over two years, she knows that in a case of her parents becoming ill, she will be up the proverbial creek without a paddle. And so she said:

> If at that time I had gone to the vocational school, [I would have been able to-MN] find a job in the city or our small town, find a local man to marry, and I would be close to my mom and dad. If my parents called me, I could come over very quickly, I could take care of any issue. Maybe because of the long time I spent there I got used to life in the countryside, or perhaps I just haven't got used to the big city… but it doesn't matter. I've said it before - I am a kind of home loving person and I don't want to drift away. But now [since] I've graduated from the university, going back to the village to stay there and farm also seems to be unrealistic, so I am very perplexed. (Meng Zhu, p. 16)

What was very interesting was the fact that Meng Zhu considers her attitude towards helping her parents to be very strongly tied to the fact that in her family, and generally speaking in her village, there was no attitude of discrimination towards girls and all children were treated well. But as she said, in the area she grew up, the

one-child policy was not that strictly enforced and the majority of families had at least two children. But in her husband's village, where forced abortions and the infanticide of girls were common practice, the attitude towards looking after elderly parents is quite different. She told me that in her village family members usually meet together to work out the plan of caring duties and responsibilities, but in her husband's village elder people are very often being totally neglected by their children and, being out of options, tend to commit suicide.

But it also seems that taking care of elderly parents is, to a certain extent, a comfort and 'luxury' that not everybody can afford. Pei Shan, when I asked about her mom, burst into tears and could not calm down for a couple of minutes. She knows how difficult her mom's life has been, working in the farm and taking care of the family. However, is seems that there is not much she can do about it. After the failure of the family business, Pei Shan and her husband migrated to Gunagdong. As she has been doing a lot of part-time cleaning jobs, and just recently got a stable job as a hospital cleaning lady, and her husband is also a part time guard, they do not have a lot of money to spare, especially since they send their only daughter to university, hoping it will give her the chance of a better future. Going back to her hometown would mean no retirement fund and possibly no more education for Pei Shan's daughter. What, then, will happen with her elderly mother is still an unanswered question.

But, there is another aspect of caring for elderly parents that has to be highlighted. Traditionally, people in China wanted to have sons, so there will be somebody who will take care of them in their old age. But the absurdity of that argument was uncovered by Beilei, who actually insisted that this desire is true. She said:

> As for a daughter, she will also have a husband, and the husband also has father and mother, doesn't he? So that daughter simply cannot serve that purpose, as she still has to, on one hand, rely on the husband and also care for her mother and father in law. So that's why the majority attach more importance to sons, and just a few to daughters. (Beilei, p. 15)

Ziyue added:

> I had a classmate. In her house there were also 4 girls and later their brother was born. Her father was always saying that sons are

> better than daughters… and his daughter answered him once: 'Look, everything that is in this house was bought by your daughters!' Just that the house was built by the father, but all the appliances, all the family wealth, including father's and mother's birthday every year, everything they needed money for, was all bought and provided by daughters. But the father still thought that a son is better. But his son's marriage, his son's business, his son's driver's license, even the birth of the child – the father gave money to his son for all of that. When his daughter said this, he [the father- MN] then said that 'all those things are dead, but the son is alive and when I'll die there will be a person to continue my line and help to settle everything' (Ziyue, p. 10)

Well, it seems for me that as the daughters will have to care for their parents-in-law, sons will be excluded from the equation. The meaning of the phrase that sons will take care of you, seems to basically mean that your daughters-in-law will.

6.6.3 Caring for oneself

While we were discussing about caring for the house, children, husbands and elderly parents, I realized that my respondents almost never talked about caring for themselves. This was the reason for me to ask about their worries about the future – not the future of their children, husbands or parents, but their own. And it seems that the majority of those women are hoping that everything will somehow work out. What they count on when it comes to their old age is social insurance (if they are lucky enough to have full time jobs) or the help of their children.

When I spoke about this situation with Li Fang, she was not very eager to discuss it. And I understood why – as both she and her husband work or had worked and have been always working as migrant workers, they are not entailed to any form of welfare in the city. They pay for their children's education, apartment and doctor's appointments. When their age or health will not allow them to continue to work, they will face the situation of having to survive with virtually no income. And when I asked about it, she told me:

> What can be done? Later I'll be like my mom and dad, getting several dozen RMB a month [currently the retirement fund from the government for people with rural hukou is established at 60 RMB (around 9 USD) per month per person- MN]. Because we have no other way, only finding regular job, but also with a regular job

> you have to pay [for the social insurance – MN] for fifteen years. What is more in many jobs [the company – MN] doesn't get it [social insurance – MN] for you, only the better ones offer it to you. (Li Fang, p.17)

While many of the women were convinced that their children will care for them, Xinmei was the only one who suggested that socialized form of caring for elderly is not only necessary, but unavoidable. She said:

> I basically think that we [her and her husband –MN] will be able to take good care of ourselves. And, on top of that, I also hope for a social system of providing care for elderly. There must be [socialized care –MN] in the future… as life standard is getting better and better… so there should be more and more opportunities and the work done regarding care of the elderly will improve. It is for sure that I'll get this social guarantee, right? So I don't think much about it, about what will happen when I am old… (Xinmei, p.23)

6.6.4 The golden age of the labour of love

Having less children, washing machines, refrigerators - it all was supposed to make housework duties easy. However, the simultaneous need of the market to sell more and more of such appliances and the belief that the way to success and prosperity for a child is only possible via education, make the standards of being a mother and a housewife much higher. And these new standards were necessary to keep women at home, because, as the new market oriented state started to cut welfare for care services, somebody had to take over the 'labour of love'. And, in the new neo-liberal reality of China, the natural providers and substitutes for socialized care were women.

These changes have 'nullified' all the possible benefits of the family planning policy for women. Despite increased and improved education and, at least in theory, a chance to compete in the job market, the mothers of the Chinese singletons have become, primarily, carers. Women are now expected to provide free of charge care for the house, for children and the elderly, be it as daughters or daughters-in-law, and while doing so they are deprived of the possibility of caring for themselves.

6.7 Conclusion

The experimental ’sandwich’ generation is how we could call the women who are now in their thirties and forties. They were the first ones to experience the one-child policy both as children, as well as grownups and parents. As has been shown in the stories told above, this policy has shaped every aspect of their lives. As far as the experiences of the interviewed women go, the claims of the one-child policy as being beneficial for women are not easy to prove. Whether we are talking about the state's propaganda to justify the implementation of the policy which interfered so drastically with the lives of millions of people, or the analysis of the policy as a tool of empowerment for Chinese women, we have to realize that those attempts are done in, what we can call, the spirit of the past. The Chinese government glorified the benefits of the one-child policy, talking about it as if it was happening not in the newly emerged reality of market economy but in times when caring responsibilities were supposed to be socialized and when women's participation in the workforce was nearly universal. It is, however, not the case. The new demands of the market and neo-liberal ideology pushed women back home to care for their, often only, children. In the case of the government it is understandable, although not justified, that the discourse around the policy was conducted in the spirit of socialist reality - after all, despite all the visible indications, the Chinese political elite maintain that China is still a socialist country. However, the matter is more complicated when we talk about 'independent' analysis of the policy, and especially its influence on women and gender equality in China. The stories of women who have agreed to share their experience with me show that, in the case of gender equality, the family planning policy did not change much. And the main reason for this is a fact that was often overlooked, that the one-child (and, as a matter of fact, any) policy, does not operate in a static void - the changeable one-child policy was (and is) operating in a changeable context, which, as I have pointed out before, just like the top down implementation system of the state, is influenced by the 'forces' of the market economy and culture. All of these forces work together, mutually reinforcing each other or neutralizing one another.

This is exactly why any 'static' attempts to analyse the effect of the one-child policy cannot reflect fully on, in the case of my research, women's situation and their life experiences. What influenced the family together with the one-child policy was also all of the ‘collateral’ consequences of the introduction of the market economy, which, together with Chinese culture, did not work in favour of women, as the traditional family ideology and gender division of labour did not change much. As has been highlighted before, reducing the number of children alone is ineffective in reducing gender inequalities. The family became more privatized than ever before, caring responsibilities were pushed back from commune to the family, which basically means to women, who, despite their new access to education (although limited for this group due to its high cost) often have to give up their 'professional' lives in order to cope with the caring duties at home. What makes this even more difficult is the fact that new privatized families and the women who are taking care of them start to be subjugated to the 'external' evaluation of being a good mother and housewife.

The stories of my interviewees also make it clear that the new policy of the two-babies-per-each-couple, advertised as the end of the one-child policy, will not change a thing. No matter the number of children, caring duties and their increasing standard will remain the responsibility of women. What is more, control over fertility creates a very complex situation for these women and influences their attitude and choices. Some women prefer to ‘stick’ with one child only even after relaxation of the policy. Some, because of their financial situation, had to give up the dream of having more children. Yet others, dreaming about having a baby of the opposite sex to the one they already have, are too afraid to get pregnant again, because they will not be able to have a third chance if the baby will not be of the desired sex. Even the fact that some women, contradictory to traditional Chinese culture, prefer to have girls rather than boys, does not imply that those women are ‘liberated’ from socially constructed norms – their preference is still related to pragmatic considerations, especially with virtually no state support for women. In the end, neither the claim of wanting a son to prolong the family line, nor preferring a girl because she is, in the long run, cheaper, really point towards gender equality. And when it comes to the issue of caring, policy planners, while glorifying the success of the policy, seem to still think along the lines

of the traditional Chinese belief of the three generational family living together under one roof, hoping, just like the women who told me their stories and who usually do not have a backup plan for old age, that it will all workout, somehow. Without a proper pension system, with rapid urbanization and the mobility of nuclear families, who live sometimes thousands of kilometres away from their extended family, this 'somehow' seems to be very unclear. But, most probably, Chinese women will be the ones who will be required to handle it.

CHAPTER SEVEN – THE GROUP OF ELDERLY AND RETIRED WOMEN

7.1 The group of elderly and retired women – Introduction

The oldest of the generation of women I have talked with can be labelled as the 'transitional generation' for many reasons. Their childhood and youth happened in the times right after Mao's devastating idea of the Great Leap Forward, when millions of Chinese people died of hunger, and exactly at the time of the Cultural Revolution, when schools were closed and young people from urban areas were send to the countryside to work in the fields. After the death of Mao in 1976 and the economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping, these women had to start their adult lives in the completely different reality of the market economy and a lack of support from the state. What is more – and from the point of view of my research the most important – they were also a transitional generation because they were the first ones who were subjected to the one-child policy. They themselves grew up in big families, but they were restricted to having only one child. This makes analysing the experience of these women extremely interesting, because they can share the stories of both worlds – the one where having many siblings was a norm, as well as the one where the size of the family was 'shrunk' rather drastically in a very short time.

The first part of the following chapter will focus on the issue of education and employment. As the introduction of the one-child policy is often justified as the 'provider' of better chances for education and employment for women, I wanted to explore the assumption that seemed very logical to me – if China needed the family planning policy in order to guarantee better education for girls, it seems safe to assume that before the policy girls in China were deprived of the access to the education because they had brothers who took the family's resources. I have also focused on possibilities in the job market, which were supposed to open for women after the policy's introduction and asked my interviewees whether the shift to the free market was as beneficial for them as promised. In the next part I will concentrate on the change of the family's composition and explore the differences between the ways in which women with one (or occasionally two) child(ren) only compare

themselves and their 'performance' and interpretation of gender equality in the family in comparison to their mothers, who had to work full time and, at the same time, had to care for many children. In addition, I will also focus on the issue of marriage and the potential change the one-child policy brought to spousal relationships. After that I will discuss the widely known and spoken of issue of sex preferences in big and small families, which emerged after the one-child policy was introduced. This topic will be followed by women's power (or rather lack of it) in decision making processes regarding their fertility which was subjugated to the top-down implementation of the family planning. Finally, I will move on to the multi-faced theme of care, checking whether less children did relieve women from the burden of childcare and homemaking. I will also explore the issue of caring for others – for parents, siblings and grandchildren – and the ways in which women interpret their roles of universal carers. After that I will also focus on the issue of care for the interviewees themselves and juxtapose their experiences and interpretations with the popular fear of the aging population. The chapter will end with concluding remarks, in which all the themes and topics which came up will be summarized.

7.2 Introduction to the participants

Chunyu (48) – born in the rural area in West Guangdong. Her mother worked as a farmer and her father was a sailor. She has younger and older brothers, with whom she was separated due to the illness of her mother. Her brothers stayed in her home village with her grandmother and aunts, while she was sent as a 3-4-year-old girl to relatives in a different province. When she was 9, she moved to the city in Gunagdong, where her family had been living for couple of years. Her return to the family was arranged by a teacher from the city who was sent to the countryside as an educated youth during the Cultural Revolution. After being reunited with her family, she faced enormous problems in school, because she could not speak Mandarin or Cantonese. She went to work in a workshop in a factory just after junior high school, while dreaming about being a kindergarten teacher. After a couple of years, she took evening classes for 3 years, and years later, when there was an opening, she took an office job in the same *danwei*. Married at the age of 23, she and her husband, who

works in a hospital lab, were fined for early marriage and early childbirth. She has one daughter, who is now 25. She is retired, but continues to work part-time in a nursery.

Guifan (58) – born and raised in urban Guangdong, in a big family with two older sisters, one older and two younger brothers. She took care of her younger brothers from the age of 6. She also helped her mom with her factory work, as at the time workers were getting wages according to the number of pieces they manufactured. Her older siblings were university graduates, but her school years fell during the Cultural Revolution. She was sent to the countryside after graduating from high school. She spent 4.5 years there, working as an educated youth. After returning to the city, she was working in the kitchen of the *danwei*. She got married at the age of 25 and has one son who is in his 30s now. She wished to have a second child, but because of her work and the work of her husband who was working in maintenance in a factory related to the food industry, the unapproved pregnancy would have left them without work and a roof over their heads. She is now the only one of her siblings taking care of her elderly parents, despite the fact that her parents live in the same house as her brother. She is also a volunteer in one of social centres.

Kunyao (56) – from urban Guangdong. After being sent to the countryside she came back to the city and started working as a salesperson at a market. Her parents had higher education and worked as a teacher and a journalist of the local newspaper. She also wanted to obtain qualifications and she attended evening college, but she could not handle the pressure of both work and study. She got married at the age of 29. Her first pregnancy resulted in a miscarriage. The second time she had a daughter who was born with a heart disease which required an operation. Her husband divorced her when their baby was 3 months old and has never paid the alimony ordered by the court. Her parents helped her to take care of the daughter, but after their death she was left alone and supports not only her 20-year-old daughter, but her older brother as well. He is also divorced, as his ex-wife learnt that he was infertile, even though they adopted a baby girl (from the one-child policy excess) before. Despite being retired she is still working, doing some cleaning jobs, in order

to support her family and pay the tuition of her daughter, together with all her caprices.

Pingning (64) - from urban Guangdong. She has a 38-year-old daughter. She got married at the age of 26. Both of her parents came from very affluent families, whose properties were seized during the Cultural Revolution. Having 3 sisters and a younger brother and with her father passing away when she was 12, Pingning's mother was left alone to care for 5 children. After the Cultural Revolution Pingning worked in a factory as an office secretary and then accountant, but always dreamt about being a writer. She has one daughter born just before the introduction of the one-child policy and planned to have one more child, hoping that the policy was just a short-term restriction. She is now retired, and is helping her daughter to care for her only son, whose birth was treated as a miracle, as the daughter's husband is suffering from a sexual dysfunction. Because of her caring duties, she has needed to give up meetings with friends and even decline invitations to visit her sister who lives in the USA.

Qiaoli (56) – a native resident of urban Guangdong. She has a 26-year-old son, whom she gave birth to after getting married at the age of 29. She would have liked to have a second child, but she was not willing to sacrifice her employment and the security her *danwei* unit was guaranteeing. She has two younger brothers. As both of her parents worked, she was asked to take over housework. When she was 17 years old, she was sent to the countryside to work in the fields for five years. After the Cultural Revolution she took up manual work at a factory. At the same time, after work, she helped her brother with the business he stared after Deng Xiaoping's reforms. She feels very resentful towards her mother and brothers, because she was always expected to help everyone in the family, but when she asked for some support for the business of her son, she was turned down by her brothers whose behaviour was justified by their mother who said that Qiaoli is now a part of another (her husband's) family.

Taoyu (52) – born and raised in the East region of Guangdong province, she moved to the city over ten years ago. She grew up with 3 older brothers and one

older sister. She married at the age of 21 and has two children – a daughter and a son, for whom she needed to pay a penalty as he was born without a permit. She underwent 3-4 abortions, most probably to be sure that the second child was a boy, as demanded by her husband. She started to work in her father's *danwei* when she was in junior high school – first in the kitchen, then she was moved to the production department where she worked until her retirement. All of the housework and childcare was always her responsibility. Despite her claims that she treated her children equally, and even feeling more proud of her daughter who is a university graduate, she shows preferential treatment towards her son.

Tianmei (56) – native to urban Guangdong, raised in a large family with 7 siblings: 3 sisters and 4 brothers. Both of her parents were doing manual labour. It was her older sisters who took care of the rest of siblings, as her parents were never home. After graduating from high school, she was sent to the countryside as an educated youth, where she spent 5 years. After her return, she worked in a factory's production line. After the economic reforms, she wanted to find a better paid job, but because of her lack of qualification she could only find unofficial jobs, without contracts, as a shop clerk in convenience stores, and never managed to find a stable job. She got married at the age of 26, but had her son when she was nearly 40. Her husband, who works as a toll collector in the highway, never helped with childcare or housework. She is very upset about her relationship with her 17-year-old son, as he spends all day in front of the computer.

Wang Fang (59) – from urban Guangdong. She has two children – a daughter and a son, to whom she gave birth before the introduction of the one-child policy. Wang Fang was included in this study because after being sent to the countryside at the age of 18, she worked as a teacher, barefoot doctor and finally as a one-child policy propagandist. After spending 8 years in the countryside, she came back to the city and has worked as an office worker ever since. She got married at the age of 20 to a soldier of the PLA, who passed away a couple of years ago. She is now helping to take care of her daughter's son (she has been doing this for the last 14 years) and is ready to help with the newly born son of her son.

7.3 Education and employment

There is absolutely no way of not mentioning the Cultural Revolution while discussing the topic of the education and employment of the women of this group. For all of them their school years, or at least part of them, were a kind of joke. Instead of normal classes, they sang songs and repeated quotes from the proverbial Red Book of Mao Zedong's thoughts. After high school they were sent to the countryside – some of them to work in the fields, some to be teachers or barefoot doctors. Soon after coming back to the city and their families, the Chinese government changed its tune and the economic reforms, together with the one-child policy, were introduced – all, officially, in the spirit of making Chinese reality and Chinese women's fate better, easier and more affluent.

The experience of this generation can help us therefore to answer the question of whether women had less chances of education and employment in comparison to their male siblings before the introduction of the one-child policy. Did the policy really improve their lives chances and make them more equal?

7.3.1 Lack of education – fault of brothers or the system?

When the one-child policy is being discussed, the issue that consistently comes up is that of the benefit for the female singletons, who have all the family resources dedicated to their education and future success. But the more I talked to these women who are now in their 50s and 60s, the more I have realized that there is also another level to deconstructing this idea, in addition to those mentioned in previous chapters. The question that kept nagging me was the issue of sex preference when it came to education before the one-child policy was introduced in a political climate which eagerly promoted the slogan of women holding up half of the sky.

The women I spoke to did not get a chance to go to university because of the Cultural Revolution (and neither did their brothers), but it seems that they did not experience less of a chance than their brothers when it came to the issue of schooling – or at least attending school. Additionally, what should be mentioned, especially since I am trying to compare their realities with those of the following generations,

is that they had very large families and many siblings. However, this situation also reflects the complicated experience women of those times went through. On the one hand, the communist state, in which they grew up, emphasized the importance of gender equality. On the other, the inheritance of thousands of years of the gendered aspects of their culture could not be 'eradicated' simply by a change in the political reality. It is generally assumed that communism led to the liberation of women and in certain aspects it certainly cannot be denied. Participation of women in the labour market became nearly universal, but domestic and family life was still women's territory and women's responsibility. It is important to stress, especially in the relation to the claims that the one-child policy opened up possibilities for girls who did not have to compete with brothers, the fact that education opportunities do not depend only on the sex of children, but on the economic situation, having urban or rural *hukou* and, in the communist state, the 'class' rank of one's family. But as none of my participants' families were members of the party elite, and few grew up with rural *hukou* – as at the time when they were younger it was not as easy to move from the countryside to the city as it is now - I was not able to verify the differences of the experiences between those different categories of women. However, the participants I have interviewed had different backgrounds – Pingning and Kunyao, for example, came from highly educated and well off families, while Tianmei's and Qiaoli's families did not have a lot of education, and Chunyu's mother was a farmer. However, as their school years fell during the time of the Cultural Revolution, the economic assets that are now considered beneficial, could have proven to be obstacles, just as happened in the case of Pingning's family, whose property was confiscated and the family labelled as capitalists, the worst political label one could get in those times. However, despite the difference in their backgrounds, their experiences regarding access to education were quite similar.

Tianmei, who grow up with 7 brothers and sisters, was sent together with her older brother to the countryside immediately after finishing high school. She spent 5 years there. However, of all of Tianmei's siblings, only her eldest sister (and also the oldest child), who had to care for her brothers and sisters, as both of parents worked all day, did not go to high school. When I asked Tianmei whether her sister complained about all the work she had to do, she said:

> Tianmei: She didn't complain, just that she only studied until junior high school. After that she didn't study, because there were too many of us, small children, [so] it was impossible.
>
> Martyna: So, except from your oldest sister, all the other kids went to high school?
>
> Tianmei: Basically we all went to high school. (Tianmei, p.3)

Even though Tianmei's sister's education possibilities were limited as she had to care for her younger siblings, all the other children in the family – boys and girls – went to high school. It does certainly reflect a form of gender inequality as both parents worked long hours and had to participate in political meetings, and the socialization of care and housework proved to be a theoretical assumption only and it was a daughter who had to do things which would not do themselves. However, the claim that the one-child policy made it possible for girls to study more as they did not have to compete for family resources should be followed by a logical assumption that before the policy (and of course common sense leads to us focusing on the generation right before the one-child policy only) this was the case. The Cultural Revolution and political system clearly affected both boys' and girls' education opportunities, but all of them had access to school. However, the problem that emerges here is that because of traditional gender convictions, not challenged in everyday life issues, girls were still considered to be the ones who had to take care of the house, even if it meant that they had have to quit school earlier. One can argue that this is exactly why the one-child policy was beneficial for women – if there had not been so many children at home, the older sister could have maybe continued studying. But I think that she could also have done that if the system of socialized care had really worked (especially since the 'free choice' for parents of not working and taking care of the family was practically non-existent). And, in addition, in today's reality of the one-child policy it is usually true that children, especially in urban areas, don't have to stay at home to take care of the household or their siblings. But their mothers have to – so it does not seem to be a win-win situation for women whatsoever.

Also Wang Fang, who went to the countryside after high school and worked as a propagandist of the one-child policy, reflects when I asked her what she would have

liked to do if jobs in the time of her youth were not strictly allocated by the state. She said:

> I would just continue to study. At that time when I went to grade 5 of junior high school [when education started to take its 'normal' form after the strictest years of the Cultural Revolution – MN] … I would just continue to study. But because of the Cultural Revolution, you just didn't have an option to do that. (Wang Fang, p.11)

Guifan, although she had the burden of taking care of younger siblings as both her parents worked all the time, does not consider parents' preferences for boys, nor the large size of the family as a reason for her not being able to study and, in general, having a difficult life. She said:

> Studying at our time was useless, but Mao Zedong just said 'There is no need to pretend to understand if you don't understand. Coping all the way through is also good'. It's just [because of] that times, that we have no education. It's a pity. People of that period, people born in the 50s, couldn't learn about culture while studying at schools…After graduation [they] had to go to the countryside… When it came to having children, they could only have one; if you had two you were expelled from the *danwei*, you didn't have a place to live, didn't have a job. So we, this group of people, are really miserable. Really. (Guifan, p. 10)

But the fact that the women of that generation did not get the chance to have a full education was not because of the brothers they had, but rather because of the system and, especially, because of the Cultural Revolution, was shown even more explicitly when I asked Guifan about the experience of her other siblings. She has two older sisters, one older brother and two younger brothers. She told me:

> They [older sisters and older brother] are all university graduates. They are people born in the 40s, before the 50s. They were very serious about studying. Both of my sisters are university graduates and they were very serious about their studies. They have a lot of culture. It's just me… Starting from me there was no education. (Guifang, p.12)

What is more, the experience of Qiaoli, who has 2 younger brothers and whose parents were manual workers and, as Qiaoli recalls herself, who did not read or own any books and had minimal education and culture, is similar. She is, in general, very resentful towards her parents for always treating her brothers more favourably and never having any demands towards them, while she was always required to do the

housework. However, despite this very traditional background of her family, when I asked her about education and the difference between access to schooling, she said:

> Martyna: When you were young, did you have equal opportunities to go to school?
>
> Qiaoli: Yes, if only parents were able to, they would let us go to school. This is a must. This kind of simple argument they did understand, couldn't be that undue. All depended on whether you yourself were able to pass. (Qiaoli, p.9)

My assumption becomes even more justified when I took a closer look at the education of the children of the women I have interviewed. Of those who had two children of opposite sex, the daughters were those who received better education than their brothers. Taoyu's son has, as she mentioned herself, graduated 'only' from vocational technical school, while her daughter got a university degree. The same thing happened in Wang Fang's family – her son finished education with a junior high school diploma, while her daughter graduated from high school and now, at the age of 40, she has started an undergraduate program at university. When the participants had only one child, all of them wanted to guarantee them the best education possible, no matter whether they had a boy or a girl – as competitiveness in the reality of a job market when jobs were no longer allocated by the state seemed to be inevitable. However, a difference that I have noticed in regards to education was the participants 'breaking through' the crippling political reality of the times. The women whose parents or close family members were educated before the Cultural Revolution and had higher levels of 'white collar jobs' were more eager to 'upgrade' their skills and education after their return from exile in rural areas, in which the new political and economic reality was waiting for them.

7.3.2 Being a woman, being a worker – the experience after the economic miracle

Although deprived of opportunities for education by the political reality rather than by brothers, the women of the 'transitional' generation were still present in the labour market. Until the era of economic reforms and transition from a centrally planned to a market economy, all jobs were allocated by the state and unemployment was virtually non-existent. The options and possibilities were

therefore very limited; one's place of work, position and place of living were all decided by the government. However, in the new reality of China's opening up to the world, opportunities were supposed to be limitless. They were supposed to be limitless for women too, because with the one-child policy in force and being relieved form the burden of caring for many children they could become successful in this new reality of competitiveness and self-dependence. Although, it seems that for this generation of women who had to 'reinvent' themselves in this new reality – while all they knew up to this point was a world of nearly universal employment and the relative 'equality' of income and lifestyle - life was not that easy, especially as the 'second shift' issue not only did not improve but, as will be discussed later, even experienced a setback.

Kunyao, whose parents were both well-educated and who worked as a teacher and as a journalist before the Cultural Revolution, came back from the countryside after 'only' two years. The government was searching for workers who could be salespeople in the city – that is how Kunnao's 'career' working at the stand in one of the city's markets begun. Dissatisfied with her job, she wanted to improve her qualifications, but was denied access to education during the Cultural Revolution and so, later, she began studying in an evening college. She told me:

> Kunyao: The Cultural Revolution [stared] in [19]66. I'd graduated from high school, but because of the Cultural Revolution I couldn't study further. At that time the [policy of] 'one worker, one farmer'[urban families with many children were requested to send one of each two to the countryside-MN] was implemented. As my brother was older he stayed in the city and I went to the countryside, staying there for two years, in Panyu [nowadays a district of Guangzhou city – MN].
>
> Martyna: When you came back to the city there were not many choices to find a job, but later [after economic reforms –MN] didn't you change for another job?
>
> Kunyao: I wanted to. I also went to study in the evening school (…) But it was very exhausting at that time. I stared to work very early in the morning and was so tired in evening classes I was falling asleep. (Kunyao, p.17-18)

Despite Kunyao's efforts to increase her qualifications, the burden of working and studying at the same time led to Kunyao quitting school. As she did not manage to pass the exam, she could not afford to keep paying for classes and courses. After her

divorce, when her husband left her alone with a three-month-old daughter with a heart disease, the only help she got was that offered by her parents. But after they passed away, the only person she could count on was herself. And without an education – and even with one child only – the new reality, supposedly beneficial for women, become very difficult to deal with. This situation, as Kunyao mentioned, became a reason for her decision not to re-marry and not to consider having more children. She said:

> My daughter was sick, [so] how would it be possible for me to marry again? Nowadays providing books and education is already awfully difficult. On top of that, making a living is also taking quite a lot of time. (Kunyao, p.5)

Also for Tianmei – who was obeying the one-child policy regulation as well – the change to the market economy did not bring career advancement or the betterment of her economic position. After spending five years in the countryside, she started to work in her mother's *danwei*, which had in the meantime shifted from the physical labour of coal unloading to manufacturing – the field which made the economic miracle of China possible. She worked for another five years in the factory's production line, but was dissatisfied with the low salary. She said:

> That time was just the start of the reform and opening to the outside world [policy of Deng Xiaping – MN]. After [19]85, when people who had courage opened shops by themselves to make money, I quit, disliking the low salary there [in the factory - MN]. Later I went to a food and drinks shop to work there. At that time, I didn't get an official job - that is no signed contract and so on - so I didn't do it for a long time. Sometimes I was working there, and sometimes again was not working. I didn't have a fixed work place. (Tianmei, p.9)

Tianmei has changed her work places often and never really managed to find a stable job which came with all the benefits. She said that even if she was hired in some shops as a salesperson with a contract, the shop would go bankrupt after a year or so, forcing her to search for another job. And it went on and on until her retirement. She paid into a 'private' retirement fund and combined it with the retirement she receives for the years she spent in the countryside and doing factory work, managing with the more or less 2000 RMB (around 300 USD) she receives.

Tianmei's case was, however, quite unusual, as she was the only one of my participants who gave up employment and the benefits of a state owned enterprise and threw herself in at the deep end. The majority of the women I have talked to, chose to stay in state owned enterprises because of all the benefits they provided – housing, retirement, free medical care and so on. Unwillingness to lose these jobs and the protection they guaranteed was strong enough to make them 'give up' on the idea of having a second child. Qiaoli, whose brother had opened a private hair salon after Deng Xiaoping's reforms, was not eager to leave her job and the security it provided, even though the factory job was not giving her much satisfaction, nor monetary compensation. And when I asked her whether she wanted to have another child – she has only one son – she told me:

> I wanted, but the government was not allowing it. Violating the one-child policy meant being fired. If I wanted to keep [my job in *danwei* – MN] I just couldn't give birth [to another child – MN]. At that time *danwei* was providing job security. You could apply for the reimbursement for going to see the doctor, giving birth and all... Benefits were very good and wanting to keep my work I didn't dare to give birth [again]. Forget about it. (Qiaoli, p.16)

It seems that this period of 'reinvention' was a bit easier for those women whose background had relatively more cultural capital. They still stayed in state owned enterprises and did not try to become rich before others, as encourage by Deng's reform, but they were more eager to 'upgrade' their qualifications and climb the ladder within their *danwei*. Chunyu and Pingning took evening classes hoping for a promotion within their work unit. Chunyu, started working in the workshop in the production line, which was extremely difficult for her because of her short height and tiny stature. It was her uncle, another factory's leader, previously a professor at a university, who told her that the only way to change her fate was to keep studying. She told me:

> He was giving an accounting class. It was an evening course, thought after working hours. He [the uncle –MN] told me to enrol, so I went to register. (Chunyu, p.19)

And even though after graduation Chunyu still worked for many years on the production line, when the *danwei's* accountant retired she took on that role. She did manage to reinvent herself, but rather not because she had only one child.

7.3.3 The contradiction of the one-child policy assumptions and women's chances in the market economy

It should not come as a surprise that of the women from this group that I interviewed, none can be really said to have achieved professional success. First they were deprived of the opportunity to study because of the fanatic experiment of the Cultural Revolution and the years they had to spend in the countryside. They were then lured by the promises of the new order, in which, as the famous saying of Deng Xiaoping goes, some were to become rich before the others. Additionally, to facilitate this advancement and to create more opportunities for women in an ever increasingly competitive job maker, the one-child policy was introduced. This generation was relieved form the burden that their mothers carried, who, as the stories tell, had many children and full-time jobs. However, the reforms happened when these women were already young adults, and, as mentioned before, they did not really have any qualifications to give them a good start in the new competitive marketplace. Even having only one child (yet still being seen as the 'natural' carer and homemaker) did not help. The new China needed skills and know-how in order to begin the race to become a world power. In all of this women did not seem to benefit much. The majority of them were stuck in the low paid jobs – being cooks, cleaning ladies and shop clerks – and often were even of deprived the benefits which were to a certain extant compensation for the very low salaries in the previous era and employment in the state owned enterprises. Left with low paid jobs, these women were not able to make any significant changes, not in their professional or, as will be discussed in the following part, their personal lives. And all of this despite the supposed relief that the one-child policy was said to bring with it. The state was no longer providing any form of the safety net– and if one took on new risks, then one had to be prepared to suffer from the consequences. If a shop or the company went bankrupt or when faced with a divorce and sick child – these things had and have to be handled individually. This is just a small price these women are paying for those who got to get rich first.

7.4 Family and intimate relationships

When a social experiment on the scale of the one-child policy in a country as big as China happens, the changes it brings along are 'on a big scale' too. The fact that family composition changed totally is beyond doubt. Families, which used to have seven children, in one generation changed to a nuclear household with one or occasionally two offspring. The remaining question is how these changes influenced the issue of gender equality within the family, both in the ways in which daughters started to be seen and treated, as well as the ways in which wives, supposedly relieved form the burden of having many children, redefined their role in their marriage and their concept of it.

7.4.1 I am not like my parents. I am not like my mom

Although the generation of women I am talking about in this chapter was the first to be directly influenced by the one-child policy, their childhood was, when we talk about family composition, as different as possible from how their and their children's families look. These women grew up with many siblings and have 'first-hand' experience of the difference in the way girls and boys were treated in big families. Many of them have experienced the tradition of valuing boys over girls and just as many of them said that they do not repeat the same mistakes of their parents, and especially – of their mothers. Those who have two children of different sex said that they are fair towards their children, which, in their eyes, makes them very open-minded. They believe that after experiencing different forms of mistreatment from their parents – be it because they were responsible for the housework while their brothers could enjoy their leisure time or because the best mouthfuls never ended up on their plates – they are conscious enough not to repeat the same mistakes.

Wang Fang blames her mother for putting boys' preference in 'action', because she helped her brothers much more and was focused on them, while the girls were left alone. She especially remembers that after coming back from the countryside, where the urban educated youth was sent during the Cultural Revolution, her mother was much more worried about feeding and bringing back to good health Wang Fang's

brothers than herself. She explained her mother's behaviour, as she knew that it would be her brothers, not her, who would one day inherit everything the parents owned. But, according to Wang Fang, she is not like that:

> But I, I've received society education. After I went to work, my way of handling [it] is not the same [as my mom's-MN]. I am very fair for my daughter and my son. We who are younger [in comparison to generation of our parents – MN], we are a bit more liberated. My mother just was…Women born in 70s and 80s are different, they don't have to study and work at the same time…Me and my mom are entirely different. My mom values sons over daughters, but I don't. I treat both [of my children] equally. (Wang Fang, p.5)

But this equal treatment became a bit doubtful when I asked about some details, such as housework. Wang Fang's son has never done any. If anyone was helping her with these chores, it was her daughter. As she said when I asked about that issue:

> In my house? My son didn't do absolutely anything. I pampered him more – he didn't have to do housework. My daughter is working now, so I take care of my housework myself. When she was young, my daughter was more hardworking, she was doing [housework], but son wouldn't. (Wang Fang, p.10)

Similarly, Taoyu believes that she treats her children equally. She is very proud of her daughter, who graduated from the university, has a stable job and bought an apartment. But then the issue of getting an apartment and a car for Taoyu's son came up – both of which are to be 'sponsored' by parents. So I asked:

> Martyna: Why didn't you decide to buy an apartment for your daughter?
>
> Taoyu: We didn't, ha-ha. If I didn't have a son, if I would only give birth to a daughter, then for sure at that time she bought an apartment, for sure I would give her money, give her few hundred thousand [RMB- MN], how much would be needed…. I could've, I would've give to her. Because we both [with a husband – MN] saved enough, what would we do with this remaining amount of money? So if there was just a daughter, if I didn't help her, whom would I help? But because of having a son it's not the same. So for sure you have to, to some extent, consider your son more. Considering…the son still doesn't have an apartment, he is still not married, he still hasn't settled down. So you have to give more to him. (Taoyu, p.23-24)

At this point it is necessary to highlight the ridiculous logic in which the unequal treatment of sons and daughters is justified and insisted on being seen as fair.

Claiming to not have any preferences as to the sex of the baby – and even saying that having a daughter is better – Taoyu still thought it fair to dedicate all the money she and her husband saved for her son. Although the sum she had at her disposal was of course limited, the question that emerges here is why, in the spirit of fairness, did she not divide the money half-half between her children? Yet for her, giving it all to a boy seems so natural that it does not even trigger a thought of how actually unequal such treatment was and how much, in fact, it resembles her parents' attitude that she still feels so resentful about.

7.4.2 Less children, different concept of marriage?

Let's try to go back, however, to the time when the women I spoke to did not yet have children, in order to discuss the issue of marriage. Logically – if we take the state's rhetoric to be true – the socialist ideology, followed by the one-child policy, should have had made some changes to the traditional way marriage was seen – as a natural course of events and basically the only choice for women which, in addition, she had to follow no matter what. Because of the very fast changes in family composition due to the one-child policy, women (already holding half of the sky) were supposed to be relieved from the burden of multiple childbearing and overwhelming housework. So just as in the case of the younger generations, I was curious about the perception of that supposed relief and the 'quality' of the intimate relationships of these women.

One recurring remark about marriage and the concept of it was summarized by Wang Fang:

> At that time, we were simpler. When looking for a husband [what mattered] was honesty and moral quality. At that time the economy was not good, and anyway, good behaviour, good character, good social relations were about it [of the requirements –MN]. It was more simple. (Wang Fang, p. 19)

As Wang Fang and many others also highlighted, there were absolutely no requirements of having a house or a car. And how could there be? When these women were getting married, economic reform had just started and the majority of them, after coming back from the countryside, were working in the *danwei* of their

parents, which also provided accommodation for its workers. But after delving deeper into the topic of the concept of marriage and the changes that could have occurred both as a result of socialist ideology and, later, as the economic reforms started and family size was drastically changed, I have noticed that the general idea of marriage as a must and the only option for women remained unchanged. Traditionally, marriage was seen as something given, or even considered as a duty. After all, being married meant that one would have children (or, to be precise, sons) who would carry on the family line. According to Confucianist belief, failing to fulfil this obligation was the gravest sin one could committed. However, my participants were getting married during the times of 'real' socialism, when, as I have mentioned before, all women were working, as they were supposed to hold 'half of the sky'. However, socialist ideology didn't seem to influence them much.

Kunyao said that she did not really want to marry. She was introduced to some potential candidates, but they rejected her, or because of her age (she finally got married when she was in her late 30s), or because of the job she had. She planned to remain single, but she experienced a lot of pressure from her family. In the end, she told me about the decision to marry her ex-husband:

> As other people introduced him to me, of course they were talking about his strong points. We were dating for a very short time…In addition, at that time, I was not young. I went to the countryside, then came back to the city. At that time in the city I was working as pork meat monger. The place of work was not ideal. I also went to the evening school to study, but I didn't manage to change the job and, because of being under all kinds of stress… It made me not really think clearly [so I] just got married. (Kunyao, p.6)

What is even more interesting, in revealing the concept of the inevitability of marriage for women, is Kunyao's attitude towards the potential marriage of her daughter. On the one hand, Kunyao told me she hopes her daughter will not get married – which probably is not something unusual coming from a person whose life was destroyed because of marriage. But after a moment Kunyao added:

> Kunyao: I hope she wouldn't want to get married, hahaha. Because my image of marriage is shadowy…but if she doesn't marry I will be worried she is a homosexual.
>
> Martyna: Why?

> Kunyao: Because I think homosexuality is not good… It's not popularly accepted. (Kunyao, p. 19-20)

But when I asked what she is worried about more – the potentially unhappy marriage of her daughter or her daughter being a lesbian, she said:

> Of course being homosexual. (Kunyao, p.20)

This view really struck me and showed that the one-child policy did not really change or even challenge the traditional concept of marriage. You still have to marry, and if you do not that means that something is wrong with you – and, in Kunyao's understanding, being homosexual qualifies as something wrong because society does not accept it. However, to be perfectly honest, it does not accept not only homosexuals but unmarried women as well.

The cases of Chunyu and Qiaoli emphasize also the concept of marriage as a must. Both of them agreed to an arrange marriage – Qiaoli because of her age, and Chunyu because of her father's suggestion that it was the only way to get an apartment. Both of them said that they never had an idea of love or romance in mind. When asked about the decision to marry at the age of 29, Qiaoli said:

> Having pressure, seeing all other people getting married, I myself also thought about marriage. What is more, other people making carping comments, saying 'How come you are not married?'… I was afraid I would be told these offensive words. (Qiaoli, p. 14)

Chunyu, who remembers her mother being bullied in her home village, because her father, working as a sailor, was always away from home, coming back once every 2 years, also did not have any expectations regarding marriage. It was just something that had to happen and was approved of by her father. At the beginning her future husband talked only to her father and she had no idea that there was something going on. I asked her:

> Martyna: So he [the future husband – MN] spoke with your father first, and then with you?
>
> Chunyu: It was all they [father and future husband –MN] who came to the agreement.
>
> Martyna: Oh, and you? Why do you think you liked him? What about his character? Or something else?

> Chunyu: There was nothing. Just that our family… my dad said… my mom said he was good.
>
> Martyna: So you decided to marry?
>
> Chunyu: No, at that times apartments belonged to *danwei*. If you wanted to have a flat allocated… You had to marry first and then have a flat allocated, so [I] just got married. (Chunyu, p.25)

Be it age, pressure from parents, fear of being ridiculed, will to get an apartment – the option of not marrying was still unthinkable. It was still a natural 'duty' to be fulfilled. Furthermore, the assumption of pure relationships (Giddens, 1992) loses its applicability in the context of China even more because of the difficulty of getting out of this inevitable marriage, as well as the position of housewives that women had to perform in addition to their paid jobs – this issue is covered in more detail in the chapter dedicated to the topic of caring, but is still deeply interwoven with the fact that the concept of marriage did not change, even though family size and the economic reality did.

Just as it was mentioned by Taoyu and Kunyao, even though the option of divorce exists in China, it is not a decision that is being made by women. I will focus more on Kunyao's experience in the next parts of this chapter, so here I just want to point out that for women in China getting out of an unsatisfactory marriage is usually not an option if she is the only one who wants it. Tianmei, who is in a very unhappy marriage, has not even considered a divorce, even though her husband never listens to her and never helps her with anything. She said:

> There are many things he just doesn't tell me about, so I sometimes… Now, after…I rather… how to say it… I just hate him. He doesn't discuss anything with me. He doesn't discuss any situation with you, he just knows about it himself, but he won't tell you. Afterwards, after I got married, I just discovered that issue, the one we discussed before [the issue of her husband parents not wanting to accept her as a daughter-in-law as she was to thin and didn't have a good job – MN]. As you knew your dad and mom don't like me, what were you doing still coming around? I just found out after the wedding. So there was nothing to be done about it. (Tianmei, p.13)

The case of Taoyu, who has mentioned that women do not ever initiate a divorce and are prized for being patient (!) when they stick with their husbands no matter how badly treated they are, also depicts very well the lack of improvement in the

division of work between spouses, despite the fact that less children in home was supposed to mean less work. It definitely meant less housework for Taoyu's husband. As she recalls, she was working, moving 50kg bags of fertilizer until the end of her pregnancy and started doing housework again two days after giving birth. What is more, even though her husband did not do anything at home or with the children, he would still criticize her for doing it wrong. She said:

> Sometimes you are so tired that you could die, but he just sits there watching TV [and] drinking tea, just like this, not helping you to do anything. (Taoyu, p. 19)

Funnily enough, Wang Fang, who says her husband helped her with the housework and, according to her, the men in her generation were more eager to do so, at the same time justifies the younger generation of men saying:

> The young men today, they are also not bad. But now they have not many children, so they don't need to invest that much energy and time, as there is only one [child –MN]. (Wang Fang, p. 17)

This in itself probably does not justify the usage of the word funnily. However, it does become clearer in the following analysis of care, where Wang Fang argues that less children do not make it easier for women, as they have to do everything alone. As it seems, there might be different interpretations of the same phenomenon, especially when applied to different gender. It also proves that while discussing the quality of intimate relationships, the issue of housework division cannot be removed and treated as a separate issue. Regardless of the number of children, if the workload is not shared, how can a spousal relationship get better?

7.4.3 When being open-minded means… nothing new

Many women I spoke to considered themselves to be open-minded, especially when they were talking about being equal and fair towards their children, and, what I will focus on next is their conviction that having a daughter is better than having a son. However, the traditional role of women in society and in the family is so deeply internalized by everyone, these women included, that the concept of gender based inequalities becomes rather blurry for them. They felt mistreated by their families because they were girls and their brothers were spoiled, had better food, were not

burdened by housework. Feeling mistreated, they believe that they are fair towards their children, but at the same time it is only their daughters who help with housework and only their sons who are being gifted with apartments and cars. The idea of a girl becoming a member of the family of the husband still lives, even if these women do not realize that they are the ones 're-creating' and 're- imposing' their unequal realities on their daughters and sons. However, the fact that they are, to a certain extent, aware of the concept of gender equality, at least more than people in the past were, is important to highlight in order to stress the fact that things can and did change, even if only slightly. Although Chinese women acknowledge existing inequalities, in reality they are doing the same things as in the past – it is just a distorted and hijacked 'version' of the idea of equality, with which they are still able to rationalize their gender bias. It can be said both about the different treatment of boys and girls, as well as the concept of marriage, which actually did not change and remains something that is inevitable for a woman, just as it was in traditional, pre-socialist China. What is more, as women have basically no way out of bad and unhappy marriages, no choice of not marrying at all, and as they maintain the homemaker role in addition to their jobs, marriage still remains a tool of 'placing women' in the social hierarchy, even with less children to care for.

7.5 Childbearing and body politics

As one of the reasons the one-child policy has attracted the attention of academics and, especially western, media, was not its influence on intimate and interpersonal relationships, but the issue of selective abortions and hundreds of thousands of girls who were never born, because their parents wanted to have a son. In this section, I will explore the attitude of the first generation of women, who were subjugated to this policy, towards their preference of the sex of the baby. What is more, I will also focus on the issue of their agency in making decisions regarding their fertility, which, as it seems, was controlled not only by the state with its top-down method of policy implementation, but with other 'powers' as well.

7.5.1 I prefer a daughter, but I know a son is better

As far as the popularized assumption of the effect of the one-child policy on the end of the preference for sons in China goes, the women of the elderly and retired group, the first generation subjugated to its rigorous demands, are the living 'emblem' of that convictions. A great majority of them stated that it is better to have a girl. Tianmei, who is 56 and has only one son to whom she gave birth when she was 40 years old and with whom she has no contact as he is addicted to computer games, regrets not having a daughter, because a girl would, in her opinion, certainly be more considerate and caring. She even stated, when asked about the advantages of having a son:

> I think, from the [relationship I have- MN] with my son, it seems that there are no advantages. (Tianmei, p.17)

But just as the preference for girls was nearly universal, so were the reasons for it. The two main points the women I talked to highlighted were the fact that girls are more attached to the family and because there is no need to provide an apartment for them when they grow up and want to get married.

Both Taoyu and Wang Fang, who have both a daughter and a son, highlighted the qualities of their girls. Taoyu's daughter, in contrast to her son, has graduated from university, has a good job and bought an apartment. At the same time, she also remembers her helping with housework, while her son did not do anything. The interpretation of Wang Fang is however a 'highly-modernized' internalization of the centuries old tradition in China, according to which the girl who upon getting married becomes a member and the responsibility of her husband's family. She said:

> Boy or girl… I don't know about other people, but we in Guangzhou… I myself just think that if you give birth to a girl, you educate her well… When she grows up, marries well, she has her own family to run, and that's just enough. But if you have a boy, you have to, in addition, find an apartment for him so he can get married and find a wife, so I think that it is better to have a daughter. (Wang Fang, p.3-4)

This nearly universal perception of the 'superiority' of having a daughter and not a son, leads to the realization that the discourse of 'demanding' women who will not marry if their future husband does not provide a house and the phenomenon of

buying apartments for boys in order to allow them to find a wife is nothing more than a new interpretation of the old practices of giving the daughter away to the other family. Also, what caught my attention was the fact that many statements of preference for girls were made from, what we can call, hindsight. These women did not opt to have a girl from the beginning, but with the perspective of time – and experience of having received more help from their daughters than their sons – they have 'realized' that having a girl is better. Pingning explained it probably most emphatically by saying:

> I think giving birth to a son is like bringing honour to one's ancestors. Telling other people there was a boy born in your family makes the other people be happier on your behalf. But now having a girl is also good. Daughters are taking care of the family, are good to their parents. Whatever the issue is, they can tell it all to their mother. Just like my daughter who is saying to me: 'Whenever you go, I will follow you.' Even though her mother-in-law is also good to her, but mother is always closer and there are always some misunderstandings with the mother-in-law. So I think having a son is well regarded, but having a daughter has more tangible benefits. (Pingning, p.3)

What is more, of those women whom I interviewed and who had two children, in all cases the older child was a girl. Taoyu told me that the only reason for her having a second child was the fact that her husband wanted a son. When he was asked by his mother what he would do if the second child was a girl too, Taoyu paraphrased his answer by saying:

> My husband decided that [we] must have a second baby, and it must be a son. His family, my mother-in-law, just asked him what would happen if the second one was a girl too… My husband just said that if it's a girl [than] I will give birth to another one, until we have a son. (Taoyu, p. 12)

I suspect that Taoyu did know the sex of the second baby before she gave birth. However, I must stress that she never said this directly. She told me that after having her first daughter she did not use any contraceptives and was pregnant three of four times and she underwent abortions, which she said at that time was a very painful process, as medicine was not that advanced. She said:

> Yes… just not knowing how could it be, I was pregnant again, that [period –MN] was delayed for couple of days. So in your heart you

> just think 'Oh my god, there it is [a baby – MN] again. Then I was going to check, I was really pregnant. I have always gone to do the abortion within 40 days, three or four times, always aborting. Before the technology of abortion was not that advanced, so the pain was extreme! (Taoyu, p. 27)

And then, as her story goes, one time she got pregnant and she just kept a baby, saying that more abortions would be hazardous for her health. And as soon as she gave birth to a boy, her husband underwent the ligation procedure. What is more, she was very well informed about 'underground' ways to check the sex of the baby before it was born. It might just be a coincidence, but I think that Taoyu and her husband wanted to be sure that the second child was a boy. Taoyu was still lucky though, because for Pingning the only abortion procedure she underwent and after which she got IUD, finished with painful and extremely strong periods, which did not allow her to go to work, as they made her feel weak and dizzy. Not to mention that when she wanted to remove the IUD, the doctor found out that the device had grown into her flesh and she needed yet more surgery.

But these stories and the issue of realizing the supposed advantages of having a girl (while, preferably also having a boy) was perfectly summarized by Wang Fang who said:

> In my heart I think that having a girl is a bit better. But subjectively, because of not having posterity, I just think that having a boy is a bit better. (Wang Fang, p.4)

Also, as I have mentioned previously, the eventual preference for girls was justified by the fact that girls are more considerate of the family and will 'stick' with and care for their old parents, which can be simply explained as another form of gender inequality and a way of maintaining the concept of the gendered division of labour and assuming that the girl will 'naturally' take up all the caring duties. For as long as having a baby of any sex has is regarded as more profitable, there is no movement towards equality of any form.

7.5.2 Decision making is not a job for women

What we must keep in mind is the fact that this generation of women in China were not just the first one that had to adjusted to the demands of the family planning

policy to allow for the further growth of China and its economy, but also the first one to whom any form of contraceptive, apart from rather unsafe methods of abortion, was introduced. As the issue of birth control is a highly problematic topic in feminist academia, its emergence and spread coinciding with top-down implemented state policy is even more so. It would be difficult to argue that multiple childbirth, especially when combined with poor nutrition and a lack of access to healthcare and hygiene services, is not harmful and damaging for women's body. Just as Jiaqiang from the middle-aged and married group of women bluntly and truthfully stated – there are no women who want to spend all their lives being constantly pregnant – so did Wang Fang and Taoyu. Wang Fang told me:

> The biggest characteristic of the past was that there were no measures of contraception. The only one that existed was abortion, but aborting too many [fetuses – MN] is not good for your body, so she [pregnant women – MN] didn't have a choice, she only could have given birth, couldn't she? (Wang Fang, p.23)

While, at the same time, stating that before women had had to have so many children because of a lack of pregnancy preventing measures, they have all highlighted the, supposedly gone, need and desire of each family to have a son. Although, before contraceptives and the policy, women often delivered one child after another, hence had more 'opportunities' to give birth to a baby boy, the top-down implemented policy whose feasibility was absolutely dependent on birth control, has limited those chances and often placed women in a very vulnerable position. Taoyu, who comes from eastern Guangdong, where the preference for boys is still very strong when compared with other areas, told me that it was not unusual for men to divorce their wives for giving birth to daughters only. Even though she did not have this experience herself, as I have mentioned while discussing the issue of sex preferences, her husband did demand a son. In spite of the fact that in this region of China the policy was not as strict as in some other parts – or, to say it more understandably, relatively a lot of people had their own businesses and undertakings and could 'bend the rules' by paying the fee - the options for having a son were still much more limited than before. Additionally, in the case of divorce, which according to Taoyu is always the initiative of the husband and his family, women have no say in any matter. As Taoyu explained:

> All the men of our region are very despotic. (Taoyu, p.11)

When I asked her to clarify what she meant, she told me that the husband would not only decide about the divorce, but also about the custody over children. What is more, there is no division of the assets. So, what usually happens is that women go back to their parents' house and start to work in factories as their only means of survival and income.

Although the stories told by Taoyu regarding divorce because of not having a son did not come from any personal experience, the story of Kunyao definitely did. Kunyao, who is currently 56, was the only divorced women I managed to talk to. And truth be told, her story was the saddest and most despairing story of all. Kunyao married late and was actually strongly considering remaining single, but the pressure of her family was too much to take, so she agreed to get married. Her first pregnancy ended in miscarriage, but she knew that the baby she lost was a girl. The second child whom she gave birth to was also a girl and this girl was born with a serious heart condition and needed surgery. Soon after she gave birth, when her daughter was less than three months old, she found out that her husband had filed for a divorce. The marriage, as Kunyao states, was not a good and happy one, as her husband did not want to move out from his mother's house and he and Kunyao for a long time had not been living together. Despite that, the divorce was the most traumatic experience for Kunyao – actually, when I met with her for the interview, before even saying hello, she handed me her divorce papers and started with her story. As I noticed on the court order, the father was obliged to pay alimony of 350 RMB (54 USD) a month for his daughter. I asked whether she has been receiving this. She told me that her husband never paid and, what is more, he demanded that Kunyao bring their daughter over from time to time to his house. But in all of this she found a silver lining:

> It would be more worrying having a son, because maybe my ex-husband's family would want a custody. (Kunyao, p.13)

She then continued to explain that the heart disease of the daughter was just an excuse for her husband to get a divorce. The real reason was, as Kunyao said, that he wanted to have a son and, with the one-child policy in force and both of them

working in state owned enterprises, there was no way for them to have another child. The suspicions of Kunyao were then supported by what she overheard:

> One time after the divorce my mom ran into the matchmaker who introduced me [to my ex-husband- MN] in the tea house, who said that my ex-husband's mother wants to find for him another woman who has not been married yet, hoping that she will give birth to a son. (Kunyao, p.14)

7.5.3 Family planning – the cursed blessing

As I have mentioned before, the implementation of the one-child policy was the time when contraceptives first became popular in China. In this part of the chapter I wanted to focus on the way in which control over the reproductive system can be 'twisted' and instead of bringing only promised benefits, relieving women from multiple childbearing and the need to care and provide for many children, it can also put these women into a very vulnerable situation.

First of all, just as in the analysis of the experience of the young and single and middle-aged and married groups of women, I tried to challenge the assumption of the end of the preference for boys, which supposedly shifted towards girls after the implementation of the one-child policy. However, in my opinion, and according to my understanding of gender equality, this situation did not change much. As long as sex preference is based on the traditional belief of role division or the belief in the biological base of this, just like the nearly universal assumption of my interviewees that women are better carers, we cannot talk about equality.

What is more, the policy and contraceptives, which limited the chances for women to give birth to a baby of the sex desired by the family, could often leave the women in question in a very miserable position. Being divorced due to giving birth to a girl and undergoing multiple abortions until the sex of the baby was 'right' are just two examples of this. It seems that contraceptives together with the top-down implementation of the policy and the patriarchal culture of China meant that women and their fertility was controlled by everything and everyone, but themselves.

7.6 Caring

The issue of care and the die-hard belief of women being 'made for' this so called labour of love as one of the main factors which influence the issue of the gender equality has been mentioned in this paper countless times. The one-child policy was justified and promoted as a way of relieving women from the burden of multiple childbearing and childrearing. For those reasons, the experience of the women from the elderly and retired group of being a carer holds importance, because they are able to provide first-hand comparison of the situations before and after the one-child policy. As the 'transitional generation', they grew up in families with many siblings, but when they started their own families, they were the first ones who experienced the 'relief' of having only one or a maximum of two children. What is more, some of them are now also witnessing and experiencing the situation of caring for their, usually one, grandchild, and the absolute 'lack' of relief from caring responsibilities in one-child only families. The question left to explore here is: why is that the case?

7.6.1 Does having one child only really makes it easier?

When discussing the issue of the one-child policy and the limitations it has posed on the desired number of children, what came up during conversations was the fact that putting the one-child policy aside, women of this generation and the following ones simply would and will not have the energy and financial resources to raise more children well. But the factor of a lack of energy - when you are the only person responsible for the upbringing of the child - somehow prevailed and, according to Wang Fang, is the reason why women did not want and still do not want to make use of the policy relaxation. She said:

> So I think that, no matter how many children you give birth to, raising them just by yourself is very difficult. What is more, in my way of thinking, if you have only one child, it does not matter a boy or a girl, if you educate it well, is enough. (Wang Fang, p.3)

Wang Fang has stressed the importance of a lack of energy as the biggest obstacle when she justified the reasons for her not having more children. She said:

> I wouldn't give birth to more children. Being an educated youth, and having my husband working for the army, our life conditions were good, but if you don't have energy, you just can't have more children. (Wang Fang, p. 9)

Wang Fang admits that her attitude might be influenced by the fact that she herself was lucky enough to have two children, a boy and a girl, and maybe, as the popular saying goes it is easier said than done. On the other hand Tianmei, who has only one son, also claims that the one-child policy was not the only reason for her and her husband not having a second child. When I asked whether at any point she was considered having a second baby, she said:

> Even before I didn't [want to-MN]. It's just that you can't bear your own burden, having one [child – MN] already entails strenuous effort! And then [there was] also a policy, a policy which only allowed us to have one.(Tianmei, p.18)

Also Chunyu, looking from the perspective of hindsight, mentioned that it would have been good to have another child, so that her only daughter would not be lonely. But when she was younger she simply did not even have time to consider it and, on the top of that, she knew that having a second child would mean losing her job and benefits. But even with one child only and both parents working full time, it was not easy:

> Although our two-person income was not much, we still had to hire a nanny to bring her [the daughter –MN] up. The 60 RMB of every month of work [of the nanny – MN] was more than my…Almost all of mine… It was just all my monthly wages. At that time, my salary was higher than the one of her [daughter's – MN] dad, because my job was more dangerous as there was poison [because of the process of electroplating – MN]. (Chunyu, p.36)

Would having two children make it even more difficult for Chunyu and her husband? Maybe. Undoubtedly it would be unwise to argue categorically that having to care for eight children before was easier than caring for only one now. However, it seems that caring for one only – in the reality of the high standards of the quality of childcare and housework – can be exhausting. What is more, as parents have only one chance to have a successful child, they – or rather mothers - do everything for that child. They know that the world is highly competitive – the government does not

guarantee employment, housing or retirement. As Taoyu said about raising children before:

> It [baby – MN] only had to appear and grow up every day. Growing up healthy, having three meals, having vegetables and rice and whatever to eat, that was it. There was no thinking over about how to raise a child. Just that way. (Taoyu, p.26)

This is why parents nowadays force their children to be 'over prepared' and competitive – and at the same time they take their children's childhood away and make them unhappy. In the end, having an extracurricular class every day is not what children naturally want. This tendency in the newly emerged market economy has been additionally reinforced by the one-child policy – as because of it the pressure on the only child, as well as on the parents, is even greater, because there just will not be a second chance. Furthermore, allowing children to study all the time, mothers do everything else – clean, cook, wash clothes, pack the bags, not to mention drive the child around to schools and activity centres. This treadmill does not end when the children grow up, because sooner or later grandchildren appear and so somebody is needed to care for them while their mothers are at work. This is how caring for only one child, but with the highest possible standards demanded, might not be easier than caring for many in times when 'all' you had to do was, basically, feed them.

7.6.2 Children's, relatives, grandchildren… the need never ends

While the stories told above about a lack of energy being the main reason for not having more children and the burden connected with having only one, it seems necessary to elaborate on the topic of what those caring burdens, supposedly diminished by the one-child policy, are. As in the previous part of this chapter I have already highlighted the problem of housework, in this part I will focused more on the issues of caring for family members, highlighting the never-ending 'demand' of the free-of-charge labour of love.

Kunyao, who, as I have pointed out, is in an extremely difficult situation, has been in the position of carer for as long as she can remember. After her divorce, when she was left alone with her sick daughter, the silver lining of her situation was the fact

that she had her parents who, before the Cultural Revolution, worked as a teacher and journalist and could help her financially. She did not work after the divorce, taking care of her daughter and her parents' everyday lives and needs. She had to start working full time again after the death of her parents. As the only experience she had was working as a salesperson in the market, it was not easy for her to find a job. What is more, Kunyao feels guilty for not having a lot of time to care for her daughter and she thinks this is why she blames her for the divorce and for the low quality of their life. But Kunyao is currently not only caring and providing for her daughter, who is studying at university, but for her older brother, who is also divorced and who was fired from his work before reaching retirement age, as well. She told me her brother's wife divorced him after realizing he was infertile, although initially she thought she was the 'guilty' one and hence decided to adopt a baby girl from the 'excess' of the one-child policy quota. When I talked to Kunyao about her caring duties, she said that she has absolutely no free time. She has never gone anywhere outside the city she lives in. On top of that, she is now helping her landlady, whose daughter migrated to the USA, in order to get some extra money, especially as her daughter constantly demands new clothes, shoes and cell phones, calling Kunyao sometimes in the middle of the night and asking her to transfer money. When I asked her what she would like to do if she had some free time, she said:

> I couldn't [do something else-MN]. I am used to doing this and that without a break. At most I would sleep a bit longer. (Kunyao, p.19)

Guifan, who is currently 58 and has only one son who is about to marry, has also not been relieved from caring duties. She cares for her own household and her parents, even though she has five other siblings – two older sisters, one older and two younger brothers. Her parents live in the same apartment with her younger brother and his family – but it is she who helps the parents with everyday tasks. Her brother did not even come once to the hospital when Guifan's father was recovering after a procedure. Her example clearly shows the discrepancy between the popular belief in the concept of filial duty and the reality, in which parents depending on their son really depend on the daughter-in-law, but even more often on their own daughter. Guifan, who is now retired and volunteers in one of community centres, said:

> Every week I have to go back [to my parents' house] two-three times, help them to buy vegetables, clean a bit. About hygiene… after all, in their age [93 and 95 years old –MN] taking care of hygiene is not easy. I also wouldn't let them do it [themselves]. I am their daughter. I have a duty to care for them. So I am just constantly hurriedly going around to [their] home, then run to the community centre and my home… I have three households, as this [the community centre] can be said to be my second home. (Guifan, p.2)

On top of this, Guifan is also 'preparing' for her role of grandmother. As she told me, her son is getting married to a girl who has two younger brothers, so she knows that the 'other grandma' will not be of any help, as she would rather dedicate her time to her sons' children.

This expectations are a reality for Wang Fang, who has been taking care of her now 15-year-old grandson since he was two years old and helps her daughter to pay for his education as well. As her son has also just become a father, she is prepared that after her daughter-in-law goes back to work, they might need her help with a baby as well. Taking her life-long job of carer, it does not come as a surprise that Wang Fang is relieved that her children are not planning to have more offspring.

Pingning helps to care for her daughter's only son – a 'miracle' baby as the son-in-law has some sexual dysfunction issues and Pingning's daughter remained a virgin for 5 years after getting married, finally giving birth at the age of 37. Terrified of any risk to her daughter's pregnancy, Pingning took her to and from work every day and now helps with her young grandson, even though she originally hoped that the other set of grandparents would help as well. She said:

> But now I also continue to help, taking care of my grandson every day. Just forget about that I myself might have some gatherings with friends… I cannot join them. My sister is in the USA, often inviting me to go to visit her, but because of taking care of the grandson I have no option of going anywhere. Even when I am sick, I also don't say anything to my daughter's parents-in-law, to not bother them. (Pingning, p.19-20)

Having support from her husband certainly makes it easier for Pingning, but she is also left without any choice. She will not leave her daughter, who is working full time and often has to stay for extra hours in the office alone. So all she can do is to keep on performing the labour of love.

7.6.3 Who will care for me?

While all of the women I interviewed had been a carer at some point of their lives, and many have been carers forever, another issue of care comes to mind when exploring the literature on the one-child policy. With the 'paranoia' of a rapidly aging population so vastly publicized, it seems only logical to explore what plans for their old age and potential sickness and need of constant care, the women who are today in their 50s and 60s have.

Wang Fang, who in her youth worked as a propagandist of the one-child policy herself, realizes now that welfare system did not keep up with the social change brought about by the policy. She said:

> The worst effect [of the one-child policy] is because… whether the society development and national condition can or not keep up. It's just that if it cannot keep up, it's like I've just said. One generation of children and parents… All together is four old people… If three generations are living under the same roof how many elderly people is it? How many elderly people's health is good? If social welfare can keep up that would be the best… but these kind of issues need to be advocated. (Wang Fang, p. 27)

Even as Wang Fang and other women I spoke with are afraid about becoming a burden on their children, the difficulty of finding (and paying) for access to some care facilities are, as they say, almost impossible. As so, until a time when care becomes socialized, care over the elderly will have to be solved within the family. And it seems that my interviewees do realize that. When I asked Wang Fang who would help her when or if she needs constant care, she said it would be her daughter, because she will surely provide better care than her daughter-in-law. The option of her son caring for her did not even cross the mind. The role of the son as a possible carer was totally ignored. Wang Fang claimed that this is exactly why people in the city want to have girls, daughters are simply considered to be better carers. She said:

> I think that maybe daughters are more considerate… Because for a mother to be taken care of by a daughter, is very convenient. But the son, how is it convenient? It's just that the daughter-in-law is not somebody whom you gave birth to, she is not your own daughter. There might be some good [daughters-in-law], but maybe they're still not as close as a daughter. So now Chinese people, especially in the cities, have changed their way of thinking,

> [wanting] to have a daughter, [who will be] more considerate. (Wang Fang, p.25).

When I asked Taoyu the same exact question – who will care for her in her old age - at the beginning her answer seemed to be the absolute opposite of the one given to me by Wang Fang. She was very clear in saying that it is her son who will take care of her, as her daughter has her own family and responsibility. But then, the meaning of the 'son taking care of me' was clarified and rather demystified, when Taoyu continued:

> It is not the same with the son. The son and daughter-in-law must, definitely must [take care of elderly parents]. If it wasn't like this, why would everyone still want to give birth to a son? (Taoyu, p.25)

However, when we take into consideration Taoyu's experience of women being the only care giver, it seems rather clear that in her expectations it would be the job of the daughter-in-law to actually provide care, just as the tradition of the old gender role division dictates and according to which she grew up and raised her children. The issue is, whether her future daughter-in-law will share these convictions. And even if she does not, what would her chance be of successfully opposing them?

Taoyu's example was, however, rather an exception than a rule. Other women were more open to an alternative solution for care of the elderly, although they were still convinced that having a daughter is better, as she will become more attached to the family. Chunyu has expressed her views on the idea of the socialization of care as something that is necessary, yet unable to function well in China, where there are no people who want to work as professional carers for the elderly. But even though people of her generation – in contrast to previous ones – have accepted the fact that one child simply will not be able to care for many elderly people, she said:

> We are also saying we cannot become a burden to our child. Now our parents are all saying that they wouldn't go to an old people's home. It is because they have many sons, so why go to an elderly home? But our generation, we can understand that, we can stand it. But to say going to the elderly home means going where? (Chunyu, p. 52-3)

The problem Chunyu elaborated on in regards to institutionalized care was the fact that she suspects that even if old people's homes will become more popular, they will be a private businesses and a lot of money would be required in order to

use them. A similar worry was expressed by Qiaoli when we discussed the issue of caring for the elderly and the need to socialize care and increase the involvement of the state in order to help not only with the issue of gender equality but also with the negative outcomes of the one-child policy. She said:

> I'm afraid I will not have anything to depend on… it's not a country for old men… What I am worried most about is an unstable society… Because if the society is not stable, then there is nothing to depend on. I hope that the country's economy will be better and better, and then the policies will be better too. (Qiaoli, p.21)

As the women I spoke to are aware that their one child, or one daughter-in-law, will not be able to handle all the care duties, if such would be required from both sets of parents and parents in law (not to mention children), many of them expressed the need for institutionalized and socialized care. But, as Wang Fang mentioned, the state did not keep up with the changes and needs of people and places in such institutions are very limited, not to mention the institutions themselves are of dubious quality, as being a carer is still considered as a job of low value. Even though such a job might prove soon to be indispensable.

7.6.4 The 'natural' role of women unchallenged

Detailed analysis of the issue of caring and women's experience of it has revealed the misconceptions about the role of the one-child policy in reducing caring responsibilities and hence benefiting women, as well as highlighted the internalized belief that caring is a 'natural' task for women, who are simply deemed to be better at it. As the women I spoke with highlighted the 'solitude' of the caring responsibility even for one child as the main difficulty and reason for not having more children, it does not seem that the one-child policy has in any way relieved that burden. And how could it have? As together with the one-child policy China has shifted to a market economy and the state has withdrawn from its role of socialized caring and all of the responsibility for caring became the family's, which in practice and in accordance to thousands years of tradition meant women. This is quite clearly visible from the stories told above – these women are caring for their homes, children, grandchildren, parents and brothers. What is more, they are doing it even if during their childhood

they were not, because it was taken over by their mothers or elder sisters. And as I have highlighted, even though they claim to be fair towards their children of both sexes, they still expect girls – be it their own daughter or daughter-in-law – to be the one who does the caring, because there seems to be no alternative. Additionally, it appears as though the number of children in families will not change this – as long as women are thought of as natural carers and the idea of the socialization of care becomes part of the past, what do we really expect to change?

7.7 Conclusion

The image that emerges from the analysis of the 'transitional' generation of Chinese women becomes one of the so called lost generation - torn by two worlds and different realities, both of which were not in their favour. But it is exactly because of the diversity of the times their stories happened in that they illustrate perfectly the issue of the systems of the state, market and culture working together and 'creating' the reality of women and all of its gendered aspects. To provide an example, in the times of Mao's socialism and collectivism, women were supposed to be holding half of the sky and their participation in labour market was nearly universal. However, this did not change the fact that they remained, just as before, to be considered the 'natural' carers. The experiment of the socialization of care in China, even though, in its assumption, was beneficial for women, did not bring the desired results. Women, mothers and daughters alike, were and are still the ones who have to care for family members and for the house. The questionable equality in the labour market (which I have also discussed in the previous chapters) did not really change the problem of the second shift. This generation of women was just as responsible for housework and caring duties in big families, in which they were caring for younger siblings, as they are in the newly emerged nuclear families whose composition has changed as a result of the one-child policy. Even though the number of children has changed, the experience of women tells us that the burden did not, as the standard of both housework and childcare has increased remarkably in post-socialist China. This all clearly shows that just change and regulation of the family size in order to control demographic development is not a way to change social relationships. In order to

achieve this, every social practice, system and ideology would have to be changed rather than the number of children in the family only.

As my interviewees themselves were denied access to education, but, what must be stressed, not because they had brothers, but because the political reality, especially of the Cultural Revolution, made it impossible for them to study – they tried to do their best to help their child(ren) to study as much as they can, regardless of the sex of the child. As they themselves realized that a lack of skills and education makes it almost impossible to survive in the new reality of the market economy, they want their children to have a brighter future and more options then they had, still believing that a school degree would be enough to guarantee them this. What is more, these women have become probably the biggest 'victims' of the economic miracle of China – they didn't 'fit' with the demand for efficiency and profitability from the free market, so they were left in low paid jobs or even without permanent employment and hence without a reasonable retirement fund. This is also why making their usually only child successful became so important. Because of the lack of support from the state for the care of the elderly, these women will have to depend on their children – or to be more precise, on their daughters or daughters-in-law. However, as the processes of marketization and privatisation of family life are moving forwards very quickly, by the time these women need intensive care, it is doubtful whether daughters and daughters-in-law will be able to provide it. From the stories told above it is clear that being a filial son is still regarded as a virtue and something more of a personal choice, but being an obedient daughter is a requirement. This shows the way in which my interviewees have accepted existing gender inequalities and, by internalizing them, they do not even realize that they themselves are actively participating in the constant recreation and reconstruction of the ideologies of the gendered division of labour and even its justification due to biological reasons. The best example to present here is the nearly universal preference for having a daughter which the women I spoke with regard as being an open-minded attitude. But in reality it is just the continuation of traditional beliefs and gendered norms, performed on women by women. What has to be realized is that the preference of girls - because they are more obedient or because they are better carers – does not lead to liberation of gendered ideology, but becomes simply

another form of the manifestation of exactly the same system of ideas. Naturally, the reasons for preference matter, but the main assumption is, in my understanding, a lack of superiority of any gender. Without it, the concept of equality – also the one based on gender – is being simply distorted and becomes a perfect tool for maintaining, and even deepening, existing systems.

CHAPTER EIGHT. CONCLUSION – DISCOVERY CONSISTS NOT IN SEEING NEW LANDSCAPES, BUT IN HAVING NEW EYES

8.1 Introduction

Being in force for nearly 40 years, the family planning policy, in its various forms and strictness, have shaped today's China and influenced the lives of millions of people. And these lives, with emphasis on the lives of women, and the impact of the so called one-child policy had on their gendered lives and identity, were the central point of this thesis. Moving beyond the positivistic approach of the demographic perspective, I have focused on the nearly completely neglected aspect of the impact of the one-child policy on gender equality, highlighting the fact that policies should never be analysed in the 'void', and, at the same time, challenging the myths and 'universalized truths' about the policy's implication, which has dominated the academia on this topic.

In this concluding chapter, I will provide a summary on the similarities and differences between the experiences of three groups of women discussed in the previous chapters on data analysis, focusing again on the themes of education and employment, family and intimate relationships, childbearing and body politics and caring. This will be followed by some reflections regarding the implications of the result of this study to the theory applied to this research, as well as the implication for the policy itself. The chapter will finish with a part elaborating on certain limitations of this study and suggestions for its further development.

8.2 The one-child policy and gender equality - Myths revisited

The main question I have focused on in this research project was whether the one-child policy can be considered as being beneficial for women and having a positive outcome for gender equality in China in general. I will try to answer that question, even though its answer cannot be explicit. But, on the whole, even though the one-child policy could be considered as beneficial in a few aspects, in the vast majority of cases it did and does not bridge, but rather widens the gaps between men

and women. In the following part I will explain the ways in which these gaps are widening, dividing the explanation into four themes of education and employment, family and intimate relationships, childbearing and body politics and caring.

The indispensable step at this point is to mark, once more and very clearly, the 'connection' of the themes to the theoretical framework, as its clarity might have 'got lost' in the abundance of data and stories told in the empirical chapters of the thesis. Reminding again about the usage of post-structural feminist approach and life course perspective, I feel obliged to highlight again that both post-structuralism (and post- structural feminism) and life course perspective have broad approaches and diverse interpretations. Hence in my approach to it I am not able to cover all the discussions that have been raised in the vast body of scholarship on the topic. Nevertheless, in the whole process of research and thesis writing, the core of the analysis lied in the particularity of the context of China, as well as the dominant concepts of the one-child policy's influence on gender equality and feminist debates related to these concepts.

As China cannot be classified nor as a fully capitalist, nor as a fully socialist state, the socialist feminist analysis doesn't hold as it "postulates the existence of two separate but interlocking sets of social relations, capitalism and patriarchy, each with a material base, each with its own dynamic" (Hartmann, 1981:364) – and I have highlighted many times already that this is not enough to evaluate the situation of women in China, as the additional factor and force of the state, with its top - down way of policy making and control over every aspect of life of Chinese people, has to be, colloquially speaking, taken into equation. We must remember that Chinese state has a contributing power in creation of dominant discourses (understood in Foucauldian way). And, as Scott (1988) pointed out:

> Discursive fields overlap, influence, and compete with one another; they appeal to one another's 'truth's' for authority and legitimation. These truths are assumed to be outside human invention, either already known and self-evident or discoverable thought scientific inquiry. Precisely because they are assigned the status of objective knowledge, they seem to be beyond dispute and thus serve as a powerful legitimating function. (p. 35-6)

The theme of education and employment evolves directly form the feminist debate on women, the state and the market and the role of the state, in Chinese reality of the top-down implementation of the policy, in affecting the opportunities for women, as well as from the debate of women and social stratification. It is important to remember always that material depravity is not absent from the post-structural analysis and that women of different background can have very different experience of the family planning policy – and that is why, as I have mentioned before, I have tried to 'incorporate' into this research women of different socio-economic statuses. As one of the 'undisputed truths' related to the one-child policy is that it allowed better education and hence competitiveness in the labour market, focusing on this theme allowed us to verify whether an increase in cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is enough to change the situation of women in nowadays China's reality – or, in other words, whether the cultural capital is the one that counts the most in 'making' somebody a winner of the present system. And, as it was seen from the stories of my interviewees, it is not really the case, as even educated women are usually stuck in the lower paid jobs which they quit after becoming mothers and having to care for the house and the family.

The theme of family and intimate relationships evolves from the feminist debate of women, family and caring, as well as, again, the debate on social stratification. Thanks to the one-child policy women were supposed to become more financially independent and hence their concept of marriage as the only way for the economic stability and wellbeing should 'alter' towards the concept of Bauman's (2013) 'liquid love' and Giddens'(1992) 'pure relationships'. However, it seems that not only it did not happen, but the importance of the symbolic capital (Bourdieu,1980) and youth has led to the reinforcement of the traditional concept of marriage and the domination of the discourse that women of certain age (27 years old!!!) are too old to be wanted and hence become leftover. And, what is not less important, among three groups of women I have talked to, marriage remained the natural 'course of action' and any alternative – like in a case of Kunyao who would prefer for her daughter to be in the unhappy marriage than being gay – is being feared as it is not something normalized and justified.

While the theme of childbearing and body politics is self-explanatory and it evolves from the feminist debate on body politics and the issues evolving around the discourses of sex selective abortions and black kids without *hukou* due to the one-child policy, the theme of care (evolving from the debate on women, family and care) encompasses all the others. It provides not only a clear example of the way in which the discourse of 'naturalness' of women's role of a carer persists, but also shows how the Bourdieu's (1990) concepts of field and habitat 'come to life', explaining the way in which social structures are being internalized, rationalised and reproduced – in other words, showing how they became dominant, taken for granted and not challenged. We could have observed it in all three groups of interviewed women. Guifan is taking care of her elderly parents because she is a daughter and hence it's a must for her – a belief that has been shared in families in China for many generations. Dantong, whose mother has been always responsible for the house work (and who worked 'outside' full time as well), claims that she wants to avoid the same faith, but also admits that family would always be the most important to her. She will be ready to quit her job if it interfered with her childcare responsibilities. Moreover, she also claimed that she will do anything to facilitate her future husband's promotion.

While each of the themes and findings resulting from data analysis and 'crosschecking' the experience of three groups of women (young and single, middle-aged and married, elderly and retired) will be summarized below, it is important to highlight that the focus of each theme's analysis was pinned at the discussion of how the discourses grouped in each theme have reinforced the impact of the one-child policy on Chinese women and gender equality.

8.2.1 Education and employment

One of the recurring assumption of existing studies on the one-child policy and its effects claims that the policy became the factor which allows the young generation of Chinese women to obtain a good education. This 'empowering' attribute of the one-child policy was usually associated with the belief that singleton girls did not have to compete for the family's resources with boys, who were

traditionally seen as the breadwinners for the family and providers of financial security for the parents in their old age. The one-child policy, which in one generation changed the composition of families from large to ones with one or a maximum of two children only, was supposed to change the status of girls, who, having been given access to education, could fairly compete in the labour market.

This assumption of the positive outcome of the policy in regard to gender equality faces, however, at least two main concerns. First of all, while the data concerning girls' participation in schooling after the introduction of the one-child policy is impressive, it tends to neglect the fact that when the first generation of children born under the one-child policy were starting to attend school, the policy of free and mandatory basic education was introduced. According to it, all children across China had to attend school for nine years and, furthermore, their parents did not have to pay for it. With this in mind, the statistical data of nearly universal school attendance rate for both boys and girls seems rather unsurprising – yet it did not happen due to the fertility control implemented in the top-down manner by the Chinese state and a lack of brothers to compete with.

While in this way we can explain universal and equal access to primary and junior high schools, it might be argued that the one-child policy has benefited girls when it comes to tertiary education. After all, as I have mentioned in the previous chapters, there are currently more girls than boys who attend universities in China. However, it seems that, again, the one-child policy is not the only factor here. Those young girls who do have brothers have not experienced any kind of 'discrimination' when compared to their siblings. What actually happened is that many of those girls got an even better education then their brothers did, mainly because of the relatively fair examination system in China – they simply did better in the exam than their brothers.

What helps to strengthen the points made and to highlight the fact that the number of children does not necessarily determine the chances of girls to get a good education, is the experience of other generations of women who grew up during the socialist period of Chinese history and during the time of economic reforms. What becomes clear after comparing the experiences of different generations of women is that the infamous preference for boys, when it comes to access to education, is limited to the experience of, what I called, the middle-aged and married women,

especially those women who are in their late 30s and early 40s. The main reason for that is the fact that their school years happened at the time of the economic reforms, when education was expensive and not mandatory. What supports this claim even further is that although women from the elderly cohort did not have a chance to get higher education because of the Cultural Revolution and, importantly, the same thing happened to their brothers, the majority of them went to high school because the socialist state not only 'promoted' the slogan of women holding half of the sky, but was also offering free schooling. What is more, according to the stories told by some of the participants from the elderly and retired women group, their older sisters (and brothers) did get a chance to study at university level, but this privilege was 'connected' to the economic background of the family, rather than to the number of children it had.

The supposedly beneficial effects of the one-child policy for gender equality become even more doubtful when we examine the situation of women in the labour market. In a nutshell, it seems that as more women get university diplomas, the less they work outside of home. While for women from the elderly and retired group employment was nearly universal, mainly due to the socialist system which 'excluded' the possibility of unemployment, the participation of the younger generation in the labour market has been decreasing since the implementation of the economic reforms and the introduction of the one-child policy. My research has not only, in a sense, reinforced the assumption of the phenomenon of so called 'rice bowl of youth', which assumes that the employment rates for Chinese women are highest when they are young (even though they do still experience strong gender discrimination and the thickening of the glass ceiling), but when they start their own family, they often leave their jobs in order to care for their (usually only) child. Furthermore, they often do this not because of 'free choice', which is glorified in neo-liberal perspectives, but because it is impossible to combine full-time employment and the demands of the market economy with the ideology of caring, on which I will focus in a separate section.

8.2.2 Family and intimate relationships

When it comes to the topic of family and intimate relationships in connection to the one-child policy, the main area of verification regards the relationships within families and the concept of marriage. The assumptions are as follows: women, who were, because of the one-child policy, better educated and, in theory, more competitive in the labour market, were also relieved of the burden of multiple childbearing and childrearing, because they 'only' have one child – therefore, the relationship between family members should strengthen and improve. What is more, the one-child policy was supposed to make women more 'powerful' and independent (due to their competitiveness in the labour market), which leads to the assumption that in today's China we could talk about liquid love (Bauman, 2013) and 'pure relationships' (Giddens, 1992), based not on the need of economic stability, but more romantic and 'voluntary' understandings of love and affinity.

However, while cross-checking the situation in three different generations of Chinese women – the eldest of which having numerous siblings and the youngest being only children - their relationships with their parents did not become deeper. The main reason for this is the fact that gender roles in families have not been altered much by the radical change in family composition. Just as in the elderly and middle-aged groups, in the youngest generation's families it was mothers only who were responsible for the house and for childcare, no matter whether they were also working outside of the house or not. In the generation of elderly and retired women many tasks were admittedly shifted to older sisters, as mothers (just like fathers) were working long hours in their *danwei*, but nevertheless these tasks remained the domain of women and of women only. Additionally, it seems that the situation of the youngest one-child policy generation will not change a great deal. Even though young girls were not burdened by housework in their family homes (as their only responsibility was to study), they will take over this burden when they settle down themselves. The deeply internalized myth of women as a carer and man as a breadwinner is, in their stories, still very pronounced, even though their initial attitude to the problem is that they do not want to be like their mothers – always busy, preoccupied and unable to have time for themselves. And unless the burden of

housework and caring is shared, we cannot expect better parent-children relationships, even if the number of children, due to the one-child policy, is so greatly limited. This is the experience which none of the groups had a chance to enjoy, even during the socialist period, when communes were supposed to take over many tasks. And at this point it should be reiterated – the policy itself cannot solve these issues, because of their deep embodiment in everyday practices and internalization of gender inequalities even by those who lose the most by their constant (even if in changed forms) existence.

The situation with the concept of marriage is similar - despite the experiences of the socialist state (the elderly and retired group of women) and the one-child policy (all of the groups), the main concept of marriage as something natural and 'obligatory' for women has not changed much, not to mention that women remain 'trapped' in unhappy marriages and the decision of divorce is still mainly a decision taken by the man. Women often simply cannot afford to get a divorce as they do not work or earn less, care for the baby and hence have no certainty of financial security in the future.

This necessity of marriage as a way of fulfilling ones 'womanhood' is also still very pronounced among the young generation of Chinese women. The fact that many young Chinese women want to get married is not a special case; it is probably nearly a universal tendency. But taking into consideration the vastly criticized outcome of the one-child policy, the horrifying statistical data that men significantly outnumber women due to intensified practices of sex selective abortions – the fact that young girls feel the need to 'hurry up' and tie the knot as soon as possible is more puzzling. Putting it in the neo-liberal and market-oriented way of reasoning – the less women there are in comparison to man, and assuming, as it has been in the literature on the so-called bachelor army in China, that every man wants to marry (once only, of course) with a women slightly younger than himself – women should not feel any worry about not being able to find a partner. Yet young girls in China, despite the one-child policy, believe that their value lies in their looks and, especially, their youth. Therefore, if you want to get married, you better do it while you are young, otherwise nobody will want you. This way of thinking is additionally intensified by the discourse of the so-called leftover women – the independent and successful generation of 'little empresses', who do not want to get married. In contrast to their grandmothers,

who, according to the family planning policy at the time, were ‘awarded’ by postponing marriage and childbirth – be it by prolonged maternity leave or additional bonuses to their salary – the younger generation of girls is being ‘punished’ for doing or wanting to do the same. If they want to postpone settling down or refuse the concept whatsoever, they are labelled as something of less value and something that nobody wants. It shows very clearly how the concept of late or no marriage (and children) has changed from being desired by the state (as a tool to facilitate economic growth) to being problematic and discouraged (out of the fear of economic growth being halted).

This change in the state’s rhetoric helps one to understand that in governing influenced by neo-liberal philosophy and a belief in the effectiveness of the ‘invisible hand of the market’ policies are not ‘aimed’ at being beneficial for a certain group of people (in the case of this research – Chinese women). They rather become a tool to ‘promote’ and ‘justify’ the self-interest of those who have the power to create the universal truths and who want to keep that power in their hands. The ‘maintenance’ of inequalities can be ‘dressed-up’ as the only way of development (which, in the long run, is supposed to be good for everyone) or as a way of maintaining social harmony and paying tribute to traditional values. No matter the explanation, the outcome is, however, the same – the disadvantaged position of women does not change.

However, the sole fact that there is a chance to become ‘leftover’ shows that there is a small change happening. This change is, however, relatively rare and socially ostracized. And it makes us think even more that, in regards to gender equality, there has been a pronounced step back. The man who cannot find a wife is seen as a victim, while the woman who does not want to get married is considered selfish and picky. This also points to the fact that the ‘disproportion’ in the sex ratio and that there is more men than women does not imply that women are more valuable, have more ‘bargaining’ power or can be less dependent on men. On the contrary, the traditional ideology of family and marriage still prevails, showing that ideologies and ‘reality’ are not always coherent. In the discussion of women’s pickiness, it is usually ‘manifested’ in their requirements towards a future partner – he needs to be financially independent, and own an apartment and a car. Although,

somehow a man's reluctance to marry a woman who is over 27 years old is not considered as being 'picky', the most important picture that emerges here is that the understanding of intimate relationships in China is still based on the ideology on the traditional gender division of labour. Girls are looking for a 'rich' boy who will be the proverbial breadwinner, while boys want to marry a young girl who will take care of the family. In these circumstances, we cannot talk about pure relationships and a change in the concept of marriage in the case of China today.

'Cross-checking' of the different women's experiences revealed how this situation is understood. It seems that many young women know that they might not be able to make enough money to get financial security themselves – they are facing a pay gap, discrimination in the labour market and the glass ceiling. Their experiences and the experiences of their mothers' generation tells them that they might need to quit their job and stay at home. Those of them who have brothers also know that parents will dedicate the family savings for an apartment for the boy so he will be able to get married – a socially constructed discourse which creates a vicious cycle. In these circumstances it seems sensible to assume that marriage is still a way for women to obtain financial stability and security. And for many of these young women it might be the only possible way, even despite their education and skills, and the expectations which the one-child policy has brought.

8.2.3 Childbearing and body politics

The idea of a forcefully implemented one-child policy is definitely the one which has been most popularized and is probably most horrifying. Forced abortions and sterilizations for those who disobeyed regulations, as well as sex selective abortions performed by families craving a son and, as an effect, the imbalanced sex ratio in China, were wildly discussed both in academia, as well as in the media. The universal introduction and access to contraceptives, extorted by the introduction of the one-child policy, has then, on the one hand, given women certain control over their fertility (just as some of my participants have said – nobody really wanted to give birth to 8 children in a row) and, according to Pan Suiming (1994), made it possible to 'see' sex as having different purposes than reproduction only, but on the other

hand, because of the state's policy and the culture, it has become a tool that has meant that women's fertility is controlled by everything and everyone but themselves. The elderly and middle-aged groups of women were those whose bodies were under strictest control, because the strictest form of the policy was in force at the time they were becoming mothers. The pressure these women felt and which was put on them by family members is difficult to overestimate – be it through sex preference which was manifested in these women going through an abortion to get another chance to have a baby of the desired sex or giving birth to a baby which will not have any legal rights.

The interviewees from the middle-aged and married and elderly and retired groups, as mentioned before, did experience a lot of this pressure first-hand. Some of them were born without a permit and were raised by relatives, some experienced a lot of pressure during pregnancy or got clear instructions about what would be done if the second foetus was not of the desired sex and some even had to face a divorce after not fulfilling their traditional role of giving birth to a son and with the one-child policy in force their chances to fulfil this 'duty' were rather limited. Nonetheless, no matter which situations these women were faced with – the whole 'responsibility' for fertility and childbearing was theirs. These convictions resonate in the experience of the youngest generation view on black children and selective abortions as the fault of women, as well as the fear of not being loved by their mothers, who supposedly craved a boy.

As a matter of fact, the issue of sex preference for a baby was the issue that reoccurred constantly in the literature on the one-child policy. While the traditional preference of boys in Chinese families led to the aforementioned imbalanced sex ratios, newer research has found that people in China, especially those who live in the city, if confronted with a choice of the sex of the baby if they at the time could only have one, declared a preference for a baby girl (Currier, 2008). This led to the assumption that there is no more prejudice towards girls and, even, that this preference has led to the 'empowerment' of women. However, in my research I verified this conviction and I have focused on the reasons for the supposed alternation in the preference of the sex of babies in China. While all the generations expressed that they would prefer to have a girl, even though women of the elder

generation admitted it 'retrospectively' as they originally wanted boys but 'appreciated' having girls later on, the reason for this preferences shows clearly that girls are preferred because they make better carers and are cheaper than boys and because you do not need to provide them with an apartment. This has proven that we cannot talk about gender equality or 'empowerment', but rather we must discuss reinforcement of the traditional conviction of women's responsibility and belief in their 'natural predisposition' to be carer. It is the same old song, just sang with a different tune.

8.2.4 Care

Upon closer inspection, we can actually see that all the issues discussed here are in a larger or smaller extent connected to the issue of caring. The topic of caring is one of the most significant not only in feminist academia but also in any research related to the one-child policy. It is because of this policy that China is facing the 'increased' issue of an aging population and the problem of singletons who will have to care for numerous elderly members of their families. It also means that in many families one child is being looked after by six grownups, who are spoiling this child to an obscene level, but also require a lot from him or her, as it is their only chance to get security in their old age. Putting the myth concerning the aging population aside, because we have elaborated on it in the previous chapters, what I believed was worth verifying was the experience of the older generation who already has grown up children, as well as the youngest generation's perspective on the issue of their parents getting old someday and requiring constant help. Again, this cross-checking of the experience and opinions of different generations pointed to the deconstruction of the myth of the one-child policy as the main reason for the problem of caring for the elderly. I have found that for people from the elderly generation, who have many siblings, the care of elderly members of the family usually falls on one person only – be it a daughter or daughter-in-law. And for the youngest generation of Chinese women this persistent belief that it is their responsibility to perform the 'labour of love', joined with the reality of the market economy after economic reforms which put a kibosh on the universal employment

of women and new possibilities of mobility within China, might be more then they can handle. The solution these women have found – hiring somebody to help with that burden- might not solve the problem. First of all, while hiring a helper can help with relieving the burden of care, it will be limited only to those who have enough money. In the end and especially if women quit their paid jobs to care for children or elderly parents, this solution might become too expensive even for the middle income group. What is more, it will not really challenge the value and importance of care work. This is why the so-called 4-2-1 phenomenon should be rethought as one regarding women, rather than all singletons in China – in the end, as I have shown before, they will be the ones from whom the labour of love will be requested and required, even though they believe they have found a solution.

While providing a new interpretation of the 4-2-1 phenomenon, the stories of the women I have interviewed also make the term of 'filial piety' at the very least questionable. Being a considerate son is seen as an 'achievement' that reflects well on him. However, being an obedient daughter or daughter-in-law seems to be perceived as something normal and natural and potentially problematic if this requirement is not fulfilled, which was expressed by one of my interviewees, who was worried about whether the wife of her brother would be filial enough to take good care of her parents. And in the end, that is the main reason why the vast majority of my interviewees wanted to have a daughter – because she will be more considerate and attached to her family, which means that she will be a better carer in the future. Having said that, I feel it is important to highlight one more time that the reasons for the preference of a child's sex and that, in the framework of gender equality, the conviction and internalization of ANY 'predestined' roles based on biological gender, leads to a significant step back.

8.3 Theoretical implications

After summarizing the findings on this research under the framework of post-structural feminist analysis and the life course perspective, which highlighted the ways in which forces of the state, the market and culture use and take from (or to be more precise, hijack) the discourse of gender equality both to 'popularize' and boost

the acceptance and rationale of the one-child policy, as well as its outcomes, I will move on to the discussion of the insights which emerged after applying these perspective to the research on China. Firstly, I will elaborate on the context of China, in which ideologies of a socialist state, a market economy and culture are mixed together and create a unique amalgam of discourses, which has to be considered when establishing the usefulness (or non-usefulness) of certain aspects of the chosen perspective. Then, I will move on the debate of whether Western theory can be applied to research on China, elaborating it further through the discussion of the disputes on inequalities in capitalist and socialist states, the issue of interpretation and material deprivation and the discussion of modernity and post-modernity.

8.3.1 The context of China

I have already highlighted the fact that the strength of post-structural theory lies it its ability to challenge myths and 'undisputed' ideologies. But, what we must keep in mind, in present day China we are looking at a very complex mix of ideologies, which tend to be conflicting and confusing. In this mix socialism blends with (a particular interpretation of) Confucianism and neo-liberalism. This creates a situation in which officially everyone claims to support the concept of gender equality, but what is done – both politically and on a more personal level of the interpretation of the term - might not actually lead to this and the persistence of gender inequalities goes 'unnoticed'.

This situation is visible in the interviews which I conducted for this research. Guifan (58 years old), despite having other siblings, is the only one who takes care of her parents who are in their 90s, even though they live in an apartment with Guifan's brother. She does not, however, feel 'disadvantaged', because she believes that as a daughter, it is her obligation and duty to care for her mother and father.

Taoyu (52) is convinced that she treats her son and a daughter equally. However, she admits that when it came to housework, it was only her daughter who would be given some responsibilities, while her son was never requested to do any housekeeping duties. What is more, she and her husband have dedicated all of the money they have saved to buying an apartment and a car for their son, justifying it

as ‘natural’ that you have to consider your son’s needs more, still believing that this is fair.

A further example is Jiaqing (43), who grew up in a large family with five sisters and two brothers, and claims that there was no preferential treatment of the boys in her family. However, when asked more questions, she mentioned that the boys were encouraged to study more and the girls were not, because their education would not bring any ‘reward’ to their parents. After all, upon getting married these girls will become a part of the husband’s family, in her parents’ eyes.

Yet another example is Dantong’s (28) perspective. As she is about to get married, she believes that housework and caring duties should be shared and divided between spouses. However, if she has to choose between her husband’s career and her own, she admits that she will support his and take care of the family, which, in the end, she finds more important than professional success.

In these examples we can see how the discourses of the (socialist?) state, which officially promotes gender equality, is mixed with cultural ‘heritage’ which defines clearly the gendered division of labour (men work outside the home, women inside) and neo-liberal ideologies which often tend to distort old cultural values, presenting them in a new form so as to justify different forms of exploitation. It is clearly visible in the discourse of ‘social harmony’ promoted by the Chinese government, which actually uses Confucianism to justify the cult (and need) of individualized responsibility of care, conveniently forgetting that Confucianism at its core is based on a collective paradigm.

8.3.2 China’s context and Western theory – is a merge possible?

While understanding the complexity of ideologies in China and the ways in which they are internalized and interpreted would not be possible without the theories of post-structural feminism and the life course perspective, we have to acknowledge the potentially problematic issue of whether these theories – as concepts developed in the West and in the Western context –can be applied to research carried out on China. After all, while Western culture is being seen as individual, Chinese culture is seen more as collective. Western countries have been (with the exception of Eastern

Europe) capitalist for hundreds of years, while China underwent a long period of socialism. What is more, it is widely acknowledged that that Eastern and Western cultures are completely different – while the former is considered as an 'outcome' of the Confucianist system of belief, the latter is supposedly based on the philosophy of ancient Greece. With such differences in context, can Western concepts help to deepen the understanding of Chinese culture and the meanings Chinese people construct?

My initial answer to this would be to say that this question should not even be asked. I have already mentioned that all modern societies are complex and that is why my framework and selection of the elements of it were decided with having the complexities of China in mind. This is exactly why the additional force of the state, as a factor operating together with culture and the market, was added. This is also why in the selection of the interviewees I focused on the diversity of experiences caused by socio-economic background, caring responsibility, number of children and personal relationship. Based on knowledge of the history, today's situation in China and literature on the one-child policy, I have created an interview guideline in which these complexities were taken into account. On the top of this, I believe that these adjustments did not have that much to do with the fact that China is not Western and hence the theories developed in the West are not applicable. To explain this point - Poland is probably considered a Western country, but it also has its own specifics and other aspects and elements - for example religion – which have to be taken into account. Every single society, both Western and non-Western, has its own specifics and characteristics - as I have mentioned numerous times. Additionally, what does it really mean to be 'Eastern' or 'Western'? Where is the border between them? This constructed distinctions and division has been, according to me, the biggest weakness of the works which tried to, not without the reason, challenge the domination of theories 'created' in 'Western world' – Connell's (2007) *Sothern Theory* (where is the border between south and north and what constitutes it?) and Chen's *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (would Asiacentrism be 'a better' alternative?) can serve as an example. Another question that we should ask is whether, for example, China is Confucianist in the same way it was thousands of years ago? Is the 'West' capitalist in the same way as Marx described it? Of course

not. In today's world, the multi-dimensional process of the dominance of neo-liberal thought has affected social, political, cultural and economic aspects of every place on earth and is being used as a justification of, for example, the need of top-down birth control planning as the only way to develop and return to 'traditional' Confucian values of the gender division of labour, the individualization of risk and as a way of justifying the state's insistence to keep welfare to a minimum. However, to go even further in a 'spirit' of post-structural analysis, I think we should challenge the basis of the doubt - that post-structural analysis is purely a 'Western invention' and hence cannot be integrated with the Chinese context. In the end the so-called 'invention' of post-structuralism, in opposition to theories of positivistic paradigm, is its focus on interpretations. And interpretivism has dominated Chinese philosophy and academia for thousands of years; Laozi's (Laozi, 2015) writings are just one example here. Having said that, can we actually say that post-structuralism is a Western invention, when positivist-interpretative discourse has been happening in Chinese philosophy as well, just many years earlier? And, what must be stressed one more time - the interpretivist paradigm which lies behind the post-structural perspective's epistemological assumption, gives the theory its strength to deconstruct taken-for-granted myths – and it does not really matter whether they are 'Eastern' or 'Western' ones.

Nevertheless, the context of China is specific, like the context of any country is, and hence the application of the theory needs some 'modifications'. In other words, for research focused on China, some of the implications of post-structuralism are useful, while others simply are not. In the following part I will focus on the main theoretical debates and the insight which this work has helped to bring to light after the application of the post-structural and life-course perspective on the research of China.

8.3.2.1 Inequalities in a capitalist state vs. an equal (???) socialist state

The main issue that we have to discuss in this debate is connected to the fact that the majority of theories on inequalities were 'constructed' in capitalist societies and hence the discussion evolves around the issue of class. However, in the case of China,

which officially persists on being a socialist state, the class division analysis does not really hold – in the end China is supposed to be a classless society. However, it is important to highlight the fact that although we cannot talk about class per se in the case of China, it does not necessarily imply that Chinese society is equal. In the complex reality of China, with its 'heritage' of Confucian culture, an authoritarian 'socialist' state and free market economy, Bourdieu's (1984) division to economic, cultural, social and symbolic capitals helps to highlight social stratification and hierarchy, as well as the way in which it is constantly reproduced. It also allows us to 'see' how the idea of 'distinction' between women and men is being reinforced, internalized and reinterpreted by different women with different 'amounts' of different forms of capital. Together with the concept of field and habitus (Bourdieu, 1984), this division highlights the idea of the social reproduction of inequality and, what interests this research most, the social reproduction of gender inequality – be it, as seen in the interviews, a conviction that girls are better carers, girls have a more relaxed life as only boys are required to achieve professional success, the 'naturalness' of giving up employment to care for family or justifying financial support to sons only. What is particularly useful here is the fact that these socially created distinctions can serve also as a political tool because of their potential to "freeze a particular state of the social struggle, i.e. a given state of the distribution of advantages and obligations" (Bourdieu, 1984:477). And, when we talk about this 'particular state' we do actually have in mind the form of culture and values of the dominant group – and, for example, the radical explanation of Confucianism in today's China is the interpretation of those who are in power, which does not make it the only possible interpretation or indeed the 'correct' one.

While Bourdieu states that we should "read power relations between groups through their relation with culture" (Lamont & Fournier, 1992:5), Foucault (1980) has broadened the discussion of power and its relational character, as well as its role in 'creating' dominant and normalizing discourses. By doing so, Foucault's analysis "added a political edge to earlier semiotic writings that analysed cultural codes and symbolic differences without reference to cultural politics" (Lamont & Fournier, 1992:6). The insight of Foucault (1980, 2012), in the context of the analysis of policy, can help to show that reality is multifaceted and that policy makers can choose only

one of these 'faces' and distort or hijack discourses, making them the 'version' that is being 'bought' by people. Such distorted discourses are, in the context of China and the analysis of the one-child policy, a belief that the one-child policy enabled education for girls who did not have to compete with their brothers (although as I have shown, if education is free and the examination system relatively fair, then there can be no talk of such competition), that the one-child policy made it easier for Chinese women to bring together their responsibility of employment with house making duties (not challenging however the assumption of housework as women's responsibility and the growing standards of housework) and that the aging population is a threat for economic development (while in reality it is a discourse which justifies the withdrawal of the state from socialized care). However, what is most important, is that the state's discourse has distorted the ideas of gender equality and masked the huge step back in this area by popularizing the idea of 'social harmony', which become a reasonable justification for pushing back the responsibility of care to the family, which means women, the 'glorification' of women's domesticity and ostracizing so-called 'leftover' women, who postpone or refuse marriage and having a child. According to this logic, women, their bodies and reproduction should serve the 'interests' of the country and facilitate its further growth. But we have already explained whose 'growth' this rhetoric means, and it is certainly not the growth of equality, but rather enriching and ensuring the domination of a selected and powerful few. Without Foucault and the deconstruction of the discourses 'from the below' we have no other option to hope for a change.

8.3.2.2 Interpretation vs. material deprivation

One of the most common arguments against post-structural feminist analysis is that because of its focus on interpretations it neglects the issue of material depravity and redistributive injustice. However, it is important to highlight that these two concepts – interpretation and material deprivation – are not mutually exclusive, but to some extent, complement each other. Post-structural analysis, in addition to interpretations of the ways in which women perceive their roles and identity, aligns

it with redistributive injustice in the creation of gender inequalities as well. Distancing itself from the universalistic aspirations of modern thought, post-structuralism with its "concern with discourse and language has spawned an interest in the construction of identity and the concept of difference" (Parpart, 1993:440)- but, again, it did not render previous analysis useless. It has rather 'only' enriched it with the "analysis of discourse, knowledge/power relations and difference" (Parpart, 1993:454).

I am as far away from the assumption that the only thing Chinese women are dissatisfied with is their identity as possible. Material deprivation plays an enormous part here as well, especially in a society like the Chinese one in which the income gap between different social groups is so obvious. We have to keep in mind that in the case of China, and in this research, we are talking about: women who lived during a socialist period which, despite of all its flaws, 'guaranteed' nearly universal coverage and benefits; women who had to find their way in the new reality of a market economy; and women who are supposedly now enjoying the fruits of China's development. The way in which these different women interpret the influence of the one-child policy on their lives is important, but, once again, this does not mean I am moving away from material deprivation. On the contrary, material deprivation is a significant factor in the 'creation' of interpretations. Can we expect that women from the elderly and retired group who have retirement and all the benefits provided by the state (like Wang Fang and Chunyu) will have the same interpretation of the impact of the one-child policy on the situation on gender inequality as women who do not have family or state support and who do not have a chance of receiving any form of pension? Let us just remember the case of Kunyao, who will have no retirement and who is caring for and financially supporting herself, her daughter and her older brother since her husband divorced her because she gave birth to a girl or Li Fang, who, as a migrant worker, has no support from the state whatsoever. Similarly, the interpretation of a girl, who is in an affluent financial situation, in respect to, for example, the concept of marriage, will not be the same as the interpretation of a girl who has no security network. The interpretations of Xiu Ying, who comes from a very affluent family, differed from the perspective of Li Yan, who doesn't enjoy any of the safety system. And it is precisely because of the importance

of material deprivation in multiple forms in current day China, that socio-economic background was one of the factors among which I tried to diversify the participants of my study. Furthermore, although distributive injustice keeps on playing a significant role in creating inequalities, it does not 'cover' the whole picture and is not creating solutions that will actually end the existence of gender equality, because it neglects other everyday aspects of social relations in which these inequalities are being constantly created and internalized. Just a very simple illustration of my argument is the issue of leftover women - financially affluent, independent and powerful, yet ostracized by the state and society - another example, which helps to deconstruct the glorified neoliberal perspective of rational 'free choice'.

8.3.2.3 Modern vs. post-modern/Industrial vs. post-industrial/Modernity vs. Liquid modernity

While post-structural theories argue that we are moving away from all the ‘solids’ of modernity, they do not assume that modernity is over yet, but that we are just facing a different form of it (Bauman, 2000). This statement becomes, to a certain extent, a reflection of what has been discussed before - that while establishing research on any society today we have to take into consideration that the concepts which stood behind the formation of current realities have changed. Both capitalism and socialism (in their original versions) were conceptualized in the era of, what Bauman (2000) calls, a solid and strong modernity period. However, because of globalization and the spread of neo-liberal ideology, all of these concepts have taken a different form, because societies have moved to a more ‘liquid’ and unstable phase of the modernity period (Bauman, 2000) and these changes, which affect all societies – no matter, Easter or Western, capitalist or socialist – also influence the transformation of social relationships. China is not an exception. The impact of market oriented policies and the domination of the neo-liberal ideology affect it, and become maybe even more hegemonic under the rule of the authoritarian socialist state. But what this research helped to verify is whether, in the case of China and its complex situation, we can talk about this ‘liquidity’ in the concept of marriage and intimate relationships (Bauman, 2013). It seems that while Bourdieu’s (1984, 1986,

1990) and Foucault's (1980,1982,2012) concepts are useful in understanding the interpretations of what Chinese women think of the influence of the one-child policy on gender inequality, the theory of liquid love (Bauman, 2013) and pure relationships (Giddens, 1992) cannot help to explain change in families and intimate relationships which, although ongoing and sped up by the drastic change in family composition due to the family planning policy, are not as 'advanced' as the analysis of Bauman (2013) and Giddens (1992). In contrast to 'strong' modernity and its social order, liquid modernity is supposed to give the feeling of unlimited opportunities (together with a feeling of uncertainty and lack of safety). However, it seems that in the case of China it is not yet the case. Marriage is seen and perceived by women as a natural step in their life and, what is more, it portrays very clearly the persistent belief and internalisation of gendered roles – women want to marry somebody who can guarantee financial security and men want to marry young women who will take care of the family. What is more, as hinted at by many interviewees, the options for women of getting out of unhappy or oppressive marriage are quite limited.

This situation renders the framework of liquid love inapplicable in the context of China – however, it has, coming back to the previous argument, nothing to do with China not being Western. It is more connected to the 'degree' of modernization processes, which in China's case (as well as many societies in the 'Western' world) is not as advanced as in post-industrial societies, in which the state is not as autocratic in maintaining 'social harmony' (and how different this is from the social order?) as it is in the reality of China. This point has been brilliantly addressed by Rofel (1999) in her discussion on 'discrepant modernity', which has challenged the concept that "modernity endures as a unified project that produces a homogenous form of subjectivity" (p.7-8). She has also, in her previous writings (Rofel, 1992) acknowledged the importance of the interpretation of the modernization processes in particular place (especially in such complex ones as transforming China) by saying:

> we must pay attention not just to the production of discourses, but to their consumption and to how consumption, unexpectedly and in small ways, subvert the dominant order. The consumption of discourse is ultimately part of its production." (Rofel, 1992:107)

I would hence stress one more time that while acknowledging the complexity of the situation in China, as well as its historical and cultural traditions, is a definite must (as it is, as a matter of fact, in any specific contexts and times), we cannot disregard certain concepts just because of them being Western or assuming Eurocentric point of view and reference. As has been mentioned by Yan (2010), who used Beck's (1992) theory of second modernity and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) explanation of individuality to showcase the Chinese path to individualization, "Chinese case simultaneously demonstrates pre-modern, modern and late-modern conditions, and the Chinese individual must deal with all of those conditions simultaneously" (p.510).

8.4 Implications for the policy

It goes without saying that the analysis of any social policy is worthless without giving practical implications and interpretations and this research is by no means an exception.

The first suggestion gains an importance in light of the latest change to the one-child policy, which allows everyone to have two children. This 'relaxation' has been nearly unanimously declared as the end of the one-child policy. Putting sarcasm aside (what will happen to those empowered and educated girls now since the need for competing with brothers becomes a 'rational' fear again), my research has shown that any form of top-down implemented policy regarding fertility should be abandoned. It does not matter what number appears in the name of the policy. As the policy does not operate in a void and is influenced by culture and the market as well, it simply creates more and more chances for interpretations which will have a negative impact on gender equality. Does the 'permission' to have two children change the issue of care for the elderly, discrimination in the labour market, the impossibility of bringing together career and family life together or even not facing 'demands' regarding children's sex? Would it change with the introduction of the 'three-children-for-all-policy'? And what if the current form of policy takes the form of an order rather than 'benevolent' permission? It is for these reasons that any form of top-down implementation of the fertility controlling policy should be abandoned if the aim we have in mind is gender equality. The two-children-for-all policy is

doomed to fail just as the one-child policy did, because changing the number of children does not equate to a change in the gender relationship. If we opt for gender equality, we have to challenge family and gender relations: we need a policy that would encourage men to share caring duties and policies which would allow changes to persisting gender relations – not only a policy which will control the number of children. To put it simple - we need policies that would actually provide varieties of reasonable choices, although we have to be extra careful with such a statement, because the ideology of choice and flexibility can easily be hijacked by neo-liberalism, in which poverty or unemployment become a free choice.

As there is no way of going back in time - the solutions for existing gender inequalities lie in admitting their existence. And, as nobody understands the problem someone is facing better than that person him or herself, analysis like the one presented above should be drawn from in order to avoid committing the same mistakes in the future. It really cannot be emphasized strongly enough - if a policy is supposed to help with overcoming an existing problem, the most important thing is to understand what the people, who the policy will affect, think and need.

One of those existing problems is education, because despite universal access to it, it is still 'gender blind' and hence is reinforcing old gender roles and practices. Only with gender neutral education and awareness of gendered issues can we hope for a meaningful change, where the burden of care and housework will be equally shared and nobody's role(s) will be defined by biological gender only. Furthermore, this statement is particularly well-timed, as just a couple of days ago a big scandal regarding sexual education in China attracted international attention, because in one of the textbooks girls who engage in sex before marriage were labelled as degenerates (Perlez, 2016). Having discourses like this is not and cannot be a reflection of a better situation regarding gender equality whatsoever. What is more, it shows how easily an idea, which supposedly should promote gender equality, can be hijacked and completely distorted – in the end including sexual education to the curriculum is commonly understood as bringing awareness to the young students. But bringing awareness can, as shown in the example above, making a huge step back.

This 'ideal' situation would, however, need more support from the side of the state. In China, the fact that people do not want to have more than one child is

usually associated with the fact that raising a child is expensive. And of course it is - especially when only one person in a family can work, because the other needs to dedicate herself to childrearing. This is a very complex problem and ready-to-go solutions are hard to provide. However, as we have learned from the experience of Scandinavian countries, the alternative approach to parental leave, which is more equally distributed to both parents, was one of the reasons these countries have not only experienced fertility growth, but also where women's participation in labour market is more feasible and the glass ceiling a bit thinner - as both man and women have to leave their posts to care for their child - the reason for hiring a man for their supposedly greater flexibility and dedication to work disappears.

Following the topic of employment, another step that should be taken in order to promote gender equality aside from encouraging men to take paternal leave and sharing caring responsibilities, is the introduction of a work-life balance policy. Such a policy should establish a minimum wage, but, what is important, the minimum wage must be high enough to actually provide a salary which would meet a family's needs and hence provide an actual choice of not having to work overtime. In the end, men cannot work all day, take on extra hours and then be required to take care of children. But, at the same time, we need to end the domination of the ideology of paid worked seen as skilful, while housework and care are seen as simple daily routines which do not 'deserve' any form of compensation.

A further issue that should be addressed and which, together with more equal distribution of parental leave, a work-life balance policy and public education which is not gender biased and will facilitate more equal access to paid employment, is the issue of care in general, for both children and the elderly. Care must be socialized, but at the same time valued. This means that policies cannot encourage only private and profit-making institutions of care, but the state's involvement in 'sponsoring' socialized care must be established as the most significant. This is not an easy task, especially in the era of neo-liberalism and the push towards individual responsibility. However, as long as care is seen to be a labour of love and the responsibility of women, nothing will change, no matter how many children these women have. But, just as the case of Northern Europe has shown, there is a chance for the socially accepted role of man as a carer – it is a very gradual, but possible process.

In addition to the socialization of care and increasing the value and respect of it, reality must be taken into consideration. To provide an example, while the care for children of kindergarten age is widely socialized in China, the opening hours of these institution completely 'neglect' the fact that mothers work, often not in state-owned enterprises, but in private companies, whose working schedules usually do not finish before kindergartens are closing. This is why we need a policy which would ensure the provision and improvement of child care services, allowing parents to fully participate in the labour market and the non-discrimination of women's opportunities due to their primary role of family carer.

The lack of protection for many women in their old age, which makes marriage and staying in that marriage often the only choice of survival is yet another issue. What might be even more difficult for them is a situation in which their husband opts for a divorce. Not participating in the labour market because of caring duties - or working part-time or without a contract - these women are deprived of any security for their old age - and hence a vicious circle of preferring a girl who will care for them in old age begins. The problem with the existing retirement system in China is the fact that despite the plan to 'cover' all citizens, women who have not been working or have a rural *hukou* will be entitled to the 'protection' of 100 RMB (15 USD) a month, while the minimum monthly wage of workers in Guangzhou in 2016 was nearly at a level of 2000 RMB, the equivalent of 302 USD (Shira, 2016). With this universal retirement protection, can we be talking about having any actual 'free' choice? It seems to me that their choice is limited to working until their last days in random and low paid jobs or starving to death. This is why a policy which would take into consideration women's needs and ensure a retirement protection system with adequate coverage, which would benefit both men and women is needed. That is to say, we need a policy which will also cover those with a low level of participation in the labour market, and which will not continue to overlook completely other forms of contribution to the society and the beloved in neo-liberal discourses – progress.

8.5 Limitations and suggestions for further studies

Like every piece of research, this one is also prone to certain limitations. One of the biggest is the limitations of the data. As China is such a big country, variations between cities, provinces and ethnicities are huge. This, together with limitations of time and resources, made this project a small scale study, with a very limited number of participants of equally limited backgrounds. However, as I have mentioned before, all studies face a similar problem. The best one can do is to make the most of the set of data that is available and make sure that a valuable contribution towards a better and more equal world, even if relatively small, will be its outcome and that this outcome will become a foundation for further research and deeper understandings of the problem.

For all of these reasons I feel that the limitations of this research constitute at the same time a suggestion for further studies. As I have focused only on women who are currently living in cities, and taking into consideration the urban-rural difference of China, research with a similar aim in mind but focusing on rural women could lead to yet different 'alternatives' challenging dominant discourses. The problem that I faced and which can be seen as a limitation is the fact that it is difficult to clearly draw a line between urban and rural. Are women born in a rural area, but living in the cities for years, urban or rural? What would happen in the less possible scenario of the opposite situation? Nevertheless, taking into consideration that 37% of Guangzhou's inhabitants are migrant workers (Ngok, 2012), I have opted for the 'vast' understanding of urban women, even though it means 'mixing' the experience of women who were subjugated to different 'realities' and different forms of the one-child policy at the same time.

Moreover, as the sample of my interviewees was not big, it could not cover the full range of diverse backgrounds. What I personally believed could be beneficial is if some 'extreme cases' were added to the equation. I did not manage, for example, to gain access to women who hold a significant position or connections to the elite and party structure. Also, I was not able to talk to a woman who is an actual 'black child' - the girls I have interviewed, even though born without permits and without hukou, were still from families who were well off enough to pay or use some channels to

make their birth legal, before they were supposed to go to school. Because of this the perspective of women from the very top and very bottom of the social pyramid are missing.

There is also another group of women who is missing in this analysis and the lack of whom was pointed out to me by my interviewees - women who lost their only child to late in their lives to have any hope of giving birth to another one. I have, however, excluded this group due to its reluctance to talk about the most painful experience of their lives. Nevertheless, I think it is important to mention, because their perspective on the one-child policy would have been undoubtedly different.

Another suggestion I would like to make is connected to a statement I made before - that the one-child policy and the persistence in maintaining myths related to it and to the understanding of gender equality is harmful, in the long run, not only for women, but for men as well. For that reason, I think it would be highly beneficial to study the one-child policy and the effect it has on the lives of Chinese men and the way they interpret it and internalize it. In the end, despite common convictions, they are trapped in their gender roles – with its privileges and costs – just as 'deeply' as women are.

When applying post-structural feminist research reinforced by life course perspective to the Chinese context, the suggestions for further studies and potential contribution for feminist theory and its development cannot be overlooked. While I absolutely do not claim to have developed a new theory, there are certain outcomes of my analysis which will hopefully led to the 'strengthening' of the feminist research.

One of such contribution is highlighting how important the integration of interpretivism and material depravity is. Focusing on one of the ends only - resources allocation or subjectivity - does not help in analysing the situation of gender equality which 'involve' tangible issues (like family and family composition in case of the one-child policy) and suggesting policies which might be more beneficial than the existing ones. Despite many accusations aimed and post-structuralist analysis, this research has proven that focusing on interpretations does not mean excluding material depravity, but rather highlighting how material depravity interferes and penetrates every aspect of gendered lives. We could have observed it when women were talking about short hours of opening of kindergartens which deprives them the possibility of

having wages and hence retirement found, which than translated to the 'expectations' of being cared for in one's elderly years by the (only) child. Another example that we can recall is worrying about having a son because he will, in the future, need to be 'gifted' with an apartment which would make it possible for him to get married – and if he wouldn't, that would mean the lack of daughter-in-law to perform caring 'duties', as the alternative of socialized and institutionalized care is unaffordable and, in many cases, unthinkable. Hence, interpretivism does not exclude the material depravity from the equation, as many discourses and gender inequalities ideologies are built on material depravity of two genders. It does however paint a more detailed picture (and it should be investigated further) of the ways in which, following Foucauldian concept of the importance of everyday practices in sustaining and reproducing power structures (Sawicki, 1998) integrates with socio-economic background of women – established by applying the Bourdieu's (1986) concept of different forms of capital in particular state formation and the opportunities that are being 'created' for women. It also creates another possible angle for the future research and potential contribution to feminist studies, because high socio-economic status (understood especially in the category of material privilege) does not necessary translate to having an agency, known in post-structural analysis as an authority to create alternative discourses which factually challenge the dominant ones.

Another contribution to the feminist studies is connected to the discussion of appropriateness of Western theory and its applicability to Eastern cultures. As this research has proven, we should not dichotomise theories in this way and label them as Eastern/Western, especially in todays' globalized world which is being taken over by neo-liberal philosophy - as long as theories and concepts serve their purpose and help to challenge the power relations and develop new insights. It goes without saying that theories should be adopted (with modifications) for different societies and different groups studied. That is exactly what I have done by analysing the dominant discourses created by the market economy, culture and the state. This is also why I did not 'evaluate' the socio-economic background of women on the basis of economic capital only, as I was aware that the specificity of the situation in China, together with rather rigid concept of gender division, would make such a division

useless, as prestige and connections are often as important in establishing one's position as material wealth. It was why I have focused so much on the issue of body politics (and especially contraceptive use), as in case of China the aspect of its 'compulsority' adds to the traditional debate of being a tool of empowerment versus being a tool of oppression. And it is also why I did have to 'verify' first whether we can talk about the changed concept of marriage in China before jumping to any conclusion. But the bottom point is that if something works – we should make a full use of it as a tool to fight inequality rather than divagate about that concepts' 'origin'.

APENDIX – RESERCH PARTICIPANTS

Name	Age	Socioeconomic Status	Siblings	Marital Status	Education	Employment
Young and Single						
An'ni	33	Higher	3	Single	University	Owner of a trading company
Dantong	28	Lower	1	Engaged	University	Social Worker
Heyue	22	Higher	2	Single	University	Social Worker
Li Yan	26	Lower	2	Single	Vocational	Unemployed
Pingwan	21	Higher	0	Single	University	Student
Wenhui	21	Lower	0	Single	University	Student
XiuYing	21	Higher	0	Single	University	Student
Zhang Wei	23	Lower	0	Single	University	Student
Middle-aged and married						
Beilei	31	Higher	2	Married	University	Housewife
Jianqing	43	Lower	7	Married	Elementary	Janitor
Lanmeng	31	Higher	2	Married	Vocational	Teacher
Li Fang	38	Lower	1	Married	Junior High School	Housewife
Meng Zhu	35	Higher	2	Married	University	Housewife
Pei Shan	46	Lower	2	Married	Elementary	Janitor
Siyun	31	Higher	0	Married	University	Housewife
Xinmei	48	Lower	3	Married	Vocational	Part time jobs
Ziyue	34	Lower	3	Married	Junior High School	Housewife
Elderly and retired						
Chunyu	48	Higher	2	Married	Vocational	Retired/ Part time job
Guifan	58	Lower	5	Married	High School	Retired/Volunteer
Kunyao	56	Lower	1	Divorced	High School	Retired/Janitor
Pingning	64	Higher	4	Married	Junior High School	Retired
Qiaoli	56	Lower	2	Married	Junior High school	Retired
Taoyu	52	Lower	4	Married	Junior High school	Retired
Tianmei	56	Lower	7	Married	High school	Retired
WangFang	59	Higher	2	Widowed	High school	Retired

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