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The changes of reproductive policies and female subjectivity in China

Dissertation

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Submitted by:

Jolene Yiqiao Kong

Supervisor: Professor Aditya Bharadwaj

Second reader: Assistant Professor Nicole Bourbonnais

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Abstract

This research correlates the change of reproductive policies with the changes of female subjectivity in China, while subjectivity refers to women's thoughts, feelings, emotions and understandings of themselves. The method used is a combination of primary and secondary sources, which involved conducting in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis, and gathering useful second-hand data to aid the analysis. This research found out that there had been an increase of selfness among women since the Mao era. The one-child policy had empowered many mothers and urban daughters, as the policy alleviated repressions by the traditional Chinese values and culture. However, it violated women's reproductive health and rights, and although positive outcomes it might have arisen, it was never meant to uphold gender justice. In the post-one-child era, there is a resurgence of traditional reproductive values and posed new challenges for women in China.

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Introduction

"Men and women are socially constructed gender roles".

– Qing, born in 1993.

Gender equality is an important developmental issue that is yet to be improved in most of the countries in the world. In China, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had initiated several campaigns since the 1950s to encourage women to work and contribute to the socialist construction. Women's social and economic status had increased since then. In 2015, China was ranked first in terms of the percentage of GDP contributed by female workers at 41%, 4% above the world average and 3% above Western Europe.[1] However, in 2017 China was ranked 100 among 144 countries in World Economic Forum's global ranking for gender equality. The report revealed that women in China usually work for longer hours at work, and have long unpaid hours doing housework at home. In addition, the sex ratio of new born babies are highly skewed towards male babies.[2] Comparing the two set of statistics, there seems to be a gap in the economic and social status of women in China. Although women contribute to almost half of the country's national income, women's career development, educational attainment, health and survival as well as political empowerment are significantly lagging behind, some at a greater extent than the others.

Past researches on women's issues in China seldom focus on women's subjectivity, that is, women's understanding of themselves, their motherhood, daughterhood and womanhood. Looking at subjectivity is to "inquire into the continuity and diversity of personhood across greatly diverse societies, including the ways in which inner processes are reshaped amid economic and political reforms, violence and social sufferings".[3] As reproduction is a critical process experienced by women and impacted women in their childhood, I have chosen to focus on the reproductive policies in China and their relation to women's senses and sensibilities.

This research scrutinises the transformations of reproductive policies in China through a female perspective. It aims to discuss how do the changes of reproductive policies impact on the subjectivity of women in China, and how do women perceive these changes. It is an important issue as it fills gaps in understanding the deeper concerns and root problems of gender issues in China. In a society which traditionally requires women's subservience to their families and the state, women's inner feelings and voices and often submerged by the male-dominant consensus views in the country.

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[1] 'Female Contribution to GDP across World Regions, 2015 | Statistic', Statista, accessed 30 May 2019, https://www.statista.com/statistics/523838/women-share-of-gdp-region/.

[2] Mimi Lau, 'China Falls – Again – in Global Ranking for Gender Equality', South China Morning Post, 2 November 2017, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2118177/china-falls-again-world-economic-forums-global-ranking-gender.

[3] João Biehl, Byron Good, and Arthur Kleinman, *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations*, vol. 7 (Univ of California Press, 2007), 1.

I conducted in-depth interviews with 15 women in Henan province of China to understand their world views and experiences with the reproductive policies in three different eras: the Mao era, the one-child policy era and the post-one-child policy era. In the first chapter, I first specified my research question and the definitions. Then, I set forth my methodologies after conducting the literature review on related issues and identifying the gaps of past researches. In the second, third and fourth chapters, I analysed women's thoughts, feelings and emotions in three different eras. In the last chapter, I made conclusions based on my previous findings.

Chapter 1: Research question, literature review & methodology

"I used to think that getting married and having children is a task. To pass on the family line, like everyone else. Now I feel that having a child is having a spiritual support. She is my hope. I feel really happy having her in my life."

– Nana, born in 1982.

1.1 Research question

Since 1949, women in the People Republic of China (PRC) experienced numerous changes of the nation's reproductive policies. Many past studies ventured into the topic of reproductive policies in China, analysing the politics and policies from different angles and perspectives. However, most of the studies failed to capture the women's side of the story. Similar to the state of China, many scholars and studies saw families as basic units of Chinese society, and as decision-making bodies on reproductive matters[4], whereas women were usually included within the families. However, women's decisions are quite often dominated by other members of the family. As a result, many of the narratives collected on reproductive matter within a family are still dominated by traditional patriarchal voices. Women's voices and personal encounters tends to be submerged and unheard in the political, academic and social fields.

Therefore, in this research I hope to explore the transformations of reproductive policies in China through a female perspective. The main research question is: how do the reproductive policies impact on the subjectivity of women in China?

Female subjectivity in this research refers to women's understanding of themselves, including the interpretation of their womanhood, motherhood and daughterhood. The main purpose of this research is to unravel the feminine context of women's experiences of the reproductive policies in China, and lay out the underlying tensions among different actors: the state, cultural and traditional values, women and their subjectivity. In other words, this research hopes to find out how the traditional Confucian values, the state and women in China confront, constitute, conflict and complement with each other over reproductive matters. As this research hopes to look at the changes of reproductive policies in different eras, one important objective is to look at how the subjectivity of women shifted with these changes. It will be an account of how women in China became daughters, mothers and sisters under the influences of the state's reproductive policies, and how they interpreted womanhood along the way.

[4] Maurice Freedman, 'The Family in China, Past and Present', *Pacific Affairs* 34, no. 4 (1961): 323, https://doi.org/10.2307/2752626.

Corresponding to the research question, there are two main subjects of study- the state and women. The two subjects are bridged by looking at how they perceive, interact with and impact on each other. There is also a common third factor- the power of Confucius tradition- that contended and complicated state's policy and women's subjectivity. In this research, I will analyse the interactions and dynamics among the three, and find out their impacts on women's understanding of themselves.

I chose to conduct this research because very few people chose to focus on women's subjectivity as they discussed reproductive policies in China. Women's subjectivity in China is an important issue as throughout the male-dominated and patriarchal Chinese history and until today, women's wills, desires, preferences, thoughts and feelings were neglected. Such a tradition also impacted on policies towards women and how society perceived women. This could be an essential gap to be filled, especially when empirical researches and objective studies might continue to ignore the changes of subjectivity among women in China.

1.2 Definitions and the scope

Before delving deeper into the research question, it is important for me to establish the boundaries of the critical terms I hope to discuss in this paper. The two main concepts involved are reproductive policies of China and female subjectivity. I will explain their definitions and scopes in the following section.

1.2.1 Reproductive policies

In China, when people hear reproductive policies, they often equate it with birth-planning policies. In Chinese language, reproductive policies are called "shengyu zhengce". Birth-planning policies are called "jihua shengyu zhengce". The only difference is the adding of "planned", or "jihua". The theme of reproductive policies in China has always been about "planning". Therefore, in this paper I shall use these two terms interchangeably especially during my analysis of interview results.

I intend to divide China's reproductive politics into three eras: the Mao era from 1949 to 1979 where there were very limited birth control policies in place, the one-child policy era from 1979 to 2014 and the post-one-child era where child birth in a family is no longer limited to one by state policy. Researchers and scholars who studied this topic had different divisions of the significant time periods on reproductive issues in China. Some of them divided the periods according to different presidents, for instance, although Jiang and Hu both implemented the one-child policy, they have had slightly different approaches or policies.[5]

I have chosen this way of division because during my preliminary rounds of interviews with women in China, I realised that their cognition of the changes of reproductive policy is in-line with this division. All my interviewees have a common consensus about the significance of one-child policy and how it had been a boundary line to the changes of their

[5] Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler, *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics* (Stanford University Press, 2005), 166.

lives. For instance, when asked about their knowledge of the birth planning or "jihua shengyu" before 1979, all of the interviewees stated that they have "never heard of the term before". This is different from the literatures on reproductive policies during the Mao period, as they all agree that there were some forms of birth planning policies in place. Such a contrary revealed that these early forms of reproductive polices on birth control and planning before 1979 were not well received at the community levels. It was until 1979 where the government imposed hard law on people that they start to learn about such a term. Since then, one-child policy acted as the clear division of people's reproductive behaviour and women's changes in subjectivity. Therefore, I have decided to divide the eras according to my interviewee's understanding about the major changes in reproductive polices, so that my following analysis can be more interconnected with their feelings and emotions.

1.2.2 Female subjectivity & the Confucian state

Subjectivity is a term used by anthropologists to refer to the "shared inner life of the subject, to the way subjects feel, respond, experience".[6] Holland and Leander wrote "we think about subjectivities as actors' thoughts, sentiments and embodied sensibilities, and especially their sense of self and self-world relations" on a special issue of Ethos.[7,8] Biehl, Good and Kleinman concluded that looking at subjectivity is to "inquire into the continuity and diversity of personhood across greatly diverse societies, including the ways in which inner processes are reshaped amid economic and political reforms, violence and social sufferings".[9]

Subjectivity of women is a quite a radical term under the Communist regime with Confucian roots in China. Why is that so? Under the communist collectivism, women are firstly the "daughters of the party", which suggests "the party's transcendental authority over family, love and the whole personal sphere".[10] On the other hand, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and women in China were all under the influence of the Confucian traditions. Women never belonged to themselves under the Confucian traditions: the "three obediences" or "san cong" transferred women's entity to their fathers, husbands and sons respectively.[11] The two forces- communism and Confucianism- intertwine and influence each other.[12] The socialist state merged with the Confucian traditions and were both critical to the formation of women's identities and subjectivity, and as the dynamics between the Confucian traditions

[6] Tanya M. Luhrmann, 'Subjectivity', *Anthropological Theory* 6, no. 3 (2006): 345.
[7] Dorothy Holland and Kevin Leander, 'Ethnographic Studies of Positioning and Subjectivity: An Introduction', *Ethos* 32, no. 2 (2004): 127.
[8] Luhrmann, 'Subjectivity', 345.
[9] Biehl, Good, and Kleinman, *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations*, 7:1.
[10] Yuk-Lin Renita Wong, 'DISPERSING THE "PUBLIC" AND THE "PRIVATE" Gender and the State in the Birth Planning Policy of China', *Gender & Society* 11, no. 4 (1997): 515.
[11] The "three obediences and four virtues", or "san cong si de", are the most basic set of moral principles and social code of behaviour for maidens and married women in East Asian Confucianism especially in Ancient and Imperial China.
[12] Wong, 'DISPERSING THE "PUBLIC" AND THE "PRIVATE" Gender and the State in the Birth Planning Policy of China', 516.

and socialist influences changed over the past decades, women's world view and inner personhood has also experiences shifts and changes.

Under the Confucian state, there are two main contenders in the field of reproductive ideologies: the state on one hand and cultural and traditional values on the other. They form a contention that constantly conflict and complement each other. The state has also conveniently adopted Confucian values to enhance its rule and order. Women are caught between to the two contenders which have similar disciplinary demands, such as being subservient followers, caretaker and nurturer and thinking for the greater good.[13] However, women's subjectivity changed significantly with the implementation of one-child policy as mothers and daughters. As China opens up in the 1980s and the one-child policy prevails, women's subjectivity interacts with Western individualistic thinking and capitalism.

To understand reproductive matter in China, we need to understand reproduction as "rooted in a particular constellation that connects cultural representations and political economy with collective experience and the individual's subjectivity".[14] Women's subjectivity in China has been influenced by the cultural, patriarchal and state-sponsored characteristics. These characteristics impacts on women's relationship to themselves as reproductive bodies and reproducers. Such a political, cultural and social context cast a unique dynamic of changes in women's subjectivity and will be carefully analysed in the following sections.

1.3 Literature review

The purpose of this literature review is to find out what had been achieved in past researches and what had been left unattended or undermined. This is critical for adjusting my approach to this topic and pitching my research methodologies.

1.3.1 Studies on reproductive policies

Both Chinese and international researchers have explored the topic of reproductive policies in China from different angles over the past decades. Historians and social scientists studied the history of development of Chinese populations from the demography of imperial China to the 21st century. The imperial China is an important period to understanding traditional and cultural context of Chinese population control. Ping-ti Ho studied the official population data and the population-land relations from 1368 to 1953. He examined the population registration system in different dynasties and periods, the basic unit of registration (per household) and the changes in the concept, interregional migrations and the political and economic factors affecting population changes.[15] Among many Chinese scholars who studied the demographic history of China, Ge has important contributions on the demographic thinking, population data and registration systems from the Warrior States of BC 770 till

[13] Francine M. Deutsch, 'Filial Piety, Patrilineality, and China's One-Child Policy', *Journal of Family Issues* 27, no. 3 (2006): 368.
[14] Biehl, Good, and Kleinman, *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations*, 7:3.
[15] Ping-ti Ho, *Studies on the Population of China, 1368-1953* (Harvard University Press, 1959).

1953.[16] He analysed the population compositions in terms of age, gender and geographical distributions, the characteristics and factors of population change and internal migrations.[17]

Chinese researchers also investigated on the birth control in imperial China. Chen gave a thorough analysis of the birth control thinking of important philosophers and political figures throughout Chinese history. He mentioned the influence of western thinking in late 1900s. Western works on population control were translated into Chinese since 1880. In 1922, Mrs Margret Sanger arrived at China to advocate on the importance of birth control and contraceptive methods, which pushed for the advancement and popularity of birth planning among elite Chinese families.[18] Many others studied the population size, demographic composition and household registration policies in different dynasties.[19, 20]

After the communist establishment in 1949, population planning became an inevitable path for China as "planning" is central to its government ideology and developmental practices. Overall, many scholars conducted profound analysis of the reproductive policies in China since Mao era. Greenhalgh and Winckler took a policy-analysis approach to understanding the characteristics of birth planning policies under each leader, from Mao to Hu. They scrutinised the policy formulation and implementation processes and discussed the consequences of these policies.[21] Scharping had a similar attempt by going through the birth control policies from 1949 to 2000. He contributed on the problems of organisation in policy implementation.[22]

According to Greenhalgh and Winckler, birth planning policies are formulated through the interactions of national political leaders, national programme leaders and subnational programme leaders. Amongst the three actors, national leader has the biggest leverage and influence on policy-making, especially during the Mao era where decision-making processes are the most centralised.[23] Detailed demonstration of how researchers perceive the reproductive policy in each period will be presented in the following paragraphs.

The first national census was conducted in 1953, which gave Chinese leaders a glance of China's population size. It is worth mentioning that Mao had a large-scale academic

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[16] Jianxiong 葛建雄 Ge, *Zhongguo Renkou Fazhanshi 中国人口发展史 [The History of Chinese Demographic Development]* (Fujian renmin chubanshe 福建人民出版社, 1991).

[17] Jianxiong 葛建雄 Ge, *Women de Guojia: Jiangyu Yu Renkou 我们的国家：疆域与人口 [Our Country: Boundaries and Populations]* (Fudan daxue chubanshe 复旦大学出版社, 2010).

[18] Yongsheng 陈永生 Chen, *Zhongguo Jindai Jiezhi Shengyu Shiyao 中国近代节制生育史要 [The History of Chinese Birth Control in Modern Times]* (Suzhou daxue chubanshe 苏州大学出版社, 2013), 50–83.

[19] Yuanhe 周源和 Zhou, 'Qingdai Renkou Yanjiu 清代人口研究 [Population Studies on Qing Dynastry]', *Zhongguo Shehui Kexue 中国社会科学* 2 (1982): 161–88.

[20] Qian 潘倩 Pan, Xiaobin 金晓斌 Jin, and Yinkang 周寅康 Zhou, 'Jin Sanbai Nianlai Zhongguo Renkou Bianhua Ji Shikong Fenbu Geju 近 300 年来中国人口变化及时空分布格局 [Population Change and Spatiotemporal Distribution of China in Recent 300 Years]', *Dili Yanjiu 地理研究*, 2013.

[21] Greenhalgh and Winckler, *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*.

[22] Thomas Scharping, *Birth Control in China 1949-2000: Population Policy and Demographic Development* (Routledge, 2013).

[23] Greenhalgh and Winckler, *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*.

debate with the Malthusian advocate Ma Yinchu.[24,25] The first national census propelled Ma to research on China's population issue. He then proposed that the central government should push for population control and birth planning in China while Mao opposed this view as he believed that a large population was a critical determinant of national production level.[26] Mao and his supporters believed that an ideal population size for better production is 800 million.[27] Since then, Ma and the Malthusian theory had been condemned by the academia due to the influence of Mao, which later escalated into the political prosecution of Ma. At the same time, fertility rate is as high as six births per woman up to the year 1970.[28]

Did Mao think that population needs to be controlled? The answer is affirmative. At the beginning of national establishment, contraception and reproductive issues are not the priority and therefore remained as a health issue under the health ministry. Government actually blocked the import of contraceptives and allowed limited access to birth control, particularly abortions and sterilisation in the hospitals.[29] However, in 1953 the authority changed priority "from revolution to development" and encouraged women to participate in "socialist construction". Deng Xiaoping was a significant advocate of birth control and led to the State Council issuing instructions on contraception to the health ministry, which marked the incipience of the policy shift.

The first reproductive campaign took place when the health ministry produced internal documents to instruct the subnational organs to "propagandise contraception and strengthen technical guidance".[30] In 1957, Mao openly spoke on a meeting of the National Council that population might need to be controlled. As he said, the growth should follow a wave patter- "sometimes increase, sometimes stagnate, sometime decrease"- and proposed that population should be planned.[31] As for how to control, he stated that it is a difficult problem which should be openly discussed and analysed. Contraception and planned birth were encouraged at highly-populous localities. [32] Mao also encouraged the printing and

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[24] Yinchu 马寅初 Ma, *Xin Renkou Lun 新人口论 [New Population Theory]* (Guangdong jingji chubanshe 广东经济出版社, 1998).

[25] Bin 周斌 Zhou, 'Yu Maozedong Changfandiao de Renkou Xuejia Mayinchu: Renkou Wenti Bushi Zhengzhi Wenti 与毛泽东唱反调的人口学家 马寅初: 人口问题不是政治问题 [Ma Yinchu the Demographer Who Goes against Mao Zedong: Population Is Not a Political Issue]', *Wenshi Cankao 文史参考*, no. 16 (2012): 12.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Zhiyi 郭志仪 Guo, 'Maozedong de Renkou Sixiang Yu Woguo Wuliushi Niandai de Jihua Shengyu Zhengce Fansi 毛泽东的人口思想与我国五六十年代的计划生育政策反思 [The Population Thought of Mao Zedong and the Reconsideration on Family Planning Policy of China in the 1950s and 1960s]', *Xibei Renkou 西北人口* 4 (2003): 2–7.

[28] John Bongaarts and Susan Greenhalgh, 'An Alternative to the One-Child Policy in China', *Population and Development Review*, 1985, 585.

[29] Greenhalgh and Winckler, *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, 65.

[30] Ibid., 66.

[31] Qianfa 曹前发 Cao, 'Jianguohou Maozedong Renkou Sixiang Shulun 建国后毛泽东人口思想述论 [On Mao Zedong's Population Thought after the Founding of the People's Republic of China]', *Maozedong Sixiang Yanjiu 毛泽东思想研究* 6 (2010): 13.

[32] Guo, 'Maozedong de Renkou Sixiang Yu Woguo Wuliushi Niandai de Jihua Shengyu Zhengce Fansi 毛泽东的人口思想与我国五六十年代的计划生育政策反思 [The Population Thought of Mao Zedong and the Reconsideration on Family Planning Policy of China in the 1950s and 1960s]'.

distribution of contraceptive information, as well as the production of contraceptive drugs and devices.[33] At the same time, Premier Zhou Enlai supported birth planning through late marriage and birth control.[34]

From 1960 to 1970s, systematic steps were taken by the state to turn the principle of birth planning into practice, yet this effort was interrupted during the most radical years of Cultural Revolution. After 1969, birth planning programmes revived and flourished. Zhou Enlai started supporting the birth planning efforts aggressively. Meanwhile, economic shocks brought by the Cultural Revolution added urgency to population control struggles.[35] Strains on employment and the fact that population size outgrew agricultural output[36] were the main driving forces behind birth control campaigns. The strongest motive behind the birth planning campaigns, according to White, is the fear of the state that it could no longer feed the escalating number of mouths.[37]

In 1971, there was a calling for the establishment of birth planning offices by the State Council, which indicates a major shift of responsibility from the health ministry and an increasing significance. As deliberate birth planning policies lacked enormous attention, it has resulted in a population size of 969 million people in 1979 and induced the government to press on the emergency stop button on population since then. Indeed, the fertility rate of Chinese women had declined since 1970 and by 1980 it has been reduced to 2.75 births per woman in 1979[38], close to the replacement level.

The analysis of reproductive politics and its changes during the Mao era laid the groundwork for understanding the political, economic and social motives for implementing one-child policy after Mao's death. Why did China implement such a radical policy since fertility was of internationally-acceptable value? Why did Deng Xiaoping, the opener of Chinese economy, place such a strict control on child birth? Some researchers explored the political and economic motives behind the policy setting. The one-child policy was indeed both a continuation and a transition of Maoist birth planning. However, the political negotiation process behind the policy setting was seldomly discussed, most likely due to the lack of official records of the high-level decision process. Together with the decision of "one-child only" in most regions in China, renkou suzhi, or population quality, became an important concept of national development in China. Education, literacy and skills are

[33] Cao, 'Jianguohou Maozedong Renkou Sixiang Shulun 建国后毛泽东人口思想述论 [On Mao Zedong's Population Thought after the Founding of the People's Republic of China]', 13.
[34] Qiuxiang 王秋香 Wang, 'Maozedong Zhouenlai Renkou Sixiang Bijiao Yanjiu 毛泽东周恩来人口思想比较研究 [A Comparative Study of Mao Zedong's and Zhou Enlai's Population Thoughts]', *Hunan Shehui Kexue 湖南社会科学* 1 (2003): 33.
[35] Tyrene White, *China's Longest Campaign: Birth Planning in the People's Republic, 1949-2005* (Cornell University Press, 2006), 58.
[36] Greenhalgh and Winckler, *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, 71.
[37] White, *China's Longest Campaign: Birth Planning in the People's Republic, 1949-2005*, 42–43.
[38] 'Fertility Rate, Total (Births per Woman) | Data', accessed 8 May 2019, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=CN.

emphasized on the upbringing of future generations, which is in line with China's goal for rural modernisation.[39] The "quality" discourse emerged in the 1980s.

Together with the implementation of one-child policy, in 1980 China passed the new marriage law to lift the minimum marriage age to 22 for men and 20 for women, delaying the previous minimum age that was established since 1950 for two years for both men and women.[40] In addition, enormous propaganda efforts were spent on promoting the policy.

Both foreign and Chinese researchers looked into the one-child policy at great lengths and depths from a variety of angles. In general, the one-child policy has many forms of existence at different regions and on different ethnicities. Although the policy is called one-child policy, it was actually implemented in a variety of ways at different levels, resulting in an average fertility rate of 1.465. For example, Henan province had an average fertility rate of 1.505 during the implementation of the one-child policy.[41] In many regions, the one-child policy also experienced many adjustments and transitions in its entailment and implementation process with time.[42] This was confirmed by the interviews with women from Henan province in the following chapters.

One of the most controversial aspect of the one-child policy is the sex ratio imbalance it aggravated. A large number of quantitative researches were conducted on the relationship between one-child policy and the sex imbalance in China.[43,44] The "mystery of missing women" in China were widely discussed in literatures. As China has a traditional culture of male preference, many female babies face sex selection from their families as they are only allowed to have one child. Abortions, infanticides and abandonment of female babies increased critically, causing the sex ratio of China to be 1.15 at birth since 1994, and the imbalance peaked in 2004 to be 1.21.[45] However, there are also studies on how the one-child policy has empowered women and girls in China[46], including the decrease of parenting biases, increase of educational opportunities and expectations and so on.

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[39] Rachel Murphy, 'Turning Peasants into Modern Chinese Citizens:"Population Quality" Discourse, Demographic Transition and Primary Education', *The China Quarterly* 177 (2004): 1–20.
[40] John W. Engel, 'Marriage in the People's Republic of China: Analysis of a New Law', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1984, 958.
[41] Zhigang 郭志刚 Guo et al., 'Cong Zhengce Shengyulv Kan Zhongguo Shengyu Zhengce de Duoyangxing 从政策生育率看中国生育政策的多样性 [Diversity of China's Fertility Policy by Policy Fertility]', *Renkou Yanjiu 人口研究* 27, no. 5 (2003): 1–10.
[42] Susan E. Short and Zhai Fengying, 'Looking Locally at China's One-Child Policy', *Studies in Family Planning*, 1998, 373–87.
[43] Hongbin Li, Junjian Yi, and Junsen Zhang, 'Estimating the Effect of the One-Child Policy on the Sex Ratio Imbalance in China: Identification Based on the Difference-in-Differences', *Demography* 48, no. 4 (2011): 1535–57.
[44] Erwin Bulte, Nico Heerink, and Xiaobo Zhang, 'China's One-child Policy and "the Mystery of Missing Women": Ethnic Minorities and Male-biased Sex Ratios', *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics* 73, no. 1 (2011): 21–39.
[45] Viola Zhou, 'China Has World's Most Skewed Sex Ratio at Birth – Again', South China Morning Post, 27 October 2016, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2040544/chinas-demographic-time-bomb-still-ticking-worlds-most.
[46] Vanessa L. Fong, 'China's One-child Policy and the Empowerment of Urban Daughters', *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 4 (2002): 1098–1109.

Moreover, human rights violations that were inflicted under the one-child policy also attracted the attention of a few researchers. Although the Chinese government never explicitly legitimated coerced abortion, it had been a common practice during the strictest years of implementing the one-child policy. The state justified these practices as "voluntary choice" or "under persuasion" while they were actually coercive.[47,48]

Another impact of one-child policy widely discussed by researchers and demographers is the ageing population China faces. About twenty years ago when concerns about ageing population initially started, the percentage of population aged 65 and above was only 4.9%. Now, the number rose to 10% and will continue to rise to 20%[49] in twenty years' time. Simultaneously, the fertility rate of China dropped below the replacement rate of 2.1 since 1992. The lowest fertility was at 1.49 in 1999 and now it is at 1.63.[50]

The decline of fertility critically below the population replacement rate since 1992 propelled the state to slowly adjust its one-child policy by regions and eventually stopped the implementation of one-child policy throughout China in January 2016. The ending of one-child policy took three transitional stages. First, it started with the merging of National Population and Family Planning Commission with the health ministry, and producing a new National Health and Family Planning Commission in 2013.[51] Then it continued with a partial relaxation of the policy for couples who are both "single child" to apply for a second baby. Only 15.4% of the 11 million couples eligible opted for a second child.[52] Lastly in 2016, the government allowed all couples in China to have a second child.

In addition to past researches, official government paper and documents, policy statement, propaganda materials are also important sources to understanding the change of reproductive policies in China.

1.3.2 Studies on women in China

This research aims to study the feminine subjectivity of Chinese women. This section aims to look at to what extent scholars explore the female subjectivity in China.

Many scholars had studied women in China through a historical review. Hinsch researched on the kinship system, life and work and the cosmology of women in early imperial China.[53] According to Hinsch, the family is seen as a "microcosm of the state", and the relationship between husband and wife is a metaphor for the appropriate relationship

[47] John Shields Aird, *Slaughter of the Innocents: Coercive Birth Control in China*, vol. 498 (American Enterprise Institute, 1990).
[48] Jing-Bao Nie, 'The Problem of Coerced Abortion in China and Related Ethical Issues', *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 8, no. 4 (1999): 465.
[49] Feng Wang, 'Can China Afford to Continue Its One-Child Policy?', 2005, 4.
[50] 'Fertility Rate, Total (Births per Woman) | Data'.
[51] Martin King Whyte, Wang Feng, and Yong Cai, 'Challenging Myths about China's One-Child Policy', *The China Journal*, no. 74 (2015): 144.
[52] Wang Feng, Baochang Gu, and Yong Cai, 'The End of China's One-child Policy', *Studies in Family Planning* 47, no. 1 (2016): 83.
[53] Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010).

between emperor and the minister.[54] The patrilineal kinship organisation structure marginalised women in their families. Patricia Buckley Ebrey also studied Chinese women and their family in the imperial time. She explored the change in the social and family status of women throughout dynasties and illustrated their lifestyles, costumes, roles, marriages and beliefs.[55] Her comparison of women in different dynasties revealed that although there were drastic changes of social, economic and religious organisation, women's experiences, piety and lifestyles persisted along. Therefore, she concluded that there is a strong power of "deep cultural codes underlying conceptions of gender"[56] and this tendency should not be undermined by scholars. Studies on women in imperial China is a common topic among Chinese scholars. Through artefacts, sculptures, paintings, poems, clothing and writings, researchers could illustrate the lives of imperial women very comprehensively. In general, women in imperial China were strictly bound by Confucian pieties.[57] Male dominance over women could be observed in various ways especially in the public domain where women were deprived of the rights to enter public spaces.

Since the defeat of the Opium War in 1840, China was forced to open its long-closed gates to the West. The winds of Enlightenment thinking, the industrial revolution, science and democracy entered China and started colliding with Chinese traditions. The liberation of Chinese women started with the movement to abolish the binding of feet and breasts during May Fourth Movement in 1919. Xu scrutinized the breast liberation movement and discovered the whole discourse was delivered through a male perspective, reinforcing the male gaze culture.[58] For instance, Zhang Jingsheng the advocate for the banning of breast binding, argued that "breast binding constrains the expression of female virtue. Flat breasts like those of men lack beauty, and so much interest has been lost in society". Similar to the anti-feet-binding movement, it was led by educated men, for the men. Concerns on the female subjectivity was not expressed and not part of the liberation discourse.

Immediately after China's liberation in 1949, it was faced with the problem of how to involves its millions of women into social production. Broyelle gave a thorough analysis of women's liberation in China through her book, including how work has changed women's role and the socialization of women's roles and responsibilities.[59] Mao was one of the most active and definitely the most influential advocate for gender equality and women rights. The turning point for women's participation in production happened in 1958, which is well-known for the launching of the "great leap forward". The whole country was on the feet to increase production, including women.

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[54] Ibid., 35–36.
[55] Patricia Ebrey, *Women and the Family in Chinese History* (Routledge, 2003).
[56] Ibid., 192.
[57] Chenyang Li, 'Confucianism and Feminist Concerns: Overcoming the Confucian "Gender Complex"', *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (2000): 187–99.
[58] Ji 许骥 Xu, 'Minguo Chunian de Zhongguoren Weishenme Yao Jiefang Rufang 民国初年的中国人为什么要解放乳房 [Why Do the Chinese in Early Republic of China Liberate Breasts?]', *Hunyu Yu Jiankang 婚育与健康*, no. 12 (2014): 56–57.
[59] Claudie Broyelle, *Women's Liberation in China*, 1977.

Post-Mao reforms reshaped marriage, family and work life of women. In the book "Women in China's long twentieth century", Hershatter examined the historical, anthropological, sociological and political studies on Chinese women since 1970 and summarized the discourse around marriage, gender equality, labour and modernity.[60] Johnson scrutinised the transformations in women and their family since pre-revolution period, and focused on the changes with time. Johnson used peasant revolution as the thread to analyse the policies towards women in China, and concluded that family reform is an uncompleted task, as traditional values and practices still hampers the political efforts.[61] At the same time, government policies have supported the traditional values and family structures directly and indirectly. This phenomenon is more apparent among rural women. The drastic changes "in women's economic roles, there is still only limited progress toward the original family reform and women's rights goals enunciated over thirty years ago".[62] This conclusion is similar to the conclusion reached by Ebrey, although her studies focused on women in imperial China, where the economic structure and roles of women are extremely different from now. Yet, cultural inertia is high for a complete revolution of women's roles.

The abovementioned literatures on women in China are mostly literature reviews. They are mostly analysis and revisions on secondary sources that have already been produced throughout history. Unlike ethnographies, such studies gave an in-depth illustration of the factual or objective accounts, but had limited coverage on the feelings and emotional side of women.

The issue of female subjectivity was inadequately explored on Chinese women. Judge in her research on the relationship between nationalism and female subjectivity among Chinese women argued that "the women's question" had begun with the rise of nationalism, or the "national question", in early twentieth century.[63] They were linked to the question of building a strong nation as "mothers of citizens". This view is echoed by Xu in the study of the ban on breast binding in early twentieth century. The motive behind the movement is to transform the Chinese physique propelled by the spread of eugenics and social Darwinism- women are seen as the incubator for the next generation with a better quality- to bring the nation forward.[64] The famous female advocates for modernity and nationalism, who were known as female pioneers, also affirmed the national relevance of women's roles as wives

[60] Gail Hershatter, *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century* (Univ of California Press, 2007).
[61] Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 216.
[62] Ibid., 208.
[63] Joan Judge, 'Talent, Virtue, and the Nation: Chinese Nationalisms and Female Subjectivities in the Early Twentieth Century', *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (2001): 767.
[64] Xu, 'Minguo Chunian de Zhongguoren Weishenme Yao Jiefang Rufang 民国初年的中国人为什么要解放乳房 [Why Do the Chinese in Early Republic of China Liberate Breasts?]', 57.

and mothers and there was a link between feminine virtue[65] and the modern nation.[66] Moreover, the female overseas writers during that time also represented their national responsibility as equal to men's. One of the most famous activists- Qiu Jin- wrote that "we all know the national is about to perish, and men are incapable of saving it. Can we still think of relying on them?".[67] It is a powerful demonstration of the sense of agency among elite Chinese women in early twentieth century.

There are ethnographic studies on specific groups of women in China today. For example, Jacka focused on rural women in China and studied their migration behaviours and their lives. Jacka explored the subjectivity of rural women and their experiences with rural urban migration. She conducted interviews and recorded her observations about different issues rural women faced, and analysed through gender perspectives against the backdrop of vast social changes.[68] Similarly, Fincher in her book about the "leftover women" in China explained how the state and society stigmatises single educated women in their late twenties through a number of interviews and accounts of women in China.[69] Chinese scholars also conducted a great number of ethnographic studies on Chinese women or literary analysis of women images presented in novels, fictions and movies.[70] They explored topics of individuality, sexual discriminations, rural migration and so on. As China experienced significant social changes over the past decades, the experiences, behaviour and social status of women in China through gender perspective has been a thriving topic for both Chinese and foreign researchers.

1.3.3 Intersectional studies

The key objective of this literature review is to examine the intersectional studies on the topics of reproductive policies and women in China. In the following section, I will demonstrate how researchers studied the intersectionality, including what stance they took, what topics they focused on and how they dialectically interpreted the relationship between the two issues.

One area of study relevant to this paper would be past investigations on the relationship between the state and women in reproductive matters. The debated issue is, do women have agency over their reproductive decisions?

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[65] Stated by Joan Judge, in early twentieth century China, "the cultural matrix central to new conceptions of the feminine was the dichotomy between virtue (de) and talent (cai)". This dichotomy, according to Judge, expressed the Confucian cultural partiality for sound morality over flashy talent of women. Refer to "Talent, Virture, and the National: Chinese Nationalisms and Female Subjectivities in the Early Twentieth Century", pp 768 for more information on the virtue of women.

[66] Judge, 'Talent, Virtue, and the Nation: Chinese Nationalisms and Female Subjectivities in the Early Twentieth Century', 787.

[67] Ibid., 799.

[68] Tamara Jacka, *Rural Women in Urban China: Gender, Migration, and Social Change: Gender, Migration, and Social Change* (Routledge, 2014).

[69] Leta Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China* (Zed Books Ltd., 2016).

[70] Jinhua Dai, *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua* (Verso, 2002).

Wong defines the relationship between women and the state in China was not simply a stark binary between private and public realms as popularly defined in the western welfare state discourse.[71] According to Wong, the public sphere of the Chinese socialist state is "a disrupted space where the 'state' still calls for its people's sacrifice for the collective good and yet at the same time, a terrain where citizens can claim their rights".[72] At the same time, women's reproduction is "collectivised for the cause of socialist modernisation" and yet, they are allowed to claim their voices through this cause. He gave examples on how women's federation voiced the problems of domestic violence associated with male preference during reproduction, and pushed forward the advocacy and punishment on violence against women.[73] As a conclusion, Wong demonstrated that women gained agency and manoeuvred through the patriarchal system and used policy as a tool to bring about changes.

Wong's argument on how women in China used collectivised reproduction to gain agency was disagreed by Anagnost. She criticised the one-child policy as the culprit of domestic violence faced by women in China giving birth to girls. She portrayed women as victims of the one-child policy.[74] Greenhalgh supported Wong's view that "women are not only victims, but also agents in the practice of controlling births and making informal population policy in China's villages".[75]

As for the position of women and girls, one-child policy has various impacts on their lives too. Female infants during the one-child policy have been abandoned, hidden and given up for adoption. Women were forced to receive sterilisation, abortion and insertion of IUDs which was detrimental to their sexual and reproductive health and rights.[76] Domestic violence was prevalent on women seeking induced abortion.[77] Many researches and studies drew a similar conclusion that the one-child policy had empowered women in China. They usually referred to the urban daughters, whose experiences are "quite different from those of daughters who grew up in the patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal world described in classic studies of gender in Chinese societies".[78] A prominent Chinese feminist, Li Xiaojiang, also favoured this argument.[79] Therefore, many people see infants and mothers under the one-child policy were disempowered while urban daughters were empowered.

There are also quantitative studies on the reproductive willingness and behaviour of women in China. The book "Would you have a second child?" was a collection of studies on

[71] Wong, 'DISPERSING THE "PUBLIC" AND THE "PRIVATE" Gender and the State in the Birth Planning Policy of China'.
[72] Ibid., 509.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ann Stasia Anagnost, 'Family Violence and Magical Violence: The Woman as Victim in China's One-Child Family Policy', *Women and Language* 11, no. 2 (1988): 16.
[75] Susan Greenhalgh, 'Controlling Births and Bodies in Village China', *American Ethnologist* 21, no. 1 (1994): 3.
[76] Deutsch, 'Filial Piety, Patrilineality, and China's One-Child Policy', 370.
[77] Jiuling Wu, Sufang Guo, and Chuanyan Qu, 'Domestic Violence against Women Seeking Induced Abortion in China', *Contraception* 72, no. 2 (1 August 2005): 117–21, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.contraception.2005.02.010.
[78] Fong, 'China's One-child Policy and the Empowerment of Urban Daughters', 1098.
[79] Deutsch, 'Filial Piety, Patrilineality, and China's One-Child Policy', 370.

the reproductive willingness of women by Chinese researchers.[80] Such studies were conducted from a demographic perspective and seldom involve subjectivity issues.

1.3.4 Identification of gaps

The biggest gap of the intersectional studies on women and reproductive policies is the lack of female voices and subjectivity in their narratives. Women's feelings and thoughts are not seen in most of the researches.

The researches that focused on reproductive policies seldom derived their analysis from women's opinions, nor pitched their policy impacts on women's lives. As for the researches on women, very few based their focus on women's subjectivity and their understanding of the reproductive policies. The quantitative researches on women's willingness, attitude and behaviours on reproduction lacked in-depth probe into women's agency as their voices are often submerged under the opinions of their families, husbands and parent-in-laws.

Such a gap would produce skewed understanding of reproductive issues, allowing us to only capture the tip while the rest of the iceberg is hidden in water. In this research, I try to fill this gap as it would help me to understand the root causes of certain reproductive phenomena. A possible application would mean a tremendous improvement of the policy-setting on reproductive issues in China.

1.4 Research design and methodology

This research is not the first one to embark on the understanding of the impact of birth-planning policies in China, but it has a fresh point of penetration of focusing on the impact on women's subjectivity. In this research, I first conducted interviews on women in Henan province and then encoded the interviews for later analysis on subjectivity. For the writing part, I used female subjectivity as my main threads to organising the changes of policies, behaviours and attitudes.

As China is a diverse country both geographically and culturally, variations in birth-planning policies existed across different regions. The scope of the research needs to be limited to a narrower geographical location in order for a meaningful analysis. This research chooses to focus on Henan province as the main region of study for the following reasons.

[80] Baochang 顾宝昌 Gu, Xiaohong 马小红 Ma, and Zhuoyan 茅倬彦 Mao, *Erhai: Nihui Shengma? 二孩, 你会生吗? [Would You Have a Second Child?]* (Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe 社会科学文献出版社, 2014).

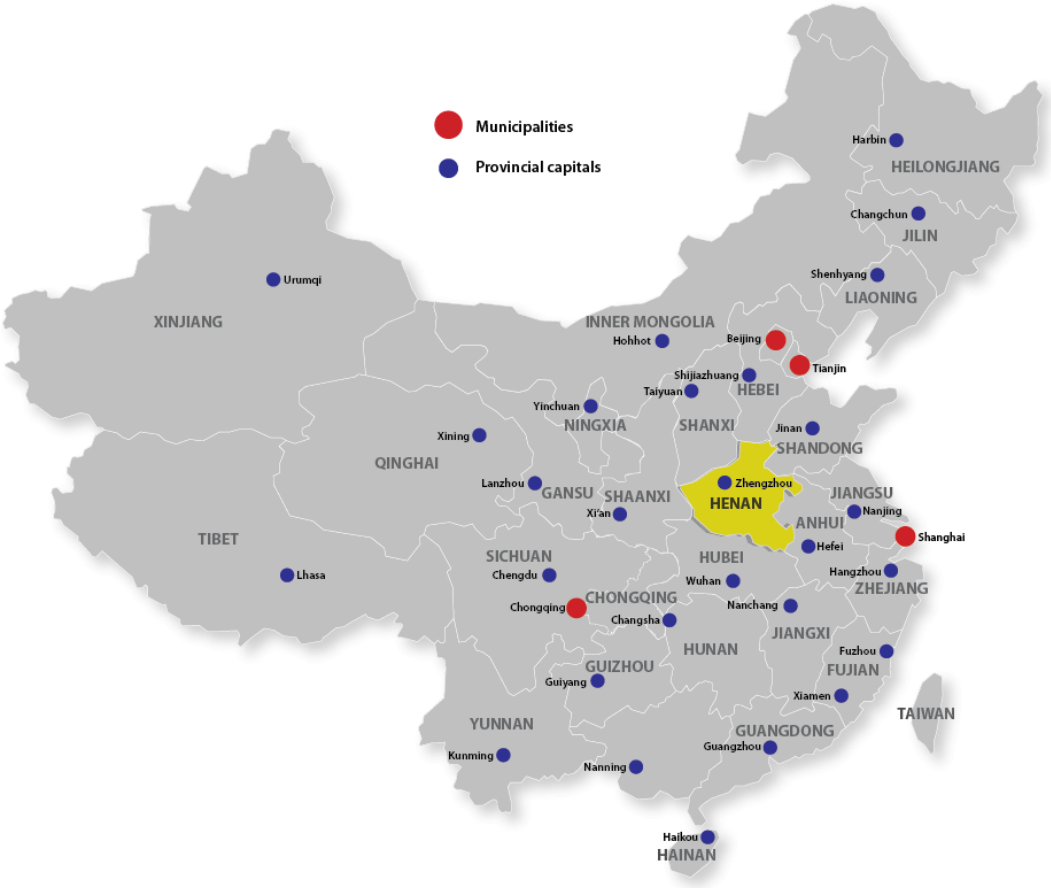

Figure 1 Map of Henan Province in China

Henan province had the largest provincial population for years. It is now overtaken by Guangdong and Shandong province to be the third most heavily-populated province in China. As shown in Figure 1, Henan is located at the heart of the rooster-shaped China. Henan was an agricultural province.

Henan is one of the birthplaces of the Chinese civilisation. From the Xia Dynasty (2070-1600 BC) to the Northern Song Dynasty (960 – 1279 AD), there were 20 dynasties that had their capitals built or moved to Henan. Henan have long been the political, economic, and cultural centres of the country. There are four ancient capitals in Henan, namely, Luoyang (the ancient capital of nine dynasties), Kaifeng (the ancient capital of seven dynasties), Anyang and Zhengzhou. Henan has the greatest number of cultural relics and historic sites in China. Since ancient times, the romantic figures bred on the land of Henan have been star-studded. They include famous ancient philosophers such as Laozi and Zhuangzi, artists, poets and political figures.

Why did I choose to focus on Henan? Firstly, Henan has been one of the most populous provinces in China. Since reproductive policies began to take shape in China, Henan was a key target province. During the implementation of the one-child policy, Henan had been one of the most problematic places by having a large rural population, strong cultural influences and traditional roots. Henan experienced many struggles trying to reconciliate the tension between tradition and modernisation, rural and urbanisation. This is

mostly due to Henan's long history and powerful tradition, and also because of its enormous agricultural population. Secondly, I have easier access to women in Henan province as I was born there and speak the dialect. It was easier for me to find suitable interview candidates and make emotional connections with them.

This research adopts a qualitative approach. Primary sources are crucial to the progress of this research as past researches seldom focused on the same or related issue of reproductive policies' impact on the feminine subjectivity of women in China. Firstly, gathering of primary resources on government documents, publications, policy papers and propaganda materials is important to understanding the policy backgrounds and specific regulations. Through examining the policy papers and propaganda slogans produced by the state, we can deduce how the state sees women in the country. Secondly, the gathering of first-hand encounters is critical to tackling the main purpose of the research that was ambitiously stated above. Private interviews were conducted with women in Henan province. These women were from different cities and villages. The interviewed women vary in their age, occupation, and social background. Secondary data are also essential, as many past researches have been done on the issue of reproductive policies in China. The state's policies on reproductive matters will be scrutinized in all three eras.

I conducted snowballing sampling with semi-structured private interviews (cite appropriate reference). After the interviews I often had follow-up conversations with some of the interviewees. I did not use any coding software and organised systematic thematic coding of the interview transcripts. As the interviews were conducted in Chinese, I translated them into English to perform coding. Some of the interviews were recorded, while most of them were documented through hand written notes. The confidentiality of my interviewees was ensured at the beginning of each interview.

There are limitations to my sampling and coding technique. Firstly, many of the interviewees are members of my extended family. I have known them before the interviews. Being families and knowing them well allowed me to connect with them emotionally, which is quite beneficial to this research, as subjectivity involves both their experiences and feelings. However, it could be a double-edged sword as they might not want me to know certain things. Secondly, I translated the interview transcripts into English. While I tried to be as accurate as possible based on my understanding of their answers, it might have unwittingly impacted precise meaning and expressive value of their descriptions.

1.5 Strengths and limitations

I conducted a total of 15 interviews with women from Henan province. About half of the interviews are done offline during my fieldwork, and the other half was conducted online (audio interviews) after I came back to Geneva. Some of them are mothers and daughters. Nine interviewees are members of my extended family. The list of questions can be found in the annexes of this paper.

Table 1 List of interviewees

1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s
Ru, 1953	Lili, 1960	Jing, 1973	Nana, 1982	Qi, 1992
Feng, 1955	Liu, 1965	KJ, 1979	Tian, 1982	Qing, 1993
Gui, 1956	Hong, 1967		Yan, 1983	Ting, 1993

As shown in the table, their age ranges from 25 to 66 years old and are spread across the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s and the 90s generations[81]. Among them, three were born in the 1950s, three were born in the 1960s, two were born in the 1970s, three were born in the 1980s and four were born in the 1990s. The interviewees highlighted in yellow are born during the one-child policy. Interviewees highlighted in blue are mothers during the one-child policies. The dotted line circling the last column is to indicate that these interviewees are no longer bounded by the one-child policy if they were to give birth.

A strength of this research is its focus on women's subjectivity that was seldom the main focus of past researches. Women's agency and voice were often neglected by the Confucian state. This could be a serious problem as social problems could arise from this negligence. In this research, female subjectivities as reproductive bodies and reproducers are emphasised as an early effort to bring more attention to women's inner feelings and thoughts, so that we can know more about women's social standing and their well-being in the Chinese society.

My limitations are mostly due to the lack of time and resources to include more stories and interviewees in this research. My sample size is obviously not a comprehensive representation of the population of Henan. In addition, the fact that some of the interviewees are my family members may limit the diversity of samples to a greater extent. Also, interviewing family members may also alter the fairness of interview results. However, the fact that I am a family of many interviewees probably allowed them to open up more about their emotions and true feelings during the interviews.

[81] In China, people like to refer to people born in each 10-year interval as a generation. For instance, people born in the 1990s, be it 1991 or 1998, people refer to them as the 90s generation.

Chapter 2: Women in the Mao era

"My mother's life was bitter. She experienced a lot of hardship. She was hardworking and loving. The whole family depended on her. My father was unreliable. When my mother was alive, life was difficult and hard. But just as our lives got better, she passed away because of cancer in 1994. She never enjoyed a good life."

– Ru, born in 1953.

Unfortunately, I did not manage to interview anyone who was born before the 1950s due to time and resource constraints. Women who became mothers during the Mao era are mostly at around 70 to 80 years old now, or even older. My grandmother, who is eligible for the interview, could not tell her stories because of her medical conditions.

However, women who gave births during the Mao period are constantly appearing during the interviews. They are the mothers of the 50s, 60s and 70s generations. As they talked about their mothers, many similar characters and repeating descriptions showed up. Through their descriptions, we could trace the side profiles of women in the Mao era.

2.1 Increased workload

"My impression of my mother was that she worked all the time."

– Feng, born in 1955.

"My mother did a lot of work. She was very busy, and hardworking."

– Hong, born in 1967.

Feng's mother had six children while Hong's mother had four children. Feng's mother was a farmer throughout her whole life while Hong's mother ran small businesses. Both Feng and Hong's greatest impression of their mothers were about the works they did. This characteristic was reflected by all the other interviewees born in the Mao era. Their impressions of their mothers are hardworking women who spent most of the time doing work in the farmlands or at home. Some even mentioned that their mothers are the main supporters of the family, or the "pillar" of the house.[82]

"My mother was the "pillar" of the family. She took care of all her children while being a leader of the village. Although she never went to school, she made sure that all her children studied. She supported us all the way, and all my siblings are at least high school graduates."

– Liu, born in 1965.

[82] Direct translation of the Chinese phrase "顶梁柱" (ding liang zhu), which refers to the pillar that supports the beam of a house.

Liu's mother was a village leader. She had gained enormous access to public affairs as compared to her ancestors. At the same time, she took care of all six of her children and made sure they graduated from high schools. Other than their critical importance in supporting the family, women during the Mao era also experienced enormous hardship, especially those in the rural areas.

> *"My mother's life was bitter. She experienced a lot of hardship. She was hardworking and loving. The whole family depended on her. My father was unreliable. When my mother was alive, life was difficult and hard. But just as our lives got better, she passed away because of cancer in 1994. She never enjoyed a good life."*
>
> *– Ru, born in 1953.*

These narratives echoed with the feminist and gender equality movement promoted by the state after the late 1950s. In the 1950s, there had been a sharp turn of the state's definition of women's role.

The Chinese government often uses many propaganda posters to promote their political campaigns, policies and ideologies. These posters acted as advocacy tools for the state. The propaganda materials are usually distributed in the entire country, covering all administrative levels and regions. Local governments or village councils will deliver the teachings of the posters to each member of their community. Therefore, they are a shred of key historical evidence for the studies of Chinese society and policy change during the time they were produced.

Figure 2 "Do a good job in household tasks and raising children", October 1956[83]

[83] Yingzhou 魏瀛洲 Wei, 'Do a Good Job in Household Tasks and Raising Children', *Shanghai Huapian Chubanshe 上海画片出版社*, 1956, https://chineseposters.net/posters/e37-314.php.

Before the Great Leap Forward took place, women's role was about doing "a good job in household tasks and raising children" as shown in Figure 2. In the poster above, the women pushed baby carts, fed babies, washed clothes and served food. Household tasks were emphasised and women were confined to their homes. However, after the Great Leap Forward began, promotion on women's role had shifted to another direction.

"Women can hold up half the sky" was a folk saying that was later incorporated into the official discourse. It was first mentioned in the People's Daily in 1956 in an article about the protection of women and children' health. After the Great Leap Forward commenced in 1958, on 9th October the People's Daily published the article "A force that cannot be ignored" to officially coin the slogan "Women holds half the sky, be pioneers in everything".[84] Mao had personally cited this slogan many times and it soon gained widespread popularity. Another phrase Mao promoted was "men and women are the same". Under the top-down advocacy frame and the national-wide idolatry of Mao, women's status in the public realm skyrocketed. It is yet to be concluded whether or not it is a true feminist movement or to what extent it brought about gender equality. However, an indisputable fact is that through this movement, women started entering the public realm through encouraging participation in socialist construction and revolutions.

This slogan has become a key message during the communist campaign for gender equality. The gender equality campaign in China also achieved great accomplishments and had long-lasting repercussions on the lives of women today. In 2015, China was ranked first in terms of the percentage of GDP contributed by female workers at 41%, 4% above the world average and 3% above Western Europe.[85] The women's movement at the end of the 1950s was a critical basis for women's achievements today.

[84] Huamin 耿化敏 Geng and Leilei 张蕾蕾 Zhang, '"Funv Nengding Banbiantian" de Kaozheng "妇女能顶半边天" 的考证 [Research on "Women Can Hold up Half the Sky"]', *Beijing Guancha 北京观察*, no. 3 (2015): 74–75.
[85] 'Female Contribution to GDP across World Regions, 2015 | Statistic'.

Figure 3 Propaganda on women's role in socialism

Figure 3 are two such posters. On the left is a female tractor driver. It was produced in 1964[86] depicting women's participation and contribution towards socialist production. At the same time, it meant to promote an image of women as labourers. The right one was probably produced during the cultural revolution, in which it quotes Mao "Chinese women are a great human resource"[87]. Under national promotion and the reality of heavy workload, women during the Mao era had to work both outside and inside the household. Apart from traditional farm work which women have been participating in since imperial China, women can now enter the male-dominated public and political arenas to become leaders, tractor drivers and heavy machine operators. In this aspect, they have gained enormous equality with men in terms of how much they could accomplish.

The workload of women had escalated too, along with this advancement in social status. Before that, women's work was restricted to farming, weaving, child care and parental cares. They mostly stayed at home. There was a clear-cut boundary of within and outside the house. "Men in-charge of external affairs, women in-charge of internal affairs"[88] has dominated people's lives for thousands of years and was integrated into the Chinese culture.

> *"Men are seen as the master of the house, the 'boss'. When people talk to you, they will ask 'where is the boss of your family?'."*
>
> *– Hong, born in 1967.*

[86] Meisheng 金梅生 Jin, 'Female Tractor Driver', *Tianjin Meishu Chubanshe 天津美术出版社*, 1964, https://chineseposters.net/posters/e13-880.php.
[87] 'Funv nengding banbiantian, maozhuxi shuode 妇女能顶半边天, 毛主席说的 [Women can hold up half the sky, as Chairman Mao said]', 2018, https://kknews.cc/news/ox48qlq.html.
[88] A Chinese saying, "男主外，女主内", translated by the author.

After entering into the public workforce, women's public workload increased while their traditional house works were not reduced.[89] In other words, while women were encouraged into the public arena as an important human resource of China's socialist construction, they were not emancipated from their house works and there was no advocacy on men's responsibilities at home. As a result, women had to do more work- the works of men and women- while men continued to do only men's works. The state had neglected the power of tradition as they change rules and make new policies, or they were oblivious to the momentum of the traditional mindset. Due to this lack of follow-ups to promoting "gender equality", it took women only a few years to break through their traditional roles and begin entering the public domain, but it took as long as half a century for women to negotiate their positions at home and for men to participate in house works willingly.

Figure 4 China vs the U.S.: home portrayals

Figure 4 illustrates two urban homes in two countries of the opposing ideologies. On the left, the Chinese propaganda poster is titled "At Home" and was produced in 1972.[90] The picture on the right was one of the many advertisements produced during the 1950s[91] in the United States. Both of them depict the lives of an urban family in the living room, and are incredibly similar in the way they perceive work distributions at home. Men are reading newspapers, while women are either sewing or pouring coffee. Both families had two children, a girl and a boy. The Chinese and American portrayal of ideal families surprisingly resonated with each other in so many ways.

The state of China emancipated women by encouraging women to work. Together with this, women received equal educational rights. The promotion of educational and working rights provided a critical basis for improving women's social status. However, due to the lack of follow-up actions and break-throughs on traditions, the women's revolution has remained an incomplete revolution until today.

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[89] White, *China's Longest Campaign: Birth Planning in the People's Republic, 1949-2005*, 22.
[90] 'Bude Bukan de Zhongguo Zhengzhi Xuanchuanhua 不得不看的 中国政治宣传画（1949-1978）[Chinese Propaganda Posters You Cannot Miss (1949-1978)]', Zhongguo guanggaowang CNAD, 2015, http://www.cnad.com/show/9/287537.html.
[91] M. Reed McCall, 'A Little Cup of Happy..', 2014, https://mreedmccall.com/tag/memory/.

2.2 The existence of reproductive policies

When I asked about the existence of any reproductive policies during the time my interviewees were born, all their answers given were negative. This is contrary to my researches.

Figure 5 Propaganda posters in the 1960s on birth-planning

Figure 5 are two birth-planning propaganda posters produced in the 1960s. On the left, it says "implementing birth planning is beneficial to the health of mothers and children". On the right, it says "late marriage has many advantages". In imperial China, women usually get married after they start menstruating, at the age of 13-15. After the new Marriage Law was published in 1950, the legal marriage age for men and women had been changed to 20 and 18 respectively. Late marriage refers to getting married two to three years after reaching the legal age.

In fact, birth planning has always been an integral part of reproductive policies. There is also evidence of internal documents published by the state.[92] However, all of my interviewees were unaware of it. To their understandings, reproductive policies of China only began in the late 1970s in the form of the one-child policy.

There seems to be an interesting divergence between the state's promotion and public awareness. The birth-planning campaign started as early as the mid-1950s. By 1952, national regulations had been drafted, and were disseminated later that year on a trial basis. The first attempt to control births was met with oppositions from conservative forces on local levels.

[92] White, *China's Longest Campaign: Birth Planning in the People's Republic, 1949-2005*, 50.

Until November 1954, the gradual promotion of voluntary birth control methods started to move forward.[93] All the interviewees born during the Mao era said that they had never heard of the term “jihua shengyu”, “planned birth” or “birth planning” reflected a mismatch of interview results and policy research.

This divergence could be caused by the fact that my interviewees are not the most suitable representatives of the reproductive policies in the Mao’s era. They were not at reproductive age during the campaigns, therefore, they might not have knowledge of the state’s promotion on contraceptive pills, planned births and other issues. If I had a chance to interview their mothers, I might have a different answer. On the other hand, all the interviewees have not heard of such a policy might also be due to the lack of advocacy on local levels.

Not only that my interviewees did not know about the existence of reproductive policies during the Mao Era, but their family structure also reflected that birth planning and control was probably absent, especially those born before the 1970s. The three “boomer” interviewees who were born in the 1950s came from families of five and seven children. Among the 1960-boomers, they came from families of three, four and six children.

Figure 6 "Daddy goes to work, we go to school" and “Let the mother peacefully produce a lot of children” in 1954

Figure 6 were two propaganda posters produced in 1954, titled “daddy goes to work, we go to school” on the left and “let the mother peacefully produce a lot of children” on the right. On the left, the couple have four children, two boys and two girls. On the right, woman held a baby in her arm while three other children sat in the cart. These posters portrayed women as caregivers in a family with multiple children. Both posters aimed to establish a caring and loving mother figure, while simultaneously encourage people to reproduce. It is quite apparent that similar to the changes in the state’s promotion of women’s role in the 1950s, reproductive policies also experienced a dog-leg bend during the 1950s.

[93] Ibid., 25.

Meanwhile, we could also look at the birth rates during the 1950s and 1960s in Henan province. Generally, the birth rate reflected that there was a baby-booming throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Since 1970 onwards, the birth rate started falling and only increased temporarily when the boomer generation became parents in the 1980s.

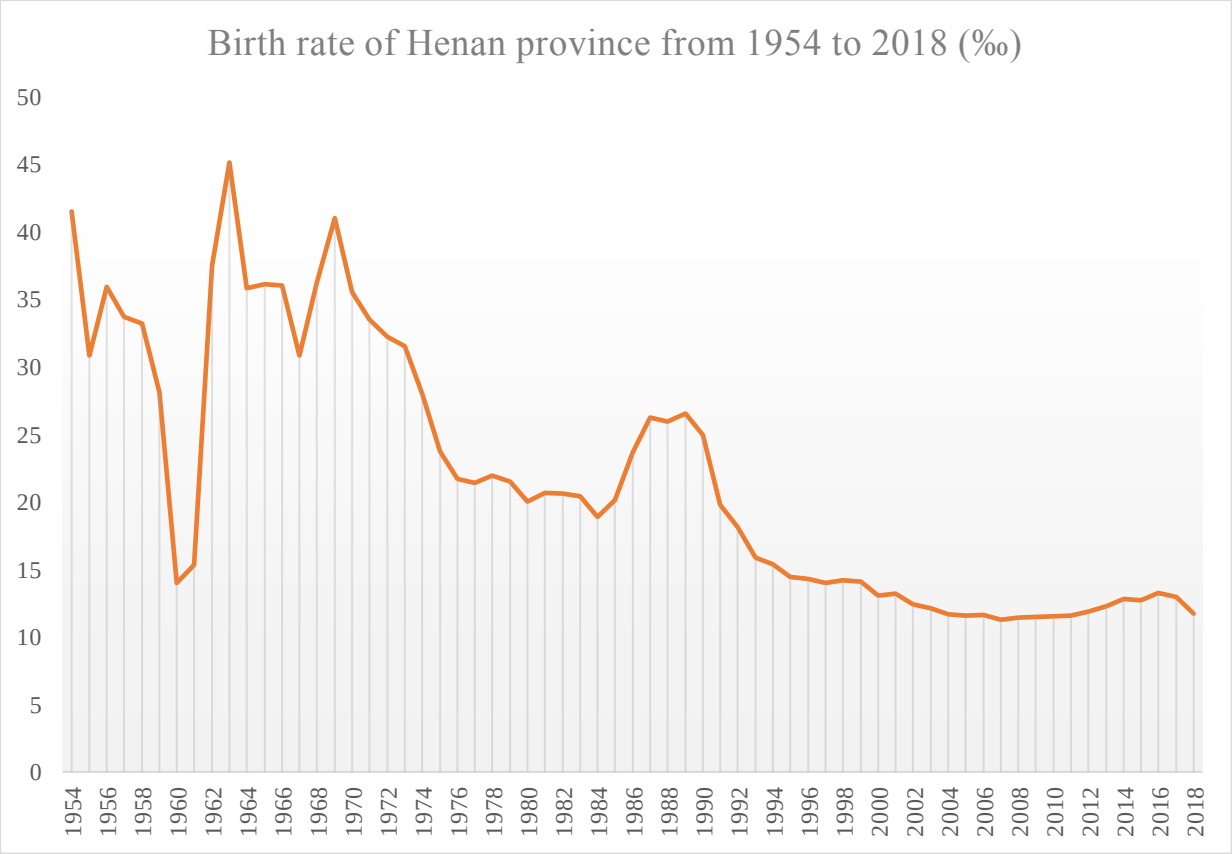

Figure 7 Birth rate of Henan province from 1954 to 2018 [94]

As shown in Figure 7, the birth rate of Henan province has been very high in the 1960s and started declining only after 1970. In fact, the birth rate at the end of the 1970s was close to the population replacement rate. The sudden drop in the birth rate between 1958 and 1961 was due to the nation-wide famine[95], in which Henan had seen the most severe deaths. The natural growth rate during the famine in Henan was as low as -25.6 ‰ in 1960.

Although political campaigns on birth planning started in the 1950s, why did the decline in birth rate only began after 1970s? This is probably because the party central's advocacy on birth planning encountered resistance at local levels, while simultaneously there were inconsistent voices within the state regarding birth control.[96]

[94] 'Renkou Chushenglv, Siwanglv Ji Ziran Zengzhanglv- Henan Province 人口出生率、死亡率及自然增长率-河南省地区 [Population Fertility Rate, Death Rate and Natural Growth Rate of Henan Province]', Hexun wang 和讯网, 2018, http://calendar.hexun.com/area/dqzb_410000_D0070000.shtml.

[95] The famine was also called "the Great Leap Disaster" by Western scholars. It was an immediate consequence of the failed Great Leap Forward. It was often known as "three years of natural disasters" in Chinese, while it was actually a result of man-made mistakes and political wrong-doings.

[96] White, *China's Longest Campaign: Birth Planning in the People's Republic, 1949-2005*, 33.

The most probable reason that people were unaware of the reproductive policies before the one-child policy was the lack of publicity on the local levels. Rural reception was probably weak during the early years of birth planning campaigns. The decline in the birth rate in the 1970s was likely a result of various factors. In 1971, the State Council included the indicators for controlling population growth for the first time in the National Economic Development Plan. Birth planning became a more critical issue and the promotional efforts probably had increased alongside, thus lowering the birth rate. As shown in Figure 8, posters produced in 1974 entailed abundant information on birth planning. On the left, it quotes Mao's saying on top, "When we plan, do things, and think about problems, we must start from the point that there are 600 million people in China. Don't forget this". On the bottom it says "family planning has many advantages", and included detailed explanations on the benefits of birth planning. The poster on the right signifies "deliver contraceptive pills to doorsteps, do a good job in family planning". In the middle, it lists the benefits of promoting family planning, including "in order to facilitate the smooth progress of the revolution and the promotion of production; in order to promote the health of the people and the prosperity of the nation; in order to protect motherhood, women and children, to better cultivate the next generation".

Figure 8 Propaganda posters on birth planning, 1974

The slogans above are similar to those posters produced in the 1960s in Figure 5. A second look at these posters, I deciphered something different: these posters on reproductive policies not only targeted the general public, but also hoped to persuade local governments to increase efforts in promoting family planning. The slogans on Figure 8 emphasises the

benefits of implementing family planning, by delivering contraceptive pills, IUDs and providing abortion services free-of-charge. As a result, the implementation and advocacy efforts increased on the local levels helped to lower fertility rate in the 1970s.

Another possible reason could be the natural decline due to urbanisation and an overall increase in national education. Moreover, political unrest caused by the cultural revolution might also lead to a decrease in the birth rate.

2.3 Subjectivity

People born during the Mao era have experienced the most significant social changes. Among my interviewees, almost all of them have experienced first generation urbanisation. Most of them were born in rural regions and moved to cities later on. Only one of them still remained living in her village but worked in the city. They also experienced fluctuations in ideologies and social organisations such as the transformation from socialist to capitalist values. Most of them experienced poverty in their childhood and enormous improvement in the standard of living. In terms of education, all of them are literate, but only a few graduated from high school or received higher education. These social transformations also impacted on their sense and sensibility.

2.3.1 Being mothers

Among this generation with bittersweet life stories, their impressions of their mothers are varied with some similar characteristics. In the previous section I have explained how they remembered their mothers worked a lot. This section will focus on the emotional connection they had with their mothers.

> *"My mother is a great mother. She is a giver, and is willing to devote her life to her children… Being a mother is about selflessness. A mother gives her children everything she has, including her life. A mother suffers from pain to give birth. It is about sacrifice."*
>
> *– Gui, born in 1956.*

Gui mentioned that being a mother is about selflessness, while Ru mentioned that being a mother is about total devotion to her children. Both of them based this impression on their own mothers, who were farmers during the Mao era. Through their descriptions, we could trace the side profiles of doting, devoted and caring mothers just like the traditional mother figures in Confucian culture.

> *"Being a mother is about total devotion to caring and loving the children. During our childhood life was bitter, we would all help our mother with works. My mother always worried about her children. She was afraid we did not have a good life. She would always support us and worry about us."*
>
> *– Ru, born in 1953.*

Under the Five Principles (Wu Jiao) of Confucianism, "a nurturing mother" (mu ci) is the guiding principle for being a mother in China. The "Dao"[97] of being a mother was elaborated in many ancient texts and guiding principles for women. In general, mothers give devoted love and care to their children to earn respect in families and society. At the same time, as a mother follows the "Dao" of being a mother, she gains authority in families and society. This is because filial piety has given good mothers a strong power over her children.[98] Therefore, a successful Confucian mother is someone who is caring, loving and complete devotion to her husband and children. The traditional mother figure is about selflessness.

Lili's mother was a leader in a textile factory, which is a transgression of the traditional mother figure. Instead of catering to her husband and children, she had an additional social responsibility of serving the nation and her fellow factory workers under her leadership. While having a hectic working schedule, she expressed love for her children by bringing snacks home and withholding justice for her daughter.

> *"When I was young my mother was always busy. She leaves in the morning and returns late at nights. She would bring snacks for us when she returns home…She was very gentle. My parents rarely quarrelled or fought. As I was the only daughter, I always told on my brothers if they bullied me, and my mother would withhold justice for me."*
>
> *– Lili, born in 1960.*

The Confucian devotion of care and love for the family and the socialist responsibility of increasing national production coexisted in the subjectivity of mothers in the Mao era. As shown in Figure 2, the state also promotes women's traditional roles in the early 1950s. When "women can hold up half the sky" began, traditional roles of women did not exit from the stage. Women during the Mao were both nurturing mothers and proud labourers. They might have struggled with juggling the two identities, but they kept everything flowing.

However, as compared to the millennials' description of their mothers, women born in the Mao era were not so descriptive in the ways they described their mothers. The millennials are very expressive of their feelings, emotions, memories and reflections towards their mothers, while women born in the Mao era were more fact-based in their narratives and tacit of their feelings.

[97] In Chinese, Dao means the appropriate ethics or codes of conduct. The Dao of mothers is the set of ethical codes and behaviours mothers need to follow.

[98] Chunfei 王纯菲 Wang, 'Teshu de "Tazhe": Zhongguo Wenxue Muqin Xingxiang de Wenhua Yiyun 特殊的"他者": 中国文学母亲形象的文化意意蕴 [Special "Otherness": the Cultural Implication of Mother Image in Chinese Literature]', *Liaoning Daxue Xuebao : Zhexue Shehui Kexueban 辽宁大学学报: 哲学社会科学版*, no. 1 (2012): 131.

2.3.2 Being a girl

The beginning of female subjectivity originates from a stage when "we have begun to perceive and symbolise gender differences".[99] I asked the question "when did you start realising that you are a girl" to all my interviewees, and their responses are varied due to their different family background and life experiences.

> *"I don't remember when I started realizing my identity as a girl. As I was the youngest in the family, I had no worries. I do not remember being told how to behave like a girl."*
>
> *– Feng, born in 1955.*

Like Feng, many of them have vague memories of their early childhood. Many of them also mentioned that they had no gender awareness when they were young. Such an impression was given by their parents' treatment of girls and boys in the family.

> *"My mother … She did not treat girls and boy differently. When I was young I had no awareness of my gender."*
>
> *– Liu, born in 1965.*

> *"I did not remember when and how I first aware of being a girl. I had no idea and I do not think that much. My family treats girls and boys the same. We all had to carry heavy stuff, and help with family chores and works. We helped our parents to work, and the elder kids took care of the younger ones."*
>
> *– Gui, born in 1956.*

Liu and Gui remembered their parents treated the girls and boys in the household equally, and therefore they had no awareness of their gender.

> *"My mother treated girls and boys the same. Actually, I think she loves girls even more. When we went out home she was always worried about our safety. She did not worry about boys. She did not pay much attention to the boys. Other families really value their sons, but my mother valued her girls more."*
>
> *– Ru, born in 1953.*

Ru mentioned her mother was especially tender to girls. As she said, this is not a common practice in Chinese families. In most other families, sons are valued more as they are the legitimate heir to the family line.

> *"I remember my parents telling me that I have to learn to cook and to make clothes. These are the basic skills for a woman, or else I would not be able to run my family."*

[99] K. M. G. Schreurs, L. Woerton, and Janneke van Mens-Verhulst, *Daughtering and Mothering: Female Subjectivity Reanalysed* (Routledge, 2003), 16.

– Jing, born in 1973.

"I remember when I was young, my relatives would say to me: 'You got to be more dexterous', 'Work harder on your house chores so that you don't get beaten by your husband in future'".

– Gui, born in 1956.

Jing and Gui's understandings of women is partially influenced by the teachings of the elders in the family. Women have the duty of taking care of families and doing housework. Gui's relative mentioned "don't get beaten by your husband" is also a side proof for the subservient family status of women in traditional Chinese families.

2.3.3 Marriage and reproduction

There are three key concepts used by interviewees born in the Mao era to describe their rationale of getting married and having children. The central idea to their motive for getting married and having children is it is the appropriate thing to do. Reasons for the "appropriateness" are natural, common, and forced.

Firstly, most of the interviewees during the Mao era mentioned the word "natural" as they talked about the rationales of their marriage and reproduction.

I did not think of why. I think it is a natural thing to do. Go with the flow. Having a family is warm and nice.

– Gui, born in 1956.

"Natural" appeared the greatest number of times during all my interviews with this generation, and it appeared 0 times among the millennials. This is an interesting phenomenon. Why are marriage and reproduction a natural thing among people born in the Mao era?

Again, it is related to traditional values. In China, filial piety is the core idea of its Confucian ethics for thousands of years. Another key icon of Confucianism is Mengzi, or Mencius. He wrote in "Mengzi·Liloushang" that "Among the unfilial behaviours, having no offspring (son in particular) is the worst".[100] Why is that so? In the Book of Rites[101], it quotes "therefore a filial son has three duties (to his parents)- nourish them when they are alive, mourn them when they die and offer sacrifices when the mourning is over".[102] The worst unfilial practice of having no sons would mean that all sacrificing for the dead would be ceased for the family line. This is particularly devastating for people if there were no one to remember and commemorate the deceased. After two thousand years, such thinking is deeply

[100] Translated by the author. The original text is "不孝有三，无后为大". This saying has been interpreted by many historians in different ways, but this translated version is the most commonly used interpretation.
[101] The Book of Rites, or Liji, is a collection of texts describing the social forms, administration and ceremonial rites of the Zhou dynasty, written during the late Warrior States (near 221BC).
[102] Jiang 张践 Zhang, 'Rujia Xiaodaoguan de Xingcheng Yu Yanbian 儒家孝道观的形成与演变 [The Formation and Transformations of Confucian Filial Piety]', *Zhongguo Zhexueshi 中国哲学史* 3 (2000): 77.

embedded in the minds of people. As a result, getting married and having children has become a "natural" thing to do in order to continue the family line. It reflects women's subjectivity is deeply influenced by the power of traditions.

> *I got married when I was 23 years old. I did not think about it, but it happened naturally as I came of age, my parents and relatives would arrange for me and tell me it's time to form a family. Getting married and giving birth was a natural thing to us, not like you girls. You have to think so hard about these issues.*
>
> *– Feng, born in 1955.*

In the dialogue above, Feng referred to me as defiance of traditional values. This indication of the shift in subjectivity among my generation will be discussed in the later chapters.

Secondly, rationalising marriage and reproduction as a common practice is another important characteristic of people born in the Mao era. The reasoning logic is, when everyone else gets married in their twenties, the person who does not do it would be the outcast of society, therefore making marriage the appropriate thing to do. Both "natural" and "common" rationales are driven by the naturalisation of traditions. However, the "common" factor has implicit social control and peer pressure in it, for the majority has gained powerful authority over the minorities.

> *It was a natural trend. When you come of age, you get married and have children. Everyone is like that. It was something I should do, and everyone thought so. I never questioned it.*
>
> *– Hong, born in 1967.*

Hong mentioned, "everyone is like that". Therefore, Hong got married at 23 years old like most other people born in the Mao era to avoid being an outcast.

> *"My husband and I met through matchmaking…After graduation, I eventually started thinking about marriage. It was a natural thing. Even if I don't think about it, my parents would also talk me into it or force me into matchmaking. I think you got to do what you are supposed to do at an appropriate age. My age came for marriage. And after marriage, it is the appropriate time for having a child. "*
>
> *– Liu, born in 1965.*

Liu's saying "you got to do what you are supposed to do at an appropriate age" highlighted the infusion of traditional values into subjectivity among women born in the Mao era. Women internalised the already naturalised traditional beliefs to avoid troubles and criticisms.

However, Ru married quite late at the age of 29 and was pressurised to get married. This brings in the third concept of being "forced" into marriage and reproduction.

"I never thought of getting married when I was young. When I grew up, my family tried to matchmake for me and I rejected. I did not want to get married. I came to the city to look after my elder sister's children. When I got older, people tried to matchmake for me. The urban and rural difference at that time was enormous, I did not want to marry someone from the rural area. However, men in the city do not look for rural girls, so I had to marry a guy with rural hukou[103]*. I did not want to, but as I got older the pressure was enormous. I had no choice but to marry my husband. He had rural hukou, but he lives close to the city."*

– Ru, born in 1953.

Ru did not want to get married but was forced to marry someone she did not wish to. She received enormous pressure from her surroundings, including families and acquaintances. Liu who internalised the traditional values also mentioned: "*Even if I don't think about it, my parents would also talk me into it for force me into matchmaking"*.

The power of tradition had authority over both men and women. The duty of bearing children to continue the family line governs the behaviours of men and women. They would be implicitly punished if they defy the traditional values. Therefore, my interviewees had all decided to comply with the power of tradition.

However, their stories continued after they were married and had children.

"I divorced afterwards and now I am alone and quite happy. You know, there was a time when people were encouraged to get Hepatitis B vaccine injections. In our family, only kids and the men took the vaccines. Well, because you need to pay for the injections. Women in our family did not take the vaccine and we were fine with it. Well, now I think of it, I feel it's very funny and dumb. I cannot die even if everyone else died. That is what I think now."

– Hong, born in 1967.

Hong and her ex-husband divorced in early 2000 due to adultery on both sides after 15 years of marriage. Her sense of personhood transformed as she was released from the traditional values of a Chinese woman downright through her divorce. Selflessness was replaced with "self", the "common" and "natural" rationales that started her marriage was ended with her pursuit of individualistic world view.

As all of my interviewees born in the Mao era gave birth during the one-child policy era, their reproductive stories will be analysed in the next chapter.

[103] Hukou is the system of household registration in China. It is originated from ancient China and people in China now are divided into urban hukou and rural hukou. They have different benefits and access to land and social services.

Chapter 3: The one-child era

"It feels like if he does not have a son, he loses his root. 'Duan zi jue sun'- broken kinship and extinction of future."

– Yan, born in 1983.

The one-child era started in 1979 and officially ended in 2016. During the 37 years of implementation, women's lives were inevitably affected by it. It impacted generations of people, including those who became mothers during the one-child era, as well as those who grew up under this policy.

In this section, I will unravel the stories of both mothers and children of the one-child era. Within my limited pool of interviewees, there are cases of forced abortion, extra-births, illegal births, "guerrilla warfare" with the Family Planning Office (FPO) and so on. Those who comply with the government regulations had one or two children according to regulations, while others managed to get around the rules and had more children. To what extent did the choice of birth belong to the hands of the women was not a simple, straightforward answer. As for the girls who were born under the one-child policy, their interpretation of womanhood had undergone significant shifts too.

3.1 Giving birth

There are many studies carried out on the willingness of women to give birth, their reproductive attitudes and behaviours. There are also many surveys on Chinese families regarding their reproductive preferences. Before conducting my own interviews, I kept wondering how reliable and representative of such survey results. This is because many of the surveys conducted to represent women's attitude and opinions might be significantly skewed towards the preferences of their family members, including their husbands, parents and parents-in-law. Women's individual voices and opinions are easily submerged, with or without women's awareness.

As reflected in Figure 7 Birth rate of Henan province from 1954 to 2018, he boomer generation of China not only entails those born in the 1960s, but also includes those born in the 1950s, except for the three years of famine. Among the interviewees born in 1950s and 1960s, all of them gave birth during the one-child policy era. Indeed, the one-child policy was put in place to curb births among the boomer generation, as the rate of population is getting out of control by the end of 1970s. In Figure 7, the fertility rate between 1980 to 1990 surged even with the one-child policy in place as a result of the boomers' generation coming to reproductive age.

3.1.1 The complexities of reproductive control

In the People's Republic of China, the divide between rural and urban is extensive in all aspects. Taking reproduction as an example, the table below shows the fertility rate for urban and rural populations in China, between 1962 and 1983.

Table 2 Fertility rate of urban and rural China, 1962 to 1983[104]

Year	Urban Fertility	Rural Fertility
1962	4.78	6.3
1963	6.2	7.78
1964	4.39	6.56
1965	3.74	6.59
1966	3.1	6.95
1967	2.9	5.84
1968	3.87	7.02
1969	3.29	6.26
1970	3.26	6.37
1971	2.88	6.01
1972	2.63	5.5
1973	2.38	5
1974	1.98	4.64
1975	1.78	3.95
1976	1.6	3.58
1977	1.57	3.11
1978	1.55	2.96
1979	1.37	3.04
1980	1.14	2.48
1981	1.39	2.91
1982		
1983	1.3	2.2

[104] White, *China's Longest Campaign: Birth Planning in the People's Republic, 1949-2005*, 73.

During the first half of the 1970s, the strong influence of administrative measures in workplaces and neighbourhoods in the urban cities has driven the fertility rate down. Population density, housing shortages, differences of economic production and educations levels are the main reasons causing the divide between rural and urban fertility.[105] As a result, rural fertility rate is almost twice of the urban fertility from 1965 onwards.

Both urban and rural populations are influenced by traditional preferences on reproduction. How do the Chinese see children in their culture? According to Potter, Chinese culture was never child-centred. In fact, it was quite the opposite as it emphasises the importance of caring for the aged. Children are the solution to individual problems in the future, including the provision of caring when aged and sacrifices when dead.[106]

> *"They are the means to ends which Chinese adults seek after as the thirsty seek for water: they can share the endless work necessary before prosperity can be achieved; if male, they can dignify existence by providing a sense that the family line is being carried on; but most important, they are the solution to the aching problem, 'Who will ever take care of me?'"*[107]

People in China not only like having children, but also like having more children. This is reflected in traditional saying like "the more children, the more wealth". Male preference also has an overwhelming influence in rural areas. The earliest records of male preference could be found in a poem in "Shijing (Classics of Poems) · Xiaoya· Sigan" during the Western Zhou dynasty (1122 BC to 771 BC).

> *"If a baby son is born, let him sleep on the big bed of sandalwood carving, dress him in beautiful clothes, and scour the beautiful jade for him to play.*
>
> *You see how his cries are so bright, how grand his future is! He will become a king or a duke.*
>
> *If a daughter is born, let her sleep on the foot of the palace house, wrap her with a swaddle, and find her a spindle so that she can play.*
>
> *I hope she is not provocative, would help out with food and winery, know the pieties and does not give parents trouble!"*[108]

This 3000-year-old poem showed the early forms of male preference. Such a preference has enormous influence until today. In a cultural sense, sons are the legitimate heirs according to Confucian ethics. They could inherit land and properties, have access to power and social ladders, as well as having the rights to making sacrifices to his ancestors to

[105] Ibid., 76.
[106] Sulamith Heins Potter, 'Birth Planning in Rural China: A Cultural Account', in *Child Survival* (Springer, 1987), 33.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Translated from the original script by the author.

continue the ancestral line. Politically and economically, having more sons could promote one's social standing in rural areas, as sons could contribute to the bargaining power of the family.[109] Therefore, while tradition and norms have made reproduction a responsibility, the economic benefits made the traditional norms more appealing and thus generating a strong belief that dominated the Chinese history, and is both metaphysical and material.

When the state intervened in reproduction, the biggest obstacles were met in rural areas. On urban populations, the one-child policy was very strict. According to the Henan Province Family Planning Regulations published in 1990 [110], the only exceptions for having a second child are as follows for urban population:

1) *Appraised by the county-level family planning technical appraisal agency, the city (local) family planning technical appraisal agency confirmed that the first child was a non-genetic disability and could not be a normal labour force;*
2) *Being identified as infertility, infertile for more than five years after marriage and the woman is over 30 years of age, could legally adopt a child;*
3) *Both husband and wife are Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan compatriots who returned to China or returned to Henan, and have only one child;*
4) *One of the spouses is the only child of a second-class and above disabled soldier or a martyr;*
5) *One of the spouses has continued to engage in underground mining operations for more than five years, has only one girl, and continue to engage in underground mining operations;*
6) *Remarried couples, having one child before remarriage and the other party has not given birth.*

The punishments for extra-birth among the urban population would be job loss for at least one of the spouses accompanied by heavy fines. As most people work under state-owned entities in the 1980s and 1990s, this punishment was very effective in curbing extra-births.

As for the rural area, the regulations were less strict. The rural population can have two children if:

1) *Couples only have one girl, and families have difficulties;*
2) *Men who have married a family with no sons, and who have raised their parents (only applicable to one person among cases of several sisters);*
3) *Having settled in deep forest villages for more than five years and continuing to settle;*
4) *Both husband and wife are ethnic minorities.*

[109] White, *China's Longest Campaign: Birth Planning in the People's Republic, 1949-2005*, 77.
[110] 'Henan sheng jihua shengyu tiaoli 河南省计划生育条例 [Henan Province Family Planning Regulations]' (1990), http://law.npc.gov.cn/FLFG/flfgByID.action?txtid=67&flfgID=87137&showDetailType=QW. Excerpts are translated by the author.

5) *If the second child is born in accordance with the regulations, the woman's age should be over 28 years old and have a birth interval of four years or more.*

This set of regulations enacted in 1990 was a result of strong resistance in rural areas since 1980 when the one-child policy was first implemented. This resistance followed a bottom-up pattern to reach the central committee of the party. The State Council realised it is necessary to revise the family planning policy. The revision project started in 1984 and ended in 1991 when the new regulation in 1990 was published.[111]

The FPOs in every locality are the ones implementing the birth planning regulations. Compliance with the regulations is compulsory. When a couple is qualified to have a child, a permit would be issued to them. Usually, to meet the family planning targets, women would go through unwanted abortions before they can obtain a permit. After the birth of the first child, it is compulsory for women to insert IUDs. Non-compliance could lead to forced abortions, sterilisation on women and economic, psychological and at times physical coercion on couples.[112]

If you take a walk in the rural villages during the 1980s and 1990s, you would see an overwhelming number of slogans, educational posters and banners on the one-child policy.

Figure 9 Educational slogans in the villages of Henan province[113]

Figure 9 shows two such slogans found in the villages of Henan province in 2002 and 1997 respectively. On the left, it quotes "Reports on extra-births will be awarded 100-800 RMB". On the right, it says "Perform abortions in time to avoid detentions". In the first slogan, the local governments used incentives to encourage reporting on neighbours to ensure that people kept an eye on one another. This could also act as a warning to those wishing to

[111] Litian 冯立天 Feng, Yingtong 马瀛通 Ma, and Mou 冷眸 Leng, '50 Nianlai Zhongguo Shengyu Zhengce Yanbian Zhi Lishi Guiji 50 年来中国生育政策演变之历史轨迹 [The Historical Track of the Evolution of China's Birth Policy in the Past 50 Years]', *Renkou Yu Jingji 人口与经济* 2 (1999): 9–10.
[112] Joan Kaufman et al., 'Family Planning Policy and Practice in China: A Study of Four Rural Counties', *Population and Development Review*, 1989, 707.
[113] 'Jihua Shengyu Xuanchuan Biaoyu Bianqian 计划生育宣传标语变迁 [The Transitions of Reproductive Policy Slogans]', Guoqing zhongguo 国情中国, 2013, http://guoqing.china.com.cn/2013-11/22/content_30678124_2.htm.

break the rules. In the second slogan the intention of threatening people with an iron fist was quite clear.

3.1.2 Non-compliance: extra-birth guerrillas

In the year 1990, a humorous and sarcastic skit titled "Extra-birth Guerrillas" was aired on the CCTV Chinese New Year Gala. The skit was about a conversation between a rural couple who blamed each other for giving birth to three daughters and had to run around the whole country to avoid the family planning policy, just to have a son. Since then, the term "extra-birth guerrillas" was used to refer to those who run around to hide from the FPOs.[114] In the skit, the couple lost everything due to the floating life. In reality, the price to pay for not complying with the state's policy was high. Yet, many people were willing to risk everything to have a son.

Among my interviewees, there are three cases of extra-births. Yan was the first girl born in her family in a rural village. After her birth, her parents had two more children, a girl and a boy, who were both extra-births. They had to pay heavy fines for each child until her little brother was born when she was nine years old.

> *"When I was born, it was already the one-child policy. Both my younger brother and sisters were extra-births. We had to pay fines. As we could not afford it, my parents were arrested and detained by FPO. They also took away things in our home, including chairs, bed, table and cut down our trees in the yard."*
>
> *– Yan, born in 1983.*

Because of the extra-births, Yan's family was stricken by poverty when she was young. They were given a ticket, or an invoice for the fines. Whenever her parents made some money they had to pay the FPO until the fines were fully collected. Her younger sister's birth costed them 900 yuan. During the 1980s where prices were really low, it was considered a fortune. Yan's little brother cost them even more. The reason her family wanted a son so much was that her father came from a big family with an intricate network of kin. They had strong obsession with sons.

> *"It feels like if he does not have a son, he loses his root. 'Duan zi jue sun', broken kinship and extinction of future."*
>
> *– Yan, born in 1983.*

Indeed, Yan's father experienced a lot of peer pressure. His family might tell him that "you should have a son", or else your hereditary line will "extinct". Mo Yan, the Nobel Laureate in Literature, wrote about the pressures of having a son in rural China in his short story "the Abandoned Child", "people kept giving me funny looks, as if I were a mental case

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[114] 'Chaosheng youjidui 超生游击队 [Extra-birth guerillas]', in *Wikipedia*, 8 February 2019, https://zh.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=%E8%B6%85%E7%94%9F%E6%B8%B8%E5%87%BB%E9%98%9F&oldid=53107711.
The skit can be watched at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXPy03ebfRo

or a strange creature from some alien planet who had landed in their midst".[115] However, pressures might also come from self-imagined paranoia, when the obsession of having a son escalates.

Monetary losses were insignificant compared to the long-lasting trauma Yan's family had. For Yan, she had to run around to avoid the FPO officials. Sometimes she stayed at her grandmother's place, sometimes at her aunt's. She had to separate from her parents often because of the fear of having a bigger target when the family is together. To make matters worse, after her brother was born, her father was diagnosed with schizophrenia for his traumas.

> *"My father has sch. It is because of coexisting fear and happiness after he had my brother. On the one hand he was fearful of the arrest and detaining; on the other hand, he was over the moon for having a son. Before that, he was a very delightful person. He liked to talk and sing. Now he does not talk to people. He feels threatened by everyone, he is usually scared, even towards families."*
>
> *– Yan, born in 1983.*

Yan's father was detained for the extra-births. It was unknown whether he was physically beaten during the detainment, but the psychological trauma he experienced was undeniable. This experience tormented Yan throughout her and left a permanent scar on her. She broke into tears many times when she was telling her story.

> *"I realised that I am a girl. I seldom received any recognition at home, and I once hated myself because I feel I did not fulfil the expectation of the family. I kept thinking, why am I not a boy? This frustration stayed with me since childhood, until I went to work in the city. At the same time, I hated my parents for wanting a son. I hated my brother too. Why do I have a brother? He destroyed the family."*
>
> *– Yan, born in 1983.*

Her worldview started with the frustration that she was not a boy. She hated her female identity because of that. At the same time, she hated her parents for wanting a son and hated her little brother for bringing all the suffering to her and her family. At the same time, she loves her parents and her siblings, and took care of them as the eldest sibling in the family. She managed to reconcile with herself and her family.

> *"I always wanted to have a child, no matter a boy or a girl, and never to be like my parents."*
>
> *– Yan, born in 1983.*

Owing to the traumatic experience she had with her family, she had decided since a young age that she would only want one child. However, after Yan got married, she ironically had the exact same reproductive pattern like her parents: she had two girls and one

[115] Mo Yan, *Shifu, You'll Do Anything for a Laugh* (Arcade Publishing, 2003), 155.

boy, the second two children were all extra-births and were heavily fined. The only difference is that Yan works with her husband in the food sector, and their incomes could easily afford the fines.

> *"At first, I only wanted to have one child. After my first girl was born, I had decided to have a second child because my husband's parents wanted a grandson…My mother-in-law said that my husband's family had four generations of single sons (Si dai dan chuan). There are too few people in the family... She said if our first girl does not have any close relatives, she is going to be lonely. After I had a son, my mother-in-law pressured us to have another son. My third child is a girl. When my third child was born, my husband and I were quite happy. My mother-in-law said, 'good, the only pity is that she is not a boy'."*
>
> *– Yan, born in 1983.*

Yan admitted that such an option mainly came from external pressure. In the meantime, she mentioned that she also likes children and it is what she really wanted, *"I really like children. Before my first girl was born, I did not like children. But now I really do"*. I asked Yan, if she and her husband both worked in a state-owned entity and would lose their sources of income for extra-births, would things turn out differently? Yan replied that she would most likely have one-child, as her mother-in-law would have a more powerful enemy to fight in order to have a grandson.

When traditional beliefs battled with state policy, tradition won in Yan's family when she was a girl. The price to pay for defying the state policy was gigantic, but her family was willing to make sacrifices, such as economic factors. Yan was caught up in the battle of the two powers again when she gave birth. The power of tradition entered this battle through the older generation, and as resistance from the policy was no longer strong in her case, tradition won again in this battle. As for Yan, she had very little decision power throughout the two battles of her life.

Nana's family also chose to go against the policy.

> *"When I was born, the one-child policy was super strict. Tradition tells people to produce as many children as possible, so in my village if the first born is a girl, it is 100% that people would have a second child. My brother was secretly born when I was three. My mother stayed home to take care of him. My father might have lost his job if someone found out about my brother. When he was three, it was less strict, so we paid the fines and people knew my brother's existence."*
>
> *– Nana, born in 1982.*

Also born in the rural part of Henan, Nana's mother was a farmer while her father worked in a hospital. Her little brother was hidden until he was three years old. Different from Yan, Nana had quite a happy childhood. As she described, both of her parents work during the day, she would take care of her brother by running around with him in the village. According to her, if the first child is a daughter, people would continue to give birth until

they have a son. Nana's self-awareness as a girl also started when she was treated differently by her father.

> *"My family has a strong male preference, especially my grandfather's generation. I feel that my mother was alright, but I had zero communication from my father. He paid more attention to my brother. I always feel that my father is more biased in the way he treated my brother and me. In my fifth grade, my father was teaching my brother playing abacus. I also wanted to learn. My father was very indifferent towards me. I was quite hurt and remembered until now. He was very patient with my brother, but he was very distant towards me."*
>
> *– Nana, born in 1982.*

This experience of father not loving her bothered Nana when she was young. She learnt about identity as a girl through a different treatment of boys and girls in her family.

> *"I thought my father did not love me, until I left home for school when I was 18. My father sent me to the train station, and he cried as I was about to leave. I felt bad for misunderstanding him. He loved me, but maybe because of our patriarchal culture, he did not express his love. Fathers and daughters at that time got to keep a distance, it is different from nowadays."*
>
> *– Nana, born in 1982.*

Now that Nana also has a daughter, the way her father treated Nana's daughter was different from when she was young. *"He spoiled her, and listens to whatever my daughter says",* Nana said.

Ting was born in the 1990s, where the one-child policy had been modified to allow for a second child if the first one is a girl among the rural population.

> *"My parents gave birth to their first child, a girl. They could not guarantee that the second child is going to a boy, so they hid my sister at my grandmother's home and did not register her hukou. The second year I was born, still a girl. They registered me. Seven years later they were allowed to have another permit, and they gave birth to my younger brother…After my brother was born, they took back my sister and registered them both. That was around 2000, the one-child policy was no longer very strict."*
>
> *– Ting, born in 1993.*

Ting was the lucky second child who did not have to be hidden. Although she said, *"when my parents know I was a girl during pregnancy, my mother thought about abortion, but my father stopped her."* Everything turned out well form her father's decision not to have

her aborted. Their family had a son, while Ting later became the top scorer in her city during gaokao[116] and got into the top university, being the 0.03% of China.

According to Ting, hiding one of the children was a common thing in the villages. People hide their children to be able to have another birth permit. Most of the children hidden were girls.

> *"My sister grew up at my grandmother's house. Every time I go to my grandmother's house, I know that she was my sister, and she could not come home yet. It did not feel very strange because it was a relatively common phenomenon in the village. A lot of children grew up in their grandmother's home, and almost all of them were girls. Our neighbour has a boy and then two girls, the girl in the middle grew up with her grandmother too."*
>
> *– Ting, born in 1993.*

According to Ting, she did not know about her parents' plan until she was seven. As she turned seven, her parents could obtain another permit, and Ting knew that she was going to have a little brother. From the only child, she had two siblings out of a sudden:

> *"My sister and my brother came in at the same time. I suddenly changed from the only child to one of the three children. First of all, as my brother was still a baby, he had most of the attention, and we also helped taking care of him. My sister was back, I have to take care of her emotions too. She was not used to living with us at first. She might have felt insecure, and question whether our parents love her. For example, if anything happens, my mother would only blame me but not her."*
>
> *– Ting, born in 1993.*

Yan, Nana and Ting had different accounts of their lives in an extra-birth family. Their lives were affected by the one-child policy at different extents, and shaped their inner worlds differently. Nana and Ting's family used tactical strategies to get around the policy, and managed to get what they wanted without paying too high a price. Based on the three family's experiences with the one-child policy, it is quite apparent that the one-child policy created inequalities and class divides. People who are rich with powerful networks could evade the state regulations. As for the poor, the prices to pay for non-compliance might be beyond imagination.

3.1.3 Compliance

With a strong state, compliance with its policies seems to be the only rational choice, especially in the urban area where incomes and work opportunities could be divested. People would adhere to the laws out of fear. This is true for some cases, but not for many others.

[116] Gaokao is the Chinese university admission examination. Henan is one of the most competitive provinces in China.

"During my time, the one-child policy was very strict. We only had one child. We were quite poor and could not pay the fine, and thus did not have a second child. If there were no one-child policy, I would have wanted two. One child is too lonely."

– Ru, born in 1953.

Ru was the only one quite sure that she would have another child if the policy allowed for more. As she could not pay the fines and was not willing to sacrifice her current standard of living, she did not opt for a second child. Also, she had no obsession with having a boy.

Lili might have another child if there were no one-child policy, but she was not so sure. She had no obsession with giving birth to a boy.

"If there were no one-child policy, I might have two children. I never thought about a girl or boy. When I got pregnant, the ultra-sound scan sees it was a girl. I was so happy. I really like girls. During my pregnancy, I got really annoyed when I see boys."

– Lili, born in 1960.

Jing wanted to have a second child. Her husband and she do not work in state-owned entities and could afford to pay the fines. Yet, she only had one child because she had a disagreement with her husband. In her case it was her husband stopping her from having more children, not the state.

"As I was not allowed to have a second child, I had to perform the abortion. Actually, if we pay or find someone to settle the problem (pay the planning office 4-7k), we could have a second child. I always wanted to have a second child, but my husband did not want to."

– Jing, born in 1973.

Liu worked as a doctor in a hospital. She was not keen about having more children even without the one-child policy.

"Not really. I did not want more children because the policy does not allow. I did not think about what to do otherwise. Maybe not, one child is enough. To me, wanting to have a child is like a mission. The mission came naturally as I came of age."

– Liu, born in 1965.

Liu thinks that having children is like a mission to her. To her, one child was enough. She did not want more children. As she mentioned earlier about her marriage, it was a natural thing, and her parents would also force her into matchmaking if she did not want to get married. Under this cultural pressure, she chose to complete her missions and not create troubles for herself. The one-child policy fended off some traditional pressures for her, and allowed her to focus on her work. Hong also had similar thoughts on this.

"Sometimes I was so frustrated that I almost wanted to strangle my child. My husband did not take responsibility in childcare. My son's studies, his parent meetings, going to school every day was all my job. I also need to work at the hospital at the same time. I am actually glad that our country allows only one child. I cannot imagine having more children. I would have gone crazy."

– Hong, born in 1967.

In fact, because Hong's marriage was very unhappy, she hated having to take sole responsibility of her child. She even thanked the one-child policy for preventing her from having more children that she did not want. In her family, men had more decision power than women. They wanted more children, also because having more children have little impact on them if they do not take any responsibilities of child-care. Therefore, for women who did not want more children, the one-child policy was a strong weapon to fend off traditional and social pressures coming from their family members. Instead of having to argue, they could conveniently evade such a battle in the first place. In such cases, the one-child policy empowered women who were not bounded by traditions and wanted fewer children.

In all the cases above, women are the ones making decisions about their reproduction. There is a strong sense of agency in terms of what they want and what they did not want. Their thought processes of whether or not to adhere to the policy were very clear.

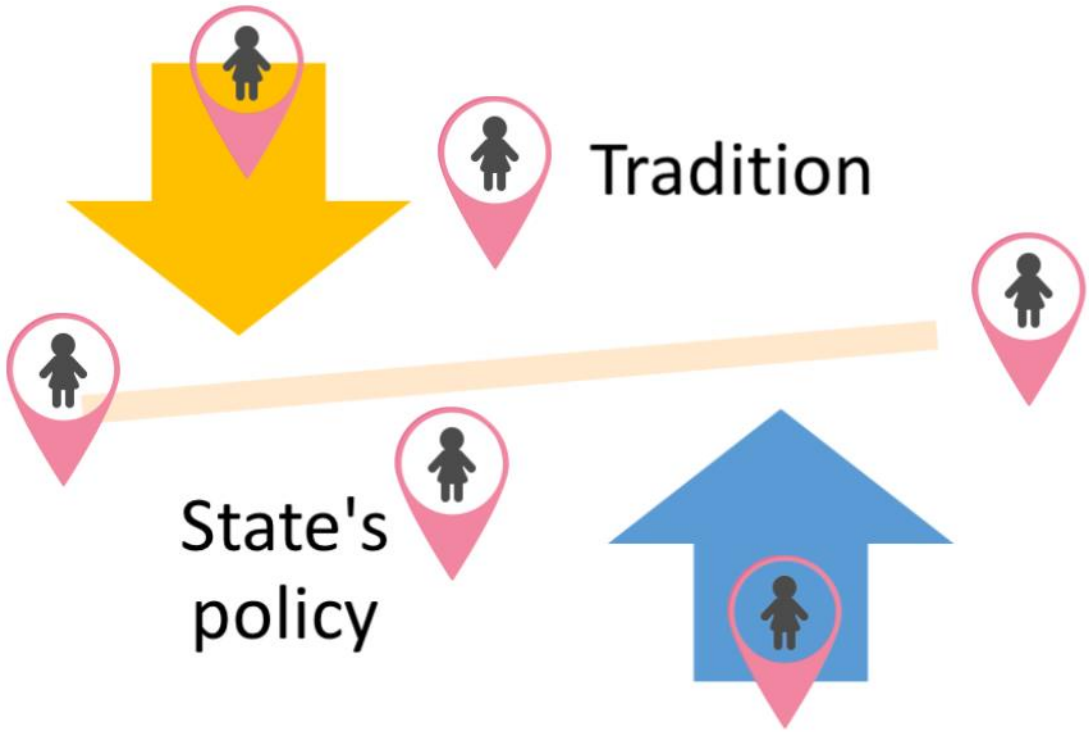

Figure 10 An illustration of the power dynamics in the one-child policy

I drew a diagram to explain the power dynamics of reproduction in the one-child policy era. The state and traditional thinking have a conflict on the number of children to have. To the state, the one-child policy suits its developmental goals. However, it goes

against the Confucian tradition of having sons and more children. Under this context, women in China also have different positions on reproduction. Some of them prefer the state's policy, some sits on the fence and could not decide, while others may believe in the traditions. Sometimes women go against the state's policy to pursue the traditional, if they personally internalised tradition into their worldview. However, as tradition had not always been a friend of women, women who do not register traditional values could use the state's power and authority to defend themselves against the control of tradition. In that sense, the one-child policy actually gave some women more choices and empowerment. This is reflected in some of my interviewees.

However, in Feng's case she was forced to have an abortion at four months even though she complied with the state policy.

> *"In the early 1990s, we were given another permit to give birth. I did not get pregnant for two years, so I had to take Chinese medicine to recuperate. I got pregnant and then there was a policy change. I was already three to four months pregnant when I was taken away for abortion. I would not have wanted a second child if there was no permit. They would fine us. However, when they gave me the permit, I wanted another child. It was a natural decision."*
>
> *– Feng, born in 1955.*

Feng was obviously caught up in a bureaucratic entanglement. According to her, the second child permit was probably given in around 1987 to 1990, before the renewed Family Planning Regulations was published. Since 1984, a few places were targeted to experiment on loosening the second child control among rural families whose first child was a girl. In 1986, the central government permitted such a practice to be executed in different localities.[117] During that time, the Henan government probably loosened its tight control and issues second-child permit for some couples. Feng was among them. After she was given the permit, it took her a few years to finally get pregnant. In 1990, the fourth national census was conducted and the population size exceeded the family planning target by 10 million. This resulted in a partisan backlash against the loosening of the one-child policy. Simultaneously, the newly published Henan Province Family Planning Regulations announced that people are only allowed to have a second child if the couple both hold the rural hukou. In Feng's case, her husband is a working class while she is a rural hukou. The FAO and the local government reacted in a harsh and sluggish manner, which is to take back these permits and cease all unqualified pregnancies immediately.

> *"It was in an evening. All the men in the family went to work on the new house, only my daughter and I stayed home. We were about to sleep when we heard the dog barked a few times and stopped. I came out to saw around ten people came to our house, men and women. They surrounded our house, and even was scared and kept still. The leader among the was the head of our production team (Shengchan dui). The*

[117] Feng, Ma, and Leng, '50 Nianlai Zhongguo Shengyu Zhengce Yanbian Zhi Lishi Guiji 50 年来中国生育政策演变之历史轨迹 [The Historical Track of the Evolution of China's Birth Policy in the Past 50 Years]'.

first thing he asked was 'who is home?'. He was a reasonable person. Then the women working at the FPO started explaining to me the change in policy. I was put on a van, and together with me was another pregnant woman. She was eight months pregnant. We went to the hospital together and were given injections for abortion."

– Feng, born in 1955.

This incidence reflected the draconian nature of governmental policies and ruthlessness towards its people. In Feng's description, forced abortions were applied on people who were extremely compliant to the state's policy changes. Together with Feng, another lady who was eight months pregnant and had to be forced to perform an abortion. She was not "forced" too, but because her husband was a leader in the local community, she had to obey "willingly" and cooperatively. They were not physically beaten or explicitly threatened, but the implicit pressure and coercion were so strong for an individual or for a family that it was almost impossible for them to resist.

There are people who resisted the new policies:

"I was too scared. The other woman also did not resist because her husband was a leader in the village. He will lose his position if they do not cooperate. There was also a woman at Wenfeng region, where she was given an injection and then gave birth to a pair of twins. The boy died while the girl lived".

– Feng, born in 1955.

I asked Feng, if the men of her family were at home that evening, would things turn out differently? She said:

"I don't think so, because there are too many people. It was a joint action by the city council, the village council and police force. There are people who resisted or ran away. On that night, some people had inside information and early alerts. They ran away. If you run away, they might tear down your house. However, if you have already given birth, they would only fine you. I heard in Tawan area, they approached a family and heard a baby crying inside, and they walked away."

I asked Feng whether is it possible to pay the fines and not have an abortion, she said during that time the main jobs of FAO was to prevent extra-births and meet planned targets. Therefore, they only accepted abortions, with fines on the side. However, some people managed to hide from the FAO during pregnancy, in those case the FAO could only issue fines.

It is ironical how the compliant ones suffered enormous pain while the non-compliant ones managed to escape. All these women and families who were forced into abortion had a birth permit. The children they carry were legal babies, except for that legality is determined by the government and the government could change its mind anytime it wanted. To Feng and her family, they were the unlucky ones caught in this bureaucratic mass. To some other

women, it could be a life and death problem as they could die from these forced abortions, especially those who are already eight or nine months pregnant.

When asked about how Feng felt after the abortion, she said:

"I was quite scared, so I was thankful it was all over."

3.1.4 Sex imbalance and the missing women

The "Global Gender Gap Report" measured the sex ratio imbalance in China. Since 1994, there were 115 boys born for every 100 girls. In 2004, this ratio peaked at 121.2 boys born for every 100 girls, and some provinces have a ratio as high as 130. The ratio stabilised at 113.5 in 2016.[118]

A consensus has emerged that the sex ratio distortion in China is due to prenatal discrimination against female conceptions.[119] Among my interviewees, none of them had an abortion to try getting rid of girls. Ting's mother nearly did, but her father prevented the abortion. In many other cases, girls either did not get a chance to be born, or were abandoned or killed after their birth. They are often referred to as the missing girls or missing women of China.

In Mo Yan's short story, *the Abandoned Child*, he concluded three main types of abandoned babies in China. The first type of abandonment occurred on families in deep poverty and were unable to raise the children, they either "drowned them in chamber pots or simply left them by the side of the road". These cases are mostly before the establishment of PRC in 1949. The second group of abandoned children included those with disabilities or who are retarded. "These children aren't even entitled to end up in a chamber pot. In most cases, the parents bury the child alive in some remote spot before the sun comes up. They then top the burial mound with a brick directly over the infant's abdomen, to keep it from being reborn during the next pregnancy". The third group are illegitimate births by unmarried women. According to Mo Yan, after liberation saw a significant drop in the cases of abandoned children. Until the one-child policy era, the numbers rose again in the 1980s and the situation "grew very complicated" as "there were no boys at all".[120]

The phenomenon of missing women in China was not simply due to traditional or cultural reasons. It is a result of counterbalance between the state policy and traditional beliefs. If we take a look at the Henan Province Family Planning Regulation again, the state actually systematically encouraged the phenomenon of missing women. For example, the option of having a second child after the first girl was very discriminatory. People can get compensations for having a girl. In fact, the sex ratio for the second child during the one-child era was extremely high. In 2000, the sex ratio of the second child was at 150 boys to 100 girls, while the third child's sex ratio was even higher. In 2015, the sex ratio among the

[118] Zhou, 'China Has World's Most Skewed Sex Ratio at Birth – Again'.
[119] Avraham Ebenstein, 'The "Missing Girls" of China and the Unintended Consequences of the One Child Policy', *Journal of Human Resources* 45, no. 1 (2010): 88.
[120] Yan, *Shifu, You'll Do Anything for a Laugh*.

rural population at the age of zero to four years old was 117.4 for the first child, 126.4 for the second child and 146.3 for the third child.[121]

3.2 Growing up

When I asked my interviewees born in the one-child era to evaluate the one-child policy, here are their answers:

> *"It was a complex issue. I quite agree with the policy as if such a policy was not in place, many millennial only-girls would not have such a happy life. With the birth planning policy, young people started realising that the purpose of life was not only about reproduction. The happiness of an individual is very important too."*
>
> *– Qing, born in 1993.*

Qing emphasised on the women empowerment perspective of the one-child policy. Although the one-child policy has been criticised for many wrongdoings, the empowerment of the daughters of China seemed to be an undeniable achievement. Qing also talked about the subjectivity of happiness.

> *"The good thing is that, mothers who do not like children could stop after one child, and use the one-child policy as an excuse. The disadvantage of the one-child policy was that the implementation was inhumane and cruel."*
>
> *– Qi, born in 1992.*

Qi discussed the hidden benefit of the one-child policy on mothers who did not like having more children. She also interpreted the policy through a humanitarian approach.

> *"From my own perspective, I think the one-child policy distorted many "only-child". I think having siblings could improve interpersonal and social skills, and could cultivate the characters of responsibility and sharing. However, on the macro level I think the one-child policy is good to national development."*
>
> *– KJ, born in 1979.*

KJ looked at the impact of the policy through a personality development perspective. She drew such a conclusion from comparisons between her own experience as a single child and her daughters who are a pair of identical twins.

> *"I think the one-child policy was a necessary tool. If you look at the economy and production of the 1950s and 1960s, the growth of population outruns productivity. It was a necessary decision to make".*
>
> *– Ting, born in 1993.*

[121] 'Zhongguoren You Duoxiang Yao Erzi 中国人有多想要儿子 [To What Extend Do Chinese People Want Sons]', *Sohu News*, 2018, www.sohu.com/a/227243630_99894792.

Ting looked at the policy through a political and economic perspective. The four of them had different angles and views, expressed their thoughts and feelings, as well as their subjective responses to the issue. Their answers reflected the diverse environment they grew up in, shaping their subjectivity in different ways. Women who grew up in the one-child era received a better education. They generally received more attention and care than their mothers and ancestors, which consequently contributed to the shaping of their inner worlds.

The term "reflective growth" was a phrase used by Cong as she described her growth. I think it is an excellent term to highlight the stories of growing up for most of the women born in the one-child era.

> *"My mother was very strict. She has high expectations for my studies. I sometimes think my parents treat me like a son she never had. Because of the pressures I felt during my teenage years, my ideal type of mother would be a friendly type. She would be someone who participates in a child's growth, be a friend and be equal. I hope to realise this ideal motherhood when I become a mother. I hope to make up for what I have lost in my childhood. It is more of a reflective growth."*
>
> *– Cong, born in 1991.*

Cong mentioned about high expectations from her parents. This was quite a recent phenomenon and a by-product of the one-child policy. In the past, Chinese people placed high hopes on their sons, as quoted in the poem, "*he will become a king or a duke".* Men have access to the public arena. They could study and become scholars, officials. They could be successful and make the family proud. Women, however, could only play with spinning wheels for the highest achievement they could attain was probably being famous wives, concubines or mothers. At the end of imperial China, many elite families were influenced by Western liberalism and allowed their daughters to receive higher educations. They became scholars, university teachers and women's rights advocates.[122] After the establishment of PRC, women had more possibilities of becoming tractor drivers, teachers, factory workers and leaders.[123] During the one-child era, women experienced an unprecedented high expectation from their parents. As they could be the only child of the family, many expectations for sons only are applicable to these daughters. It pushed women for excellence in their studies and career path extensively.

> *"My mother was too harsh on me when I grew up. She was very strict, I was always repressed, scared and demure because of this. I tried to avoid the parenting style of my own mother. Until now, when my mother said something, although I might not agree with her, I would still listen to her. I could not feel much love from her when I was younger. I want to change this, to avoid giving my children pressures."*
>
> *– KJ, born in 1979.*

[122] Hershatter, *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century*.
[123] Broyelle, *Women's Liberation in China*.

Both KJ and Cong had decided to apply their own experience to bring up their children. Nana also understood the importance of companionship from her own childhood.

> *"When I was young, my mother had to work on the farm every day. There was so much work, and she did not have time for us. Luckily my mother was very clean, she would return late at night and call us over for cleaning, and from there we would have time to talk to her a bit. When I became a mother, I would intentionally spend more time with my daughter. This comes from my reflections in my childhood."*
>
> *– Nana, born in 1982.*

Reflective growth among the above interviewees is an indicator of women's rising agency and the strong will of changing the status quo. Instead of being passive recipients of society and the world, they are eager to make changes and exert their powers. Their evaluations and reflections on the impacts of the one-child policy also reflected their dynamic thinking processes. Unlike many media or propaganda contents that portrayed the one-child policy as absolutely evil or good, they were able to see the complexities of the policy as a reflection of their lives.

Chapter 4: Post-one-child era

> *"Since the moment when the ultra-sound scanning revealed that I was going to have a daughter, I knew for sure that I would have to have more children until I have a son. I know about the family's tradition.* I was satisfied with having a girl, but on the way back from the hospital, my husband kept muttering, 'how could it be a girl'."
>
> *– Nana, born in 1982.*

4.1 Marriage & birth

In October 2016, during the 18th Central Committee Plenary Meeting, the CCP announced the full implantation of the two-child policy. This decision was mainly due to economic and social reasons, including low fertility rate and the loss of demographic dividend, ageing population, the high projected burden of elder care and sex imbalance.

In July 2017, the Straits Times reported a woman in Anhui province who died after her husband forced her to have four abortions in a year as he wanted a son. This incidence happened after the second child limit was lifted. The woman, Yueyue, gave birth to a girl in 2013. Her husband wanted to try for a second child and he was determined to have a boy, and insisted his wife to undergo ultrasound scans to identify the baby's gender, and resulted in Yueyue's death after four abortions.[124]

This was one of the most extreme and tragic cases of son-preference after the one-child policy ended. Moreover, this case also reflected that in the post-one-child period, women might still not have sufficient control over reproductive matters in China.

4.1.1 The resurgence of traditional values

In the previous chapter, I talked about the power dynamics of the state's policy and the traditional values. The state's policy could act as a counterbalance to traditional values of son-preference that pressured many women. I have also revealed that the state's policy had a stronger binding force on urban populations and a weaker binding force on rural populations. The second-child policy had little impact on rural populations except for eliminating the fines, because rural populations had been having the second-child option since 1990s. The most significant impact rests on urban populations. As the state withdrew a big proportion of its power on the reproduction of the second child, it caused a resurgence in traditional power. Among my interviewees, women born after the 1980s are directly impacted by the second-child policy.

Nana gave birth to her first child in 2007. After the ultrasound scanning announced she would be having a girl, she knew that she would have to have a second child afterwards.

[124] 'Woman in China Dies after Husband Forced Her to Have 4 Abortions in a Year as He Wanted a Son: Report', Text, The Straits Times, 19 July 2017, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/woman-in-china-dies-after-husband-forced-her-to-have-4-abortions-in-a-year-as-he.

However, during her labour in 2007, she was contracted with amniotic fluid embolism, a rare and fatal condition that has a recorded death rate of 80%. Luckily, she survived from the operation by removing her womb:

> *"When I gave birth, I had an amniotic fluid embolism. I kept bleeding and the doctors could not find the bleeding point, so my womb was removed to keep me alive. I did not know about the removal. The second afternoon when I woke up, my first thought was to ask about my daughter's wellbeing. She was in the children's hospital and well taken care of. Until my daughter was about two months old, I was asking about the contraceptive measures like when do I need to insert the IUD ring, I was told my womb was removed."*
>
> *– Nana, born in 1982.*

After accepting the fact that her womb has been removed, she moved on with relief that she survived the deadly condition. However, problems started arising as she could no longer become pregnant and provide a son for her husband's family.

> *"My husband was very understanding at that time. He said, we have a daughter so it would be fine. But he also reminded me not to tell his father, his father was not very healthy physically, and he had a strong male preference. My husband was afraid that telling his father would devastate him. When my daughter got older, people around started suggesting that it was time to have a second child. My husband's father kept pestering us too. One time I was angry, and told him the truth. All the problems started surfacing. We kept fighting, and after some time, my husband stopped supporting me."*
>
> *– Nana, born in 1982.*

Nana divorced her husband when her daughter was four, and kept custody of her daughter. A year later, her husband's new wife gave birth to a boy. Other the reproductive issue, her husband's lack of contribution to childcare was also a problem in their marriage.

> *"My husband never took care of my daughter. At nights when she cried, he was annoyed. I had to hold my daughter every day myself, even when we go out, he would not help to hold her. I had a lot of arm sore because of that. When we eat outside, he never asked whether I needed help or offered to hold our daughter for a bit so that I could eat. It was a common phenomenon among all his friend, or people in our region. They think that children are women's job, if they took care of children for a little while, you owe them big debts."*
>
> *– Nana, born in 1982.*

According to Nana, the negligence of men towards home responsibilities was a prevailing phenomenon in her hometown- a middle-sized town in Henan province. Living under such a trend, Nana accepted her fate without many difficulties.

"I was not angry. I was like every other woman thinking this is the natural way. Now I feel I was stupid, so stupid. After I gave birth, I went back to work as a nurse. My income was meagre and my husband's family were unhappy about me going to work. But I felt that women have to work, my parents also fully supported my decision. I insisted and continued working. Now I really appreciate my parents' advice and support, because after I divorced him, my salary helped to bring up my daughter. I think a woman's life is not all about marriage. Women need to know this, and pursue happiness."

– Nana, born in 1982.

Nana lost her womb but found a new life. To her, although the process was painful and the fact that she almost died, the outcome was satisfiable. She no longer experiences the pressures of marriage and reproduction. However, during the interview she also revealed the situation of marriage and reproduction in the villages:

"In villages, mothers-in-law now live a hard life. Sex imbalance is very extreme in rural areas. During the one-child policy, rural families aborted their girls and kept the boys. Now they are all left out. In the villages, men's families need to pay a lot for betrothal price. Women are only responsible for giving birth, all the childcare responsibilities are on the mothers-in-law. Women's status really improved a lot! The problem is super, super serious. You got to go to the villages and see."

– Nana, born in 1982.

"Women's status really improved a lot", she said. Her reaches such a conclusion through observations on the financial benefits women receive in society.

Her observation was supported by evidence. It is a traditional culture to give betrothal presents to the bride's family. Since 1949, betrothal presents had become simple and modest. The diagram below shows the betrothal presents and their monetary worth. From 14 RMB in the 1950s to at least 150,000 RMB nowadays, marriage has become increasingly expensive and luxurious. Usually, the less developed areas tend to have higher betrothal prices, as it is more difficult for poorer men to get married. Due to the patriarchal culture and sex imbalance, women and their families have more bargaining power on their marriages. Nana thinks it is an improvement of women's status in society, but is it really the case?

Such an impression might only be a false illusion to conclude that women's social status has improved. The main reason that families are willing to pay high betrothal prices is to continue their hereditary line. In exchange of the high betrothal price, the newly wedded bride's most important obligation is to produce a son. In such situations, women are actually "selling" their reproductive rights and surrendering their wombs in exchange for high prices paid to their families, which in many cases are used to "buy" another bride from another family for their brothers. Once the deal is settled, women have to provide the "services" in return. Such an "improvement" of women's status is a sex-imbalance bonus that was already paid by the millions of missing women in the past decades. The bonus is quite temporary as it

tends to exist only before marriage. The bonus misguiding as it might not even been enjoyed by the rural women, but instead by their families or their brothers. In the meantime, the prices of these bonuses are also paid by women from neighbouring countries, as brides from Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar are constantly being sold to China.

Figure 11 The changes of betrothal prices in the past decades[125]

Figure 11 illustrates the development of betrothal prices. Due to the soaring prices, families are now buying brides from neighbouring countries such as Vietnam, Myanmar and Cambodia. These brides require less cost, and the whole value chain is extremely mature. In

[125] Ying 孔颖 Kong, 'Zhongguo Nongcun Shengnan Xianxiang Diaocha: Bei Tianjia Caili Yakua de Jiating 中国农村剩男现象调查:被天价彩礼压垮的家庭 [Survey of Rural Male Surplus in China: Families Crushed by High Betrothal Prices]', Fenghuang gongyi 凤凰公益, accessed 9 June 2019, http://gongyi.ifeng.com/a/20160224/41554729_0.shtml.

fact, such a trend started in Taiwan. In the past decade, it gained popularity in mainland China and became an intense market.[126]

4.1.2 Dynamic subjectivity

On the other side of the country, women's lives are entirely different. Among the metropolitans, marriage and reproduction have become a choice rather than necessity. Among my interviewees who were born in urban areas in the 1990s, all three of them have a Master's degree in the top 50 universities in China. All three of them experienced migration from their small city into bigger ones, one of them even migrated to the United States.

> *"The purpose of marriage is to find the irreplaceable person who will face our lives together. If I feel that he does not understand me spiritually, I will choose to pursue my desired life alone. If I manage to find such a person, I will get married. It's the same for children. If we both feel it is necessary to have children, provided that we have enough time and energy, I would then decide to have a child or two. These are options, not necessities."*
>
> *– Ting, born in 1993.*

Ting is the only single woman among the three interviewees. She is about to finish her studies and start working in Beijing. Marriage is not in her priority list. In fact, she longs for love and high-quality companionship. Marriage is just one of the many possibilities of her life, so as reproduction.

> *"I was married at the age of 25, before that, I was looking for a suitable marriage partner. I don't know when I started thinking about it. It was probably decided when I wanted to have a child when I was in college, and I always thought about what kind of person I am and what kind of person I can be married to. Marriage is a choice. If I can't find a suitable person, I will happily stay single. My husband also thinks the same. He used to be a celibatarian."*
>
> *– Qing, born in 1993.*

Qing works Zhengzhou city, the provincial capital of Henan. She got married last year. Her reproductive goal is the main reason driving her to step into marriage. She only wants one child in the future and has no preference on the sex of her child.

> *"I got married at 25 years old. 50% is for love, 50% is to apply for a green card (in the US). We were quite sure that we are going to get married in the future. It is just that my husband's green card application is scheduled soon, if we don't get married then I would have to wait for several years to apply as a green card spouse. In fact, I feel that the time to get married has not arrived yet, we were a little too fast. Some*

[126] Yi-Han Wang, 'From "Farming Daughters" to "Virgin Brides" Representation of Vietnamese Immigrant Wives in Taiwan', *Gender, Technology and Development* 14, no. 2 (2010): 217–39.

bad habits of my husband were not altered before getting married, and I couldn't change his habits much."

– Qi, born in 1992.

Qi is also very clear about what she wants, just like Ting and Qing. The three of them could represent many urban girls living in big cities. They are educated, determined, and decisive. In the meantime, they have strong bargaining and decision power on their own reproductive matters. Parental or social forces could hardly change their minds.

What gave birth to young women's individualistic personhood? Is it the one-child policy? Capitalism? Or globalisation? I think it is hard to determine. Maybe a combined force of these social changes altered the traditional figures of women and produced a dynamic subjectivity.

4.2 Generational differences

"The previous generation is very different in mindset. They do not feel the pressure bring up the children. The standards of childcare are very different. In the past, people could bring up a child as long as they can feed the child. Now, we need to have money to support better quality education. We will delay the child if we do not provide good educational support. Bringing up three children alive is not as good as bringing up one child well. The older generation does not listen, and they cannot understand."

– Yan, born in 1983.

Just as Yan's mother-in-law did not understand why the couple hesitated about having more children since they have the money to afford the fines and a decent living, Yan could not agree with the "old" form of reproduction, where people only wanted quantity and paid little attention to the quality of raising children. Although Yan gave in to having more children than expected, she made such a decision through thorough considerations and discussion with her husband.

The main difference I drew from my interviewees born in the two generations- Mao era and the one-child era- lies in their distinctive amount of "self" in relativity to the outside world. In the Mao generation, women used words such as "selflessness" to describe motherhood, used "natural" and "everyone else" to understand marriage. However, among the single-child-girls, their individual sensibilities are the most valuable possession they employed to deal with issues in the real world.

Undeniably, over the past generations, there is a significant decline of male preference in China credited to the implementation of the one-child policy. Together with this, women's education improved tremendously and allowed them to have stronger bargaining power and control over their bodies, minds and spiritual pursuits. The prices paid are the injustice their mothers experienced, the forced abortions and sterilisations, the missing women and many other social problems.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

During my research, I have sought to understand the subjectivity of women in China, about how women experiences changes, how their experiences interact with the state and with the traditional values, and how do these factors ripple back to women's inner worlds. My initial foray into this complex field unfolded in the three chapters on the three eras of reproductive policies that women experienced. Traditional Confucian values and the state's policies are the two big waves that most women have to deal with in China. Sometimes these two waves combine to create a swirl, sometimes they appear one after the other, sometimes they cancel out each other's forces. Regarding their reproductive journey, some women sailed through the waves tranquilly, some struggled through and merely survived, while others drowned. Along their journeys, women's understandings of their lives also experienced enormous changes as they sail through the waves.

It is commonly perceived that the Chinese government had made enormous contributions to the improvement of women's status and rights in China. However, through my investigations in the previous chapters, I concluded that the related campaigns started by the state of China were merely utilitarian tactics aimed at solving critical problems instead of upholding social equality or promoting women's rights. Women's subjectivity had always been ignored and neglected by the state, also by the Chinese society that is deeply influenced by traditional values.

The power of traditional values has been declining at different rates in different regions- faster at urban areas and slower in remote rural regions. The gender axis had been significantly restructured, but Chinese society and culture are still male-dominant and patriarchal in nature.[127] This is also reflected in the state's governing style and decision-making processes. Indeed, the CCP leads a Confucian state that restricts the autonomy of individuals and made self-sacrifice for the state as the highest ideal of citizenship.[128] Although the state helped pushed forward women's working rights and educational rights, it is mainly for the development and interests of the state, rather than the social justice of gender equality and women's rights. Women's right, therefore, is not a given concept embedded in women's inner world. The general environment of China- whether the state or the traditional culture- also does not cultivate a strong subjectivity among women.

From Mao period where women are encouraged to enter the public sphere, women are seen as an important human resource to advance China's socialist construction. Women's extra burden and work in the families are undermined and neglected. Women dealt with this by accepting both responsibilities and continued harnessing the traditional value of "selflessness". Later on, as the state has decided that population growth had gone out of

[127] Goncalo Santos and Stevan Harrell, *Transforming Patriarchy: Chinese Families in the Twenty-First Century* (University of Washington Press, 2017), 32.
[128] Lucian W. Pye, 'The State and the Individual: An Overview Interpretation', *The China Quarterly* 127 (1991): 443.

control, they pressed the emergent button by installing the one-child policy. Women have mixed feelings towards the draconian policy. On the one hand it abused women's reproduction health and rights. Forced sterilisations and abortions tormented their bodies and minds. The state also discriminatively designates the responsibilities and repercussions of such coercive acts on women only, while men stay out of these contraceptive and sterilisation prosecutions.

On the other hand, women's traditional responsibility of producing a son has been largely alleviated. Having only one child, women could be moderately liberated to focus on their career development and quality education for the next generation. Daughters are given more expectations and chances to prove their intellectual capabilities. They are better educated and cultivated. They also have more bargaining and decision power on their own marriage and reproduction because of their financial independence. To marry these urban daughters, men also have to change their traditional behaviours in families to increase their attractiveness and marital demand. This phenomenon is demonstrated among my interviewees. There is a trend of an emerging sense of "self" for each generation of women. They started questioning what used to be "natural" duties or missions and rationalising their sexuality, the decisions to marry and reproduce. They have increasing bargaining power on their life choices, and such changes of attitude directly challenges the traditional values of Chinese culture.

These highly educated and individualistic urban daughters are merely a small percentage of the gigantic population. Their rising subjectivity could be a trend among Chinese women, if their independence could indeed bring them better quality lives and social respect. However, the state's policy-making has always been top-down, patriarchal, concerned with stability and control. The state of China has not yet realised that gender equality is an important aspect of social justice, and does not seem to be interested in upholding justice for its citizens. The state now hopes that women could "reproduce for the nation" while continuing to neglect women's struggles and concerns in terms of career-family-balance, housework divisions, childcare responsibilities and so on.

While it is apparent that some urban women are hardly bound by the state's new advocacy on "reproduction for the nation" to solve fresh developmental problems, it is important that we do not overlook the implicit reproductive repressions experienced by most other women. Such repressions no longer exist in the old forms where it was obvious that women are mistreated or disrespected. They exist under the disguise of the most demanded thing in Chinese society - money – in the forms of high betrothal prices and reversed gender inequality in terms of men's financial spending on dating. These impressions of "women's social status has improved a lot" or "gender inequality no longer exists in our society" originate from the sex-imbalance bonuses enjoyed by young women in our generation that were paid with the lives of millions of missing women in the past few decades. The benefits of "improved social status" are sugar-coated bullets that could impede the rise of real feminism and true gender equality in China.

Through this research, I hope to learn about women's inner worlds through the reproductive angle. It was very helpful to my understanding of the deeper concerns among women in China, and to see the fundamental problems that the state had failed to resolve. Due to the limited time and resources, I did not manage to delve further into areas such as the changes of subjectivity across different generations. The main purpose of this research hopes to set the agenda for the future, as I think the fundamental issue lies in the negligence of women's voices. More researches need to be conducted in this area to address this core weakness.

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Appendix I: List of interviews

No.	Name	Year	Time & venue	Media
1	Gui	1956	7th Feb 2019, @Xuchang, Henan	Face to face private interview
2	Jing	1973	7th Feb 2019, @Xuchang, Henan	Face to face private interview
3	Feng	1955	11th Feb 2019, @Xuchang, Henan	Face to face private interview
4	Hong	1967	11th Feb 2019, @Xuchang, Henan	Face to face private interview
5	Liu	1965	11th Feb 2019, @Xuchang, Henan	Face to face private interview
6	Cong	1991	12th Feb 2019, @Xuchang, Henan	Face to face private interview
7	Yan	1983	10th April 2019, @Geneva, Switzerland, interviewee at Xuchang, Henan	Online audio chat, private interview
8	Ru	1953	10th April 2019, @Geneva, Switzerland, interviewee at Xuchang, Henan	Online audio chat, private interview
9	KJ	1979	10th April 2019, @Geneva, Switzerland, interviewee at Xuchang, Henan	Online audio chat, private interview
10	Lili	1960	11th April, 2019, @Geneva, Switzerland, interviewee at Zhengzhou, Henan	Online audio chat, private interview

11	Ting	1993	11th April 2019, @Geneva, Switzerland, interviewee at Beijing	Online audio chat, private interview
12	Tian	1982	12th April 2019, @Geneva, Switzerland, interviewee at Xuchang, Henan	Online audio chat, private interview
13	Qing	1993	27th May 2019, @Geneva, Switzerland, interviewee at Zhengzhou, Henan	Online audio chat, private interview
14	Qi	1992	27th May 2019, @Geneva, Switzerland, interviewee at Xuchang, Henan	Online audio chat, private interview
15	Nana	1982	28th May 2019, @Geneva, Switzerland, interviewee at Yuzhou, Henan	Online audio chat, private interview

Appendix II: Sample interview questions

1. Describe your family composition
    - How many siblings did you have?
    - Are you the eldest/youngest? What is your ranking?
    - Any infant mortality in your household?
    - What was your parent's occupation?
2. Birth-planning policy during birth and childhood
    - Are you aware of the reproductive policy during your birth?
3. Being a daughter: understanding about motherhood
    - What is your impression of your mother during childhood?
    - What do you think a mother's role is? What is the image of mother at your earliest memory?
    - Who influenced such a perception of motherhood?
    - How does this perception of motherhood affect you in your motherhood?
4. Understanding of female subjectivity
    - Since when you realized you are a girl? And since your earliest memories, how women are different from men?
    - Did you feel special treatment?
    - Did your parents show or talk about male preference?
    - What do you think could change if you have a male sibling?
    - What makes a woman?
5. Being a mother: thinking about the next generation
    - When did you get married and why?
    - When did you start thinking about getting married? How do you see marriage? Is it something you must do or is it a choice?
    - Did you have any children? How many? Why is that so?
    - Childcare: how is child care responsibility divided between you and your husband?
    - What was the policy at the time of you giving birth?
    - Did the policy influence your choice of having children? How do you think of this influence?
    - Do you have gender preference for your child? Girl or boy, number of children
    - What is your ideal number of children? Why?
    - Any birth controls? Any abortions?
    - What do you think of the role of mother? Any connection to your mother?
    - How about your daughter? Do you hope she becomes a mother too?
    - What do you think is the purpose or value of getting married and having children?
6. Additional follow-ups:
    - Do you like birth-planning policy? Why and why not?
    - When you juggle family and work, did you have any frustrations about being a woman?

Appendix III: List of figures, tables, pictures and abbreviations

Figures:

Tables:

Abbreviations:

CCP- Chinese Communist Party

FAO- Family Planning Office

PRC- People’s Republic of China