Shifting Traditions of Childrearing in China: Narratives from Three Generations of Women

Xin Guo

UCL
Doctor of Philosophy
Declaration

I, Xin Guo, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis. This thesis contains 96,033 words in total.
Abstract

This thesis sets out to study three generations of Chinese mothers’ experiences in childrearing. A feminist position is taken when studying mothering experiences which emphasises that gender is not immutable and that motherhood is not isolated from other social domains. Three aspects of these mothers’ lives were investigated: women’s growing-up experiences; mothering experiences in combination of women’s other roles and practices; and intergenerational transmission between mothers and daughters. A historical and intergenerational design with case study approach was adopted. Twelve families from varied social-economic background that have three generations of women (36 women in total) were studied from one middle size inland city in China (Bengbu). The biographical-narrative interview method was employed, providing maximum autonomy to the women to recount their lives in their own ways. The researcher’s role has been to imaginatively interpret the women’s accounts in relation to the times to which they refer (current and past time) and to seek to understand their lived lives and told stories in relation to two types of time: their biographical time and the historical time they lived in. Significant changes in mothers’ experiences were found across the three generations, reflecting the ideological shifts in motherhood over this period. Differences within the same generation which reflect the impact of women’s biographical trajectories are also discussed: the way they were mothered, the particular intergenerational relationship they had and the transmission process they were involved in. However, the continuities were also addressed, highlighting the gendered and devalued roles in childcare across three generations. This reflects the complex dynamic relationship between women’s agency and the social structure. Specific policy recommendations are made based on these findings. My own biogeographical stories were also presented to reflect my particular view on mothering and how my attitudes (un)changed alongside this PhD project.
Acknowledgement

This thesis draws on the experiences of 36 women/mothers who generously shared their precious time in long interviews. Many heart-breaking stories, as well as happy memories, were recalled in these interviews and helped me to ‘grow’ as both a mother and a researcher. I would like to thank them for their cooperation in, and enthusiasm for, my project.

I feel incredibly lucky to have worked with my supervisors, Julia Brannen and Rebecca O’Connell, who not only offered intelligent challenges, encouragement and stimulation, but also demonstrated real interest and respect towards another culture and shared their insights in cross-culture comparisons. As mothers and women, I am also genuinely thankful for their sharing of personal stories which created warmth and laughter, as well as inspiration.

Thanks are also due to many experienced researchers who share wisdom with me. To Tom Wengraf, who spent time reading my thesis and provided insightful comments. To Vivian Zhang who shared her experiences of using the BNIM with Chinese families. To Michela who read through my whole thesis during her holiday time and came back with valuable suggestions. To Ann Phoenix, Judith Suissa, Heather Elliot, Andrew Molly, Cornor Squire, Paul Thompson, Narriet Nielsen and Michala Breengaard who discussed my thesis at different phases of my journey, raising inspiring questions and directing me towards relevant literature. To the UCL-IOE gender study group and particularly to Claudia Lapping who provide valuable feedback about my research and encouraged me to carry on with my feminist project.

I will never forget the valuable companionship of other Ph.D mothers, Michala Breengaard and Hanna Kim, who shared the ups and downs of our academic journeys. Congratulation to Michala who has just finished her Viva and good luck to Hanna, a capable mum of two, who I believe can finish her journey successfully!

This thesis could not be successful without the advice and generous help of my Chinese friends and teachers, Jinghuan Shi, Xirong Zheng, Lili Zhang and Yan
Luo. These women are the ones inspired me to think about intergenerational differences in the first place!

Finally, I can never say enough thanks to my family! Thanks for my parents’ strong belief in me in starting this daunting journey! Thanks to my son, Benjamin, who give me peace to work even though he really wanted to spend more time playing with his mummy! This whole Ph.D journey would not have been possible without my husband’s 120% support! He filled in perfectly as a caring and loving parent when I had to shut myself in the study and he looked after the whole house when I hardly had time to do any housework. After the birth of our daughter, Freya, who could not (and still cannot!) sleep unless being carried upright, he walked miles with her to provide space and time for my work! Not mentioning the fact that he is always the first reader of my writing and who shared important views on my project as well as constantly encouraging me! He owns the secondary author’s position for my thesis if there is such a thing!

The study was funded by the China Scholarship Council, without whose generous financial support I could not have studied for the last three and half years in the UK.
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Chapter 1  Introduction

1.1  Introduction

This thesis sets out to study three generations of Chinese mothers’ experiences in childrearing. China has witnessed a huge societal transformation in a relatively short period of time. I am interested in how this societal transformation was 'lived' by mothers in China, in other words, women’s own accounts of the continuities and changes in mothering practices and the ways they make sense of motherhood experiences. By investigating three generations of mothers’ experiences of childrearing I hope my study will provide insights into both mothers' subjectivities and the structural opportunities and constraints upon their lives in particular historical eras. Additionally, I will examine how far intergenerational transmission and relationships are a crucial part of mothering practices in Chinese families and culture, in particular concerning cooperation in childrearing across generations of women (Goh & Kuczynski, 2010). Finally, by taking a particular feminist perspective in understanding mothering, this thesis seeks to produce a concrete and historical understanding of what it meant to be a mother in specific situations, so that categories such as private and public, femininity and work and care can be transcended, just like women have been doing in their everyday lives.

This chapter is organised in the following way. I will first give an account of the emergence of the research topic relating this to my personal experience as a mother. Then I will map the historical background in which the three generations of mothers grew up and were mothers. Finally, I will introduce the chapters that make up the thesis.

1.2  Biographical Reflections

Reflexing a researcher’s own biography is characteristic of feminist approaches to research. This provides a reminder to both myself and readers that my own social identity and values can affect the data gathered and the picture of the social world produced. My social position as a feminist mother in China provides important motivation to start this research project.
I became interested in feminist theories and actions since meeting my Masters supervisor, Jinghuan Shi, who was one of the earliest female scholars challenging gender inequality within the Chinese education system. Then, during my professional career, I promoted gender equity in schools, including challenging teachers’ stereotypes about boys and girls and promoting leadership among female teachers. I regard myself as a feminist not only because of these educational and professional experiences, but also because of how I practise these ideas in my personal life: I try to be an independent woman who wants to make a contribution to the public world (e.g., my paid jobs) and I challenge inequality within my personal life (e.g., my husband and I enjoy a very equal relationship and share the household chores between us). When pregnant with my son, I had already made up my mind to fight the Chinese medical system and public opinion, both dominated by men, which denied women’s ‘natural’ ability to feed her own baby. I prepared well by reading many (western) books and went to pre-natal classes that were organised by an international hospital (which copied the western medical system and its values). However, the reality was a total disaster: I have a mixed race son who seemed never to have enough breast milk. I became a 24-hour milk machine with a baby who never slept more than an hour, no matter if it was day or night. I was exhausted, upset and confused. I searched for external help and finally was recruited by the La Leche League, which was only emerging in China at that time. This organization supports us – the new mothers – to breastfeed on demand and we were told that the older generations of women in China fed their babies until they were two years old and they could feed babies easily, even when they were working. Persuaded by this organisation, I also started to adopt a so-called ‘attachment style’ of parenting which seemed appropriate for my son at that time; but which was, of course, incompatible with my work. So, I gave up my job, which had requested me to go back to work after four months’ maternity leave, as I planned to feed my son much longer than that. Previously, it would have been unthinkable for me to give up my work, as a determined and ambitious Chinese feminist. What had happened? I started off as a feminist and ended up being something which seems to be the opposite of it!

Luckily, I have a group of older friends (aged between 40 and 50) who are all feminists and have been ‘fighting’ with me in our professional area for years. They
came to see me and my son and I asked about their experiences. They said dismissively, ‘We never talked about things like this (e.g., breastfeeding). We just got on with our work.’ I was shocked. Don’t we say that ‘the personal is political’? Why had such important personal experiences for women been totally swept under the carpet by this group? I knew they were worrying that I was transforming from a ‘female warrior’ to a ‘petite bourgeoisie’. It was the first time I realised the intergenerational differences between me and my older friends.

Such a difference forced me to reflect on my own behaviour and on how intergenerational conflicts had impacted on my motherhood. I totally dismissed my mother’s experiences and claimed I would never want her to bring up my son. Most of my friends had to rely on their mothers or mothers-in-law to care for their babies but they complained all the time. I said I wanted to avoid all of this from the beginning. I made these decisions, feeling brave and strong. However, why did I ‘deny’ my mother’s experiences? Because of my own relational problems with her? Because of huge differences between what she said and what was said on programmes such as ‘Super Nanny’ or western parenting manuals? Had I tried to understand my mother’s particular values and practices? The more I asked myself, the more ridiculous I started to feel. Although still strongly defending my own choices and decisions, I started to communicate with my mum: what was it like when I was little and what was it like when you were small?

The answers were astonishing. My mum only had about 70 days maternity leave in 1970/80s and then I was left in a free-childcare centre (tuoersuo) with some help from my grandmother. She weaned me before I was 1 year old. When she was small, she could not remember, she said. So I carried on to find more from my father who said that he grew up in a pile of clothes – my grandma worked in a clothing factory and she was a single mother. He had hardly any breast milk as my grandma never could eat enough to produce much milk for him. That was the time when there was no baby formula! These facts are clearly not reflected in what Le Leche Leagure said to me.

Then in 2011 Chua’s Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother was published in Chinese the same year as my son was born. Like many of my peers, I was totally dismissive of
her mothering, a method we wanted to be as far away from as possible. However, she (as well as most western media and some Chinese media) claimed her practices to be ‘Chinese practice’ or ‘Chinese tradition’. Well, my parents never did anything like she did and my grandparents would have had even less time for their children. So, who decides what is ‘Chinese childrearing practices or tradition’? Chua is Chinese but she grew up in America. Much western research on the Chinese has come from such people who claim to represent Chinese culture. This is the point at which I desperately wanted to know more about real Chinese women’s lives as mothers. I wanted to find out what happened to my mother’s and grandmother’s generations and what is being experienced by my generation. I read research and literature which unfortunately was dominated by psychological and medical studies about Chinese mothers. Then I read western literature on motherhood which sounded distant from my, my mother and my grandmother’s experiences. Thus, I decided to investigate for myself. I wanted to find a way to resolve my own confusion and life conflicts by listening to Chinese women’s real stories and their wisdom. I also felt an urgency to find stories from my grandma’s generation as I had already lost the chances to talk to my own grandmothers. I hoped I could start to transform my relationship with my mother and connect more with my (already deceased) grandmother as well as understand my older feminist friends through such a research journey (which could also lead to a hopeful outcome for other women like me).

The dissatisfaction with existing theories/concepts in studying motherhood makes me decide not to follow any particular theories before exploring these women’s experiences. Therefore, methodologically, I decided on a grounded approach which includes a narrative method and historical research. I employed a biographical-narrative interview method which gives maximum autonomy for women to talk about their life stories and to decide how to relate their experiences in different life phases (see Chapter 3), and which therefore suited my grounded approach. The historical and intergenerational design is also important as it aims to connect women’s lived lives with the historical time they lived in, as well as being embedded in intergenerational transmission process within families. Twelve families from
varied social-economic backgrounds that have three generations of women (36 women in total) were studied from one middle size inland city in China (Bengbu). In the following I will outline the historical context these women lived through.

1.3 Mapping the Historical Background of the Three Generation of Women

This thesis studies three generations of women’s motherhood experiences, covering about a century of Chinese history. Setting the historical context is therefore crucial to understanding the lives of each generation and the ways the women make sense of motherhood. However, it is impossible to describe here all the important historical events across the 100 years that these women’s lives span. Instead, I will present a brief chronology of events for each generation, followed by an outline of the major features of the historical context that each generation of women lived in.

1.3.1 The Great-grandmothers’ Generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Sun Yat-sen founds the Revolutionary Alliance (Tongmenghui), precursor to the Nationalist Party (GMD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Republican revolution, fall of the Manchu Qing Dynasty (founded 1644)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Sun inaugurated as first president of Republic of China (ROC). He abdicates. Warlord era begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>May 4th Movement (student-led anti-Japanese, anti-warlord multi-class movement, including the first women’s movement in modern China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Formal establishment of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). 1924–1927:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The stratification of women and their families across three generations is very complex. Appendix V explained the way they were stratified in details. The term - social-economic status (or SEIS) has been created to reflect such a complex stratification process and to differ from the commonly used terms such as socioeconomic status/SES.

The summary of the twelve studied families can be found in Appendix I.

This chapter focuses mostly on a national history. The local history of Bengbu can be found in Appendix II.

The more detailed historical background that is particularly relevant to these women’s lives will be presented in the chapters on the empirical analysis (mainly in Chapters 4 and 5, but also part of Chapter 6). This means there will be some inevitable repetition about the historical context in this chapter and the following ones. However, this chapter outline some national level historical data (e.g., statistics or research evidence) whereas the Chapter 4 and 5 will explain about major historical events in much more detail as well as drawing on data from twelve studied families and 36 women from city Bengbu.

All chronologies are created based on national historical literature (e.g., Lieberthal, 1995; Meisner, 1999; Rofel, 1999) and local history literature (e.g., Editorial Board of Bengbu History, 1995) I read. A website about China's profiles is also helpful. I select the historical events that are significant in shaping China's history and relevant to women’s lives.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>First United Front alliance between the GMD and the CCP. The GMD launches anti-Communist purge. Nanjing Decade (GMD rule) begins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Japanese invade Manchuria (Mukden Incident), starting the war between Japan and China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Rape of Nanjing (massive atrocities against Chinese civilians by Japanese soldiers).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Japanese surrender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945-49</td>
<td>Civil War between the GMD and the CCP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>The GMD retreats to Taiwan. People’s Republic of China established by the CCP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>New marriage law enacted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-52</td>
<td>China joined the Korean War.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>The government proposed the idea of establishing more ‘Free Childcare Centres’ (tuoersuo) and kindergartens to free women from the home. Also around the same time, the ‘hero mother’ idea, borrowed from the former Soviet Union, was promoted in China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>The government legitimised 56 days of maternity leave for all full-time female workers who worked for either private or public organisations with more than 100 employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958-60</td>
<td>Great Leap Forward, aimed at hastening the pace of economic and technical development, which ended up with an enormous waste of resources and partly caused the Great Famine in the following three years (see detail in Chapter 4).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 A brief chronology of historical events for the great-grandmothers

The majority of great-grandmothers in this study were born in the 1930s. As the above brief history of the period demonstrates, they are the generation born after the fall of the Qing Dynasty – the last dynasty in China. They experienced two different societies (the Republic of China (ROC) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) run by two parties with different political ideologies (the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party). Therefore, this is a generation growing-up with continuous change. When they were young, they lived through wars and grew up in a patriarchal society. Although the May 4th Movement started to challenge the dominant ‘man is superior to woman’ ideology in China, gender equity was still beyond most women’s and girls’ reality. Instead, Confucius’s ‘Three Obedience and Four Virtues’ still dominated the normal household structure and culture (see Chapter 4). However, when reaching the usual age of marriage, the establishment of the PRC changed...
many of these great-grandmothers’ life trajectories (see Chapter 5). This was the first government to publically encourage women’s participation in work outside home/family and promoted the ideology of the ‘liberated women’. In urban areas, 90% of married women participated in the labour market during the period 1949 to 1976 (Bian, Logan, & Shu, 1998). In the city that I did the study, Bengbu, nearly half (48%) of the full-time employees were women in 1985 (Editorial Board of Bengbu History, 1995). On the other hand, women’s role in reproduction was also emphasised by this new government, particularly demonstrated by Mao Zedong’s promotion of ‘hero mothers’ in 1950s: a ‘hero mother’ is someone with more than ten children and for women with more than five, ‘an honoured mother’. The first Law of Marriage was implemented which gave men and particularly women the freedom to choose their own life partners as well as the right to divorce. Also, it was the first time in China that some institutional support was provided for early childcare (from the 1950s) and the policy of maternity leave was introduced (around 56 days during 1950-1970)(State Council, 1951), although there were significant variations regarding who could enjoy it (see Chapter 4 and 5).

1.3.2 The Grandmothers’ Generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960-62</td>
<td>Great Famine: massive famine resulting from the Great Leap Forward; afterwards Mao was less powerful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Red Guards (youth groups intensely loyal to Mao) formed. Mao resurgent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-76</td>
<td>Ten Years of Turmoil or Cultural Revolution (official designation of the decade in PRC today). Most intense period was from 1966-69. (See Appendix III for details) Since 1967, the ‘Up to the Mountain and Down to the Countryside’ started which sent millions of youth to the countryside to ‘learn from the peasants’ during the ten year period. By 1980, the majority went back to the cities. (See Chapter 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>April 5th Movement. Mao dies (succeeded by Hua Guofeng). Fall of “Gang of Four”. Signs of the end of the CR.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Reform era begins and Deng Xiaoping rises in importance. Deng Xiaoping introduces economic reforms: “The Four Modernizations”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>The Re-establishment of the National Entrance Examination for Universities (gaokao system).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>One Child Policy implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Special Economic Zones in Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou (Guangdong), Xiamen (Fujian), and the entire province of Hainan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 A brief chronology of historical events for the grandmothers’ generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Free higher education is abolished and replaced by academic scholarship based on academic ability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Deng Xiaoping boosts “Open-door” policy to encourage Foreign Direct Investments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) comes to China - The introduction of Western-style fast-food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>The Standing Committee of National Congress issued “Protection Polices on Female Workers” which extends the maternity leave from 56 to 90 days (pre-natal 15 days and post-natal 75 days).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>France’s Hachette Filipacchi starts to publish a Chinese version of the fashion magazine “Elle”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Tiananmen student-led, multi-class protests with military power (official death toll: 200).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second generation of mothers in my study were born around the 1950s, which was the early period of the PRC. Generally, the new city-born girls had better educational opportunities (see Figure 1-1), although these were interrupted by the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). They experienced more discrimination than their mothers (see Chapter 4). Figure 1-1 presents the female proportion of total students enrolled in higher education (universities and colleges), secondary (high) schools and primary schools between 1949 and 1988 for all China, urban and rural areas combined. We can see a steady increase of female students between 1949 and 1981 except for 1961, although there are fluctuations for higher education (Bauer, Feng, Riley, & Xiaohua, 1992, p. 337).
Nevertheless, this is not a ‘golden’ generation for these women. Although there was less warfare, continuous national ‘social activities’ (she hui yun dong) produced a different type of disturbance in ordinary people’s lives. As Whyte (2003) comments, ‘CCP rule has been filled with new forms of tumult, including the socialist transformation of the mid-1950s, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, the launching of a draconian family planning policy, and then the traumatic about-face represented by the post-1978 market—oriented reforms (p.3)’. These times also made daily adult monitoring of and caring for their children difficult and some researchers (e.g. Whyte, 2003; Zhou, 2000) claim that this loosened family relationships. The Great Famine, partly caused by the Great Leap Forward, was vividly remembered by all the study grandmothers and some experienced the death of close ones. Then, the Cultural Revolution, particularly its associated policy of ‘Up to the Mountain and Down to the Countryside’ (shangshan xiaxiang 上山下乡) between 1967 and 1968 interrupted all women’s (and men’s) education and brought about other life changes.

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In Chapter 4, according to grandmothers’ recounts of their growing-up process, we can see that not all families have ‘looser’ relationships due to these political movements.
Then, when they became mothers, the One Child policy started and therefore the majority of this generation have one child, compared to their mothers who had five on average. Institutional childcare was improved and the majority of women who worked in State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) could enjoy free childcare for their children from when they were only a few months old. Maternity leave was extended to 90 days (State Council, 1988).

However, around the late 1980s and 1990s, the Economic Reform, starting in 1978, started to change normal people’s life and a socialist country was redefined as a ‘socialist market’ one. In the late 1990s, due to the bankruptcy of many SOEs, many women, especially older women, were made redundant or forced to retire early (Maurer-Fazio, Connelly, Chen, & Tang, 2011). In 1990, the female labour force participation rate dropped to 76.3% in urban areas, compared to 90% in 1976 (Status., 2001). According to the Fifth National Population Census in 2000, this rate was at a similar level – 77.3% (Maurer-Fazio et al. 2011, p.4). Alongside the drop in the women’s work force, the ideology of the ‘virtuous wife and good mother’ ideology was revived (See Chapter 5). For example, according to two national surveys of women’s status in China⁷, there was increasing acceptance that ‘men’s role was primarily outside the home and women’s role was inside the home’. The proportion of people who accept this statement rose from 42.93% in 1990 to 52.15% in 2000 (The Second Wave Research Team of Chinese Women Status, 2001) and to 58.20% in 2010 (The Third Wave Research Team of Chinese Women Status, 2011). At the national level, according to the survey of Chinese Women status (2011), 85% of housework was still undertaken by women (ibid).

On the other hand, the economic reforms also gave some men and fewer women a new opportunity – they gave up ‘iron bowl’⁸ jobs and started their own businesses (called ‘jump to the sea’) at this early marketization stage and therefore, a gap between people’s living standards increased rapidly.

⁷ Led by the All China Women’s Federation (ACWF), from 1990 a national survey on women’s status has been conducted every ten years. So far, we have three weaves of survey: the first in 1990, the second in 2000 and the third in 2010. The investigated men and women’s ages were between 18 and 64 for the main survey.
⁸ ‘Iron bowl’ refers to jobs within State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), particularly those controlled directly by national or provincial government, which meant there was always good social welfare and relatively high and very stable salaries between the 1950s and 1980s.
### 1.3.3 The Mothers’ Generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Stock markets open in Shanghai and Shenzhen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>First McDonald’s restaurant opens in Beijing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Deng Xiaoping’s South Tour. Deng Xiaoping accelerates market reforms to establish a “socialist market economy”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>China connected to NSFNET (Internet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Educational legislation stipulates a nine-year compulsory education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Deng dies (succeeded by Jiang Zemin). Hong Kong becomes part of the PRC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-98</td>
<td>In 1996, the government started “mutual-choices” employment policies in some pilot provinces. This means the higher education graduates needed to search for their own jobs instead of being allocated jobs by the central government as it had been the case since the late 1970s. By 1998, 70% university graduates were responsible for finding their own jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>Slow-down of the Chinese economy – partly due to Asian Financial Crisis; partly to do with China’s new policy of cooling down the economy to deal with the high inflation in the early 1990s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2012</td>
<td>The Chinese government expanded the higher education sector. The government requested a slow-down in expansion of HE in 2008 and in 2012, the expansion policy changed to a ‘stabilising’ policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>After years of negotiations, China joins the World Trade Organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>China has at least 103 million Internet users, 45.6 million computer hosts, and 677,500 Web Sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>The Chinese inaugural edition of ‘Rolling Stone’ magazine is immediately sold out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>China surpasses the United States in carbon dioxide emissions due to fossil fuel use and cement production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Sick toll in baby milk scandal rises to 13,000. Oct: Premier Wen Jiabao accepts responsibility for the milk scandal that may have affected more than 50,000 children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Olympics were held in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>China overtakes Japan as world’s second-biggest economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>China’s urban population outnumbers its rural population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>One Child Policy changed to Two Children Policy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3 A brief chronology of the mothers’ generation**

The majority of mothers in this study was born in the late 1970s or 1980s, after the implementation of the One Child policy. The “One-Child” policy in China affected family size, intergenerational relationships (Whyte, 2003) and attitudes to girls (Fong, 2002) for the majority of this generation. Although there was debate about
whether girls were equal with boys for this generation, in at least one aspect girls became much more equal with boys: education. According to the national data demonstrated in Table 4, gender differences narrowed at all stages of enrolment in education (Statistics., 2001).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
<th>Secondary Education</th>
<th>Primary Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>44.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>44.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 Female students’ representation in education in China

The accelerated economic development and the increasing influence of Western culture (e.g., food, fashion and music, refer to the brief chronology) meant this generation grew up in a materially richer environment but also held very different values from older generations. For example, the materialistic and acquisitive values contrasted sharply with the Spartan socialist values under which their parents were reared and the moralistic Confucianism of their grandparents (Whyte, 2003).

However, this is not a ‘happy’ generation. First, they experienced intense education competition and parents were willing to spend significant family income in supporting their children’s education – some said they spent one parent’s monthly wages every month in 1996 (Davis & Sensenbrenner, 2000). The ultimate goal of this educational competition was to get into higher education so that a better future may be guaranteed. However, the expansion of higher education from 1999 to 2012 meant on the one hand more students entering university – in 1998 there were 3.4 million students enrolled in higher education. By 2008, there were 20.2 million in HE, an almost six-fold growth in enrolment (Knight, Deng, & Li, 2017). On the other hand, this also brought about a tougher job market for university graduates (ibid.), with many young people going into jobs for which they were overqualified. Under such conditions, gender discrimination in the job market became even more evident. For example, between 1991 and 2014, the female labour force participation dropped from 73 to 64 per cent in China (Eklund & Göransson, 2016). Although there was a general scarcity of jobs in cities, research shows that the drop has been
faster for women, in particular for the age group 25-34 (Dasgupta, Matsumoto, & Xia, 2015).

In terms of childcare, this generation also experienced a decline in institutional support. All ‘free-childcare centres’ (tuorsuo) stopped during the early 1990s and the privatisation of early education (between 0 - 6) started to develop rapidly (Mou, 2004). This means that this generation has to rely on their grandparents’ support in childcare much more than the two older generations before them (Cook & Dong, 2011). In 2008, the baby milk scandal made this generation of mothers worry more about food security as well as other risks (such as air pollution, quality of toys and so on). Adding to such worries are the different childrearing values this generation of mothers hold and, therefore, intergenerational conflicts in childrearing became intense (Goh, 2009). Finally, this generation experienced class differences much more than the two older generation as they were growing up in the period when a ‘middle-class’ started to appear (Li, 2011). Therefore, intensive mothering, which reflects the worries this generation of mothers hold on the one hand, and symbolises a certain class status on the other\(^9\) became a new dominant ideology (see Chapter 5).

### 1.4 An Overview of the Thesis

After the introduction, Chapter 2 discusses the literature of studying childrearing and motherhood in both the West and China, including the dominant scientific discourse and the feminist literature. It also includes the literature that sheds light on grandparenting, intergenerational relationships and transmissions which are relevant to Chinese mothering experiences. Then a feminist perspective is articulated which decides five features of this research. Relevant concepts that are helpful in investigating Chinese mothers’ lived lives are discussed. The detailed research questions are presented at the end of Chapter 2.

An historical and intergenerational design to capture the lives of three generations of women is discussed and explained in Chapter 3. The specific research procedure is

\(^9\)Western practices and values are regarded as superior among this generation. This is partly because only well-educated people had better access to the latest western ideas. On the other hand, this intensive mothering also requires a full-time mother in many cases and can, therefore, only be realised by well-off families. See detail in Chapter 5.
explained, the adaptation of the biographical-narrative interview method, and the mixed analytical strategies, including applications of some interpretive method from the biographical-narrative-interpretive method (BNIM), and thematic analysis and historical analysis are discussed. Finally, some ethical issues in different stages of the research are highlighted.

In Chapters 4 to 6 mothers experiences are analysed. Chapter 4 focuses on women’s accounts of their growing-up experiences. The detailed historical contexts in which these three generations of mothers are lived is presented before moving on to a thematic-analysis of their accounts of growing-up. When analysing a specific woman’s account, their particular life conditions (biographical time) is also taken into consideration. For each generation, the accounts of three to four women from different social-and-economic backgrounds are analysed and compared.

Chapter 5 describes how the three generations recall their mothering experiences. Similar to Chapter 4, historical background is highlighted in the beginning for each generation. Three dominant ideologies of motherhood/womanhood are identified for each period. When analysing women’s accounts, an adapted BNIM is applied involving the separation of women’s lived life from their told stories before synthesising them to reach a deeper understanding. For each generation, two women with distinctive attitudes and practices (one was particularly engaged with the dominant ideology of her time and the other is rather distanced from it) are discussed in detail. Therefore the similarities and differences within each generation are highlighted. At the end, the changes and continuities across three generations are also summarised.

Chapter 6 focuses on the processes of transmission between mothers and daughters. The concept of intergenerational transmission is discussed first with some empirical examples from the study families. Bourdieu’s concept of culture capital and Bertaux’s and Thompson’s work on family transmission provide useful analytical tools to understand the transmission stories of these families. Data on two chains of mothers are analysed in detail in the chapter to show the complexities of transmission and how it plays out in practice for different individuals. This chapter also argues
that social mobility is an important aspect of mothering experiences which is often neglected.

The concluding chapter (Chapter 7) links the three empirical chapters to each other and to the research questions. I reflect on my application of concepts and methods developed in the west in investigating Chinese women’s lived lives and address their usefulness as well as limitations. My own biographical evolution as a mother is also presented. In the end, this thesis’s contribution is summarised.
Chapter 2  Literature Review and Conceptualisation of Mothering

In this chapter, I make reference to three types of literature\(^{10}\) from both the West and China: scientific studies about motherhood, feminist studies of mothers and intergenerational approaches in childrearing. Then, based on existing literature, I further clarify my particular feminist concern in conceptualising motherhood as well as discussing the (in)appropriateness of some terms in describing what is researched by this thesis. Three main concepts are discussed in terms of their relevance in investigating Chinese women’s lived lives. Finally, I set out my research questions which reflect my theoretical interests as well as fill a gap in the existing literature.

2.1  Literature Review

In the following, three major and relevant types of literature are reviewed. The first is the dominant literature discussing childrearing and mothering in a scientific logic in both the West and in China. The focus is particularly on how Chinese motherhood has been studied from medical, psychological and neuroscience perspectives and then the problems associated with taking such a narrow view of motherhood are addressed. Feminists’ research on motherhood/mothering is the focus of the second type of literature reviewed. The different historical backgrounds of the women’s movement and research themes of feminist research are explored, comparing the West and China. Finally, I argue for the relevance of an intergenerational approach in studying mothering in China and therefore review the relevant literature. In this part two major themes are covered: grand-parenting and intergenerational transmission. In the summary, I point out how these three types of literature provide a foundation for this thesis.

2.1.1  Scientific discourses in child-rearing practice

The domination of psychological (and particularly developmental psychology), medical (including brain sciences) and professional discourses in today’s discussion of motherhood/parenthood have been well documented in the West (e.g.Arnup, Lévesque, & Pierson, 1990; Lee, Bristow, Faircloth, & Macvarish, 2014; Phoenix, Woollett, & Lloyd, 1991; Thomson, Kehily, Hadfield, & Sharpe, 2011).\(^{10}\)

\(^{10}\)See Appendix IV for the Search Strategies applied in the literature review.
Such discourses have also dominated the literature of motherhood/parenthood in today’s China. In fact, since the beginning of the 20th century, as with most disciplines in social science, western theories and perspectives in child-rearing/parenting have had an enormous influence on thinking in China. In particular, since the 1980s developmental psychology has dominated discussion about child-rearing, focusing on how to measure parenting behaviours and their outcomes on children’s development. For example, parental attitudes and behaviours towards the child have been argued to have significant effects on the child’s achievement motivation (e.g., Cheung & McBride-Chang, 2008) and socio-emotional well-being (Chen, Liu, & Li, 2000). Moreover, the categories established in the west for describing and measuring parents’ behaviours, such as “authoritarian”, “authoritative” and “permissive” (Baumrind, 1971), have also been applied in China, mainly for school-age children and adolescents (Chen, Dong, & Zhou, 1997; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Leung, Lau, & Lam, 1998), with less attention being applied to early childhood (Wang, Chen, Chen, Cui, & Li, 2006).

There have, however, been criticisms about a lack of cultural sensitivity in applying these western concepts directly. For instance, in a psychological study of 50 immigrant Chinese and 50 European-American mothers with preschool-aged children, by comparing the results of these mothers on standard measures of parental control and authoritative-authoritarian parenting style as well as Chinese child-rearing items (designed by themselves as particularly relevant to Chinese practices) involving the concept of ‘training’, Chao (1994) argued that the Confucian cultural orientation has produced the indigenous Chinese parenting dimension: ‘training’ (jiao xun). ‘Training’ refers to teaching children appropriate behaviour early, through guidance and continuous behavioural monitoring, while remaining involved and providing care and support. This is why, in Chinese and Chinese American families, authoritarian parenting is considered part of ‘proper’ training and has been associated with positive child outcomes (Chao, 1994; Chen, Liu, Li, et al., 2000; Chen, Wu, Chen, Wang, & Cen, 2001). These findings have led some researchers to advocate culturally appropriate methods and measures. Among these attempts to better understand Chinese parenting and to develop a psychometrically appropriate...
measure (Chen, Liu, & Li, 2000; Lieber, Fung, & Leung, 2006), the five Chinese parenting practices identified by Wu et al. (2002) are most widely employed.

It is necessary to point out that although most psychological studies of Chinese child-rearing adopted the term ‘parenting’ and ‘parents’ to demonstrate their neutral stance on gender roles, it is mothers who have been researched most\(^\text{11}\). However, these mothers are not investigated as subjective individuals; rather, their parenting practices/styles are only meaningful if they can be associated with certain children’s outcomes. In fact, the impact on children’s outcomes is the essential criteria in determining which parenting practices are counted and how they are measured.

There is another type of psychological and medical study in the dominant scientific discourses that focuses mainly on mothers’ experiences – studies in Chinese mothers’ experiences of the transition to motherhood (e.g., Choi, 2007; Lam & Mackenzie, 2002; Ngai, Chan, & Holroyd, 2012; Ngai, Chan, & Ip, 2010). The majority of these studies have adopted medical or psychological concepts and measurements to capture mothers’ experiences, such as ‘perceived maternal role competence’, ‘self-reliance’, ‘self-efficacy’, ‘psychosocial adaptation’, or ‘motherhood normalization’. Even though some research has employed qualitative interviews to capture women’s subjective experiences (e.g., Choi, 2007 and Ngai et al., 2012), these experiences are pre-defined by psychological or medical terms. Furthermore, child outcomes are still an implicit priority in this research on mothers (Ngai et al. 2010).

In summary, no matter whether the studies focus on parenting or motherhood transitions in China, they share some common features by adopting scientific discourses. First, children’s outcomes are the main concern of these studies which also assume that parents (mainly mothers) have a significant and long-term impact on children’s development. Such logic tends to study mother-child relationships in isolation, ignoring all other layers of influence on child-rearing attitudes and behaviours, such as mothers’ and children’s relationships with other adults within

\(^{11}\)One exception is Chen’s et al. (2000a), in which she specifically argued for a focus on fathers, due to the Chinese particular parenting culture that puts fathers in an important role.
and outside the family and the historical, structural and cultural influences on mothers’ experiences.

Second, all these studies assume a certain type of parenting as ‘normal’ or ‘good’ whereas others are ‘pathological’ or, at least, not good enough. The increasing use of evidence-based interventions in parenting, supported by local and international governments is a good example of such an intention (Gillies, 2014; Jin et al., 2007). It is always the ‘pathological others’ who are targeted in such interventions. More problematic for China is the fact that the criteria used to define ‘normal’ and ‘pathological others’ were designed in the West. Therefore, even middle-class mothers/families in China face a certain claim of deficiency when compared to white, middle-class, Western families (e.g. Chao, 1994; Jin, 2012; Shin & Wong, 2013).

The critiques of such a scientific discourse on child-rearing have been growing significantly since the late twentieth century in western academic circles. From the 1980s, this literature relates to, and is influenced greatly by, feminist research on women and mothers which can be traced back to the second-wave feminist movement. Work by Riley (1979) and Oakley (1980) are among the earliest to document and critique the domination of medical intervention and the popularisation of psychology that shaped the ‘logic of reproduction’ and motherhood in the UK. In her review of the recent historical literature on motherhood, Jane Lewis (1990) emphasizes the context of the scientific discourses in which late nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ maternal ideologies and practices were embedded. Ramaekers and Suissa (2011) in their philosophical critique of today’s mothering culture highlight the ‘scientific logic’ that is still dominating the twentieth-first century’s ideologies and practices of childrearing.

In the following, I identify and discuss the main feminist research on motherhood.
2.1.2 Feminist Literature on Motherhood

A. The Western Feminist Literature on Motherhood

How to understand women’s experiences as mothers has been a debated topic for feminism for years. There are radical feminist critiques of motherhood (e.g. Firestone, 1971) as being the fundamental oppression of women, and arguing for a future that can free women from such labour and its associated type of family and relationship structure between men and women. This type of critiques also challenges the essentialist view on women’s care practices for children and family (e.g. Chodowrow, 1999). However, there are also feminist writers who have pointed out the ways in which motherhood may sometimes offer women scope for an experience of power and active agency (e.g., Gordon 1986, Johnson 1988, New and David 1985, Ribbens 1993a). I discuss both types of literature in detail below.

a. Critiques on Essentialist View and Women’s Oppression

Following the focus on oppression, many feminists from the second wave (Chodorow, 1999; Rich, 1976; Ruddick, 1980) challenge the practices of care from essentialist and oppressive ideas of maternity and femininity. For example, in Chodorow’s (1999) influential psychoanalytic work on mothers, she challenges the classical psychoanalytic view that the desire and the capacity to mother are an innate predisposition of women (e.g., Winnicott 1956, Balint 1949). She argues that ‘the contemporary reproduction of mothering occurs through social structurally induced psychological processes’ (1978, p.7) which also connects with the psychological and inter-personal capacities and needs, emerging from feminine and masculine development. Such a reproduction, resulting from women’s mothering, ‘generate tensions and strains that undermine the sex-gender system even while reproducing it’ (1978, p.211). However, Chodorow also suggests that ‘In a society where women do meaningful productive work, have on-going adult companionship while they are parenting, and have satisfying emotional relationships with other adults, they are less likely to over-invest in children. But these are precisely the conditions that capitalist industrial development has limited’ (1978, p.212). Therefore, Chodorow’s critique not only challenged the essentialist view of mothering, it also highlighted its oppessional features on women as a result of how the industrial, capitalist West
operates— such a society sharpened the separation of domestic and public spheres, ‘producing a family form reduced to its fundamentals, to women’s mothering and maternal qualities and heterosexual marriage, and continuing to reproduce male dominance.’ (ibid, p.10)

This focus on the wider society’s oppressive power on mothers’ lived lives has been taken up in the 1980s and 1990s when feminist social history and policy analysis demonstrated how law, state, medicine and science regulate and construct mothers (Lewis, 1992; Phoenix et al., 1991; Smart, 2002). Responding to the scientific discourse on motherhood in the West, many feminists have analysed how such discourses regulate mothers’ time, energy and identity (Apple, 2006; Faircloth, 2013; Faircloth, 2009; Ramaekers & Suissa, 2011) and how this type of discourse works with global capitalism which defines the meaning of motherhood (Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 1997).

Among these studies, Hays’ concept of ‘intensive mothering’ has been widely used to describe the dominant ideology in both the West and developing countries (Faircloth, Hoffman, & Layne, 2013). Based on three types of data (historical documentation about childrearing, best-selling contemporary childrearing manuals and in-depth interviews with 38 American mothers of two- to four-year-old children), Hays (1996) systematically analyses the cultural model of mothering. She argues that ‘the contemporary cultural model of socially appropriate mothering takes the form of an ideology: the ideology of intensive mothering is a gendered model that advises mothers to expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children (Hays 1996, p.X).’ According to this ideology, ‘the methods of appropriate child rearing are construed as child-centred, expert-guided, and emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive’ (ibid, p.8)

Following the similar analysis and critiques on intensive mothering, there is a burgeoning literature on parenting culture in the UK and other western countries in the new century. In particular, the Centre for Parenting Culture Studies in the UK (Lee et al., 2014) has produced a comprehensive edited collection on this issue based on their work over six years. In this book, they aim to ‘explain why the everyday and routine matters of being a parent, typified by the example of feeding babies, have
become the ‘big issues’ they now appear to be.’ (ibid, p.3). In answering this question, an interdisciplinary approach is adopted by various authors. They suggest that the reasons not only lie in the dominant scientific-logic in childrearing, but more widely in the neo-liberal society which promotes a particular privatization of parenting responsibility that excluding other adults’ and institutions’ involvements in childrearing.

**b. Focusing on Mothers’ Agency and Practices**

Other studies focus on the positive experiences of women in their particular roles as carers of children (and other family members) and emphasise mothers as active and complex subjects who are not totally determined by dominant ideologies/cultures and therefore demonstrate their agency, the other side of the debate within feminism. Much of this type of feminist research has followed de Beauvoir’s (1972) project: regarding being a woman as a bodily ‘situation’ that ‘is itself situated in terms of particularities of lived experience (subjectivity), social arrangements and the norms and discourses that constitute the ‘myths of femininity’ (Moi, 1999, p.80, cited by Thomson et al., 2011 p.6)’. Therefore, individual women’s particular subjective experiences within specific social and historical contexts are given much attention.

For instance, psychosocial methods developed since the 1950s and 1960s when Western social scientists using psychoanalytic approaches to explore social and political context (Lapping, 2011) have been used by some feminists in studying mothers’ subjectivities. Much of this literature has investigated mother-infant relationships and/or mothers’ transitions to which emphasise the importance of both conscious and unconscious identity in shaping particular maternal subjectivities (Baraitser, 2008; Elliott, Gunaratnam, Hollway, Phoenix, & Wetherell, 2009; Fraiberg, Adelson, & Shapiro, 1975; Hollway, 2015). This type of research views mothers as complex subjects, providing new ways for perceiving motherhood in relational terms and highlighting the limitations of language in understanding their experiences fully. Although aiming to go beyond the dualism of psychology and sociology, this psychosocial approach still focuses more on the psychological side of motherhood and its immediate environment, while paying less attention to larger structural influences. For example, in her psycho-social research on 19 mothers from
a town in the UK with a mix of different ethnicities, Hollway (2015) used psychosocially informed observation and interview methods in exploring women’s identity change when becoming a mother. Hollway highlights that although their sampling principles pay attention to the settings, ‘a psycho-social perspective depends on analysing participants’ relation to aspects of their setting, and reflecting on our- the researchers – relation to our encounter with them.’ (2015, p.30). She emphasises that it is the ‘psycho-dynamics of biography’, the aspects that have been neglected by sociologists (Roseneil, 2006, quoted by Hollway 2015, p.30) she wants to focus on in her study of mothers.

Other feminist sociologists make the social structure more salient without claiming a determinant effect on mothers’ experiences. For example, since the mid-1980s, as a result of an increased demand for women’s employment, research interest has been aroused in the variation in the experiences of employed mothers in British and American societies (Brannen & Moss, 1991; Brannen, Moss, & Moss, 1988; Gerson, 1986; Gerstel & Gross, 1987; Phoenix et al., 1991; Sharpe, 1984). On the one hand, research suggests that by combining career with motherhood, employed mothers have achieved financial and social independence and gained power at home. On the other hand, these employed mothers often felt anxious about meeting society’s ‘high expectations’ and have sought to ‘compartmentalise the different parts of their lives’ since ‘work and family constantly intrude on each other’ (Gerstel and Gross 1987, p.259).

One of these studies highlights both the constraints upon employed mothers and their agency. Brannen and Moss (1991) conducted a longitudinal study of over 200 new mothers in South East England in the 1980s who initially returned to employment within nine months of giving birth. In the context of the dominant ideology of the time (the early to mid-1980s) that constructed the full-time mother and breadwinning father as the norm, they explore the experiences of being an employed mother. The authors construct mothers as active managers of a dual-earner

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12 It was a time in which rather few mothers returned to work as childcare was difficult and eligibility for leave was stringent.
lifestyle, managing the practical and ideological components of their lives with little support from partners, employers or wider society. The great majority (80%) of the employed mothers studied said ‘there had been more gains than losses from combining motherhood with full-time employment’ (1991, p.111). Therefore, while they were still constrained by dominant ideologies and lack of support, ‘they were beginning to create a new discourse around maternal employment’ (1991, p.254).

There is also an emerging type of literature that is concerned with the ‘content of childrearing’ (Gordon, 1986) to respond to the gap in feminists’ writing highlighted by some researchers (Arendell, 2000; Gordon, 1986; Ribbens, 1994; Ross, 1995). Such a focus very often connects with the increasing attention to the practices of everyday life (Morgan, 1996) and concerns on how mothers form particular subjectivity and identity within social constructions by ‘doing’ childcare. This includes cultural research about how consumption constitutes maternal practices (Clarke, Layne, Taylor, & Wozniak, 2004; Longhurst, 2009; Rose, 2010), psychosocial research focusing on how first-time mothers’ practices, such as breastfeeding, nappy-changing, and walking-the-floors at night, are vehicles for their identity transitions (e.g., Elliot et. al. 2009), and feminist sociological accounts of what women do with their children in everyday life (e.g., Ribbens 1994). This research aims at making ‘invisible’ maternal practices ‘visible’ (Daniels, 1987) and inserts mothers as the ‘subjects’ at the centre of the research as well as connecting subjective experiences with structural context.

For instance, Ribbens combines methods of ethnography and life histories in studying 24 middle-class and white British women’s childrearing practices in their everyday lives. Instead of comparing concrete issues, such as food, sleep, clothing and cleanliness’ alone among these women’s daily practices, Ribbens found that ‘these concrete trivia were intricately interlaced by the women to create particular sorts of frameworks of meaning which they used to makes sense of their concerns in bringing up their children.’ She used cases of four women to present whole ‘family portraits’ (i.e., asking each woman to draw a spatial map of people important to her and asking questions about their lives in general) as way of presenting and understanding mothers’ meaning-making in their childrearing, an ‘insider perspective’ (1994, p.3).’
However, as Ribbens argued, the ‘outsider’s view’ is also important when she tries to connect these women’s accounts of trivial daily practices with larger social and cultural themes such as individuality, family, childhood and even broader social and political philosophy (e.g., the conceptualisation about power and the division between the public and private). Overall, she wants to show that ‘the feminist sociological study of childrearing can reveal and respect the diversity of women’s own childrearing views, a diversity which is rooted, not in contrasts between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mothering, but in much wider issues of social and political philosophy (1994, p.5).

The literature on mothers’ agency and practices also includes feminist philosophical and political study of ‘maternal thinking’ and ethics of care that are reproduced within everyday childcare practices (Noddings, 2013; Ruddick, 1989; Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Tronto, 1993) which celebrate ‘women’s ways of knowing’. For example, Sara Ruddick’s (1989) seminal work identified three particular characteristics of maternal thinking that arise from the practical activity of caring for children: protecting the child in order to preserve life; promoting the holistic growth of the child and training the child for social acceptance. Such a way of thinking disposes women, whether or not they physically become mothers, to moral and epistemological visions that are different from men. Mothers, for example, resist exploitation, abuse, oppression, and domination because these are contrary to the values of caring as they have been inextricably and historically bound to women’s lives (Radosh, 2008). Ruddick ambitiously proposes that such maternal thought is not merely valued within the domestic sphere but also can be widely applied to a politics of peace set against the practice of violence and war.

c. Motherhood and Diversity

However, much of the literature discussed above focuses on the experiences of women who are white, middle-class and western. Relating to the critique of second-wave feminism’s ‘universal’ concept of women/mothers, some researchers recognise the salience of class and race distinctions in relation to mothering practices and ideologies (Collins, 1994; Lareau, 2011; Phoenix et al., 1991; Reay, 2004; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989) and claim a dividing effect in today’s Western society.
Therefore, mothers’ responses to children vary and they do not nurture, protect or socialize their children in identical ways or circumstances. For example, according to American sociologist Collins (1994), three issues form the ‘bedrock’ of the ‘mother work’ of women of colour: survival, power, and identity. Stack’s work (1975) demonstrates how low-income black women strategically used their social network to rear their children among extended families, particularly when becoming lone mothers. Collins’ work (2005) also presents how low-income black mothers integrated their work and childrearing and formed a different mother-daughter relationship, proving an alternative to today’s intensive mothering practices. However, this new ideology also impacted on this group of African-American mothers, as argued by other researchers (e.g. Elliott, Powell, & Brenton, 2015), and they embrace and perform intensive mothering in the absence of larger social support for their children’s upbringing and at a cost to their own emotional and physical well-being.

In general, mothers who are regarded as ‘deviant’ according to the intensive mothering ideology are increasingly studied by feminist researchers, including, for example, single mothers (e.g. Layne, 2013; Stack, 1975), teenage mothers (e.g. Phoenix, 1991), minority and immigrant mothers (e.g. Elliott et al., 2009; Jiménez Sedano, 2013), and lesbian mothers (e.g. Lewin, 1993). In the following, I specifically focus on the literature on Chinese mothers, which also contributes to the focus of women’s diverse experiences discussed here.

**B. Chinese Feminist Literature and Motherhood**

Compared with the diverse feminist studies of motherhood in the West, research on mothering with a feminist agenda is only emerging in China in this century (Tang, 2001, p. 42). This delayed focus on women’s experiences as mothers relates to China’s particular trajectory of feminism/women’s movement. The Chinese women’s movement has always been part of, and connected with, national crisis and reform (Chang, 2014). The first wave of Chinese women’s liberation started around 1840 when the Opium War (Britain’s invasion of China) ‘woke up’ the Qing Dynasty government. As part of the male politician’s reform movement – Constitutional Reform and Modernisation – the topic of women’s liberation was
raised. Women’s problems were regarded as the same as the problem of the nation – the feudal system. Similarly, at the time of the May 4th movement in 1919 (aimed to counteract the colonization of China by Western countries), women’s issues were raised but were again treated as part of national crisis (Li & Zhang, 1994). Since then, the Chinese Communist Party has been a firm supporter of the women’s movement but they also have the assumption that when the country was liberated and reform achieved, so would the issue of gender equity be resolved (Croll, 1983). Particularly, after the establishment of the P.R.C., the women’s movement was institutionalised by the government – an official department, the All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF), was established to lead and direct the Chinese women’s movement (Zheng, 2010). On the one hand, the establishment of a governmental department symbolised the support of the ideology of gender equity from the new government; while on the other hand, it also meant that as a marginalised organisation the ACWF has to gain their political legitimacy by agreeing to the overall country’s political ideology. For example, the ACWF insisted ‘that women’s studies be based on Marxist women’s liberation theory’; they considered the term ‘feminism’ as ‘part of a bourgeois ideology’ and adopted the term ‘women’s study’ instead (Li & Zhang, 1994, pp. 142-148). In addition, the ACWF assumed that in the ‘new era’, most women have been liberated from their family roles and therefore the focus should be on women’s problems in participating in work and economic reform (ibid). Such a governmental led women’s movement is widely regarded as a unique feature of Chinese feminism and Zheng (2010) used the term ‘socialist state feminism’ to refer to ‘women Communist Party members in powerful positions who consciously promoted women’s empowerment and equality between men and women (p.287).’ Under such an ideology, the ACWF has focused on supporting women in gaining equal status at work and home in actions and policies, rather than research. Women’s studies did not start until the 1980s when economic reform began and many issues about women that had been assumed solved suddenly became apparent (Li and Zhang, 1994).

In 1980s, the first Women Study Institute was established by the ACWF and started to collect statistics on Chinese women as well as to hold conferences on women’s issues. Alongside the governmental research institutes, non-governmental women research centres started to appear in universities in the late 1980s. These women
scholars broadened their research about Chinese women from various disciplines, including history, literature, sociology, population studies, law and political studies. The issues studied included Chinese women’s history, women’s literature, women’s employment, women’s population mobility, prostitution, the relation between birthrate and women’s employment, legal protection of women’s employment and suffrage, women’s legal rights, the decrease in the number of female leaders in government and so on (Li and Zhang 1994). Interestingly, although the family and marriage have become one of the most studied areas by feminist sociologists, women’s experiences of childrearing were still rarely touched until the new century (Tang, 2001).

Between the 1980s and 1990s, apart from some oral history studies and literature research, the majority of studies about Chinese women were still quantitative, aimed at collecting data and presenting the changes (or lack of changes) in women’s status in various areas (Li and Zhang, 1994). In the new century, alongside the greater influence from the western feminists’ research in motherhood (Song, 2011a), studies of women’s experiences as mothers started to emerge.

a. Social, Historical and Policy Analysis

The majority of this emerging literature is social, historical and policy analysis which focuses on how the state, in different historical periods, shapes particular maternal ideologies and how such dominant ideologies liberated but also oppressed women. In particular, three historical periods with distinct constructions have been investigated in China— the early 1900s of the National Party governing period, the early plan economic period of China (1949 – 1980s) and the current modern/post-modern China. For the early 1990s, according to feminist researchers’ historical studies (e.g.Xiao, 2011; Yu, 2007) the discussion of (new) ‘Virtuous Wife and Good Mother’ (xianqiliangmu) have, on the one hand, supported the importance of women’s education; on the other hand, advocated that the ultimate goal for a new woman is still defined by their care role at home but armed with scientific knowledge (Lu, 2012).
After the establishment of the People Republic of China, researchers highlighted the socialist government’s political efforts in creating a new ideology of women which shaped a working mother’s identity. In her study comparing working mothers’ experiences before 1990 and after 1990 based on historical documentation and interview materials, Jin (2013) has demonstrated that by rewarding and praising women’s participation in work and providing free and convenient childcare, the nation provided a place for working mothers to develop a relatively separate identity and self-value from ‘motherhood’. However, these resources for creating a new identity were not accessible to everyone. In fact, only women who worked full-time for state-owned factories had access. Furthermore, apart from childcare, responsibility for other domestic work was still shouldered only by mothers and made invisible publicly. Such devalued and invisible maternal work became particularly problematic for women after the 1980s-1990’s marketization reform. Based on her analysis of policies and the secondary statistics on women and employment since the 1980s, Song (2011b) points out the social phenomenon of calling ‘women to go back home’ and the new romanticisation of ‘mothers’ in public media (Wang, 1999) happened at the same time as the availability of jobs declined severely in the early 1990s. She argues that such new discrimination towards women could be traced back to the historical unsolved problem of the gendered role in caring.

b. Qualitative Research with Focus on Mothers’ Subjectivities

The second type of literature relates to feminist researchers’ attention to Chinese women’s subjective experiences (Song, 2011a; Wang, 2000) and the increasing usage of qualitative interview methods to explore women’s ‘own voices’ (Wu, 2005). Most of this literature appeared during the last five to ten years. This research tended to point to how modern Chinese mothers are influenced by maternal ideologies and practices in the west, including intensive mothering (Jin & Yang, 2015; Kuan, 2015); the importance of breastfeeding (Breengaard, 2015); and the scientification of parenting (Tao, 2013). However, this research also highlights how Chinese women’s experiences differ from those in the West.
One ideological difference between China and the west is the culture of ‘education fever’ and competition to produce a ‘quality child’ (Anagnost, 2008a; Woronov, 2007) that shapes Chinese mothers’ identity (Jin & Yang, 2015; Kuan, 2015; and Breengaard, 2015). For example, Kuan’s research of Chinese contemporary parenting, between 2004 and 2006, employed an ethnographic approach to study ten ‘new middle-class’ families in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province. Kuan primarily focuses on experts and parents – especially mothers - by conducting many interviews as well as observing their daily lives and experts’ lessons. On the one hand, she demonstrated the almost ‘irrational’ investment mothers put into their children’s education; on the other hand, she tried to ‘challenge the image of middle-class mothers as being excessively ambitious for their children, obsessed with perfection and the social status that a good education will bring.’ Instead, she ‘tried to bring the ethical dimension of ‘mindless’ middle-class life to light’ (p.210). She argues that parents’ aim is not only about educational achievement but it is a way of expressing their love and care for their children by pushing them hard. This, on the one hand demonstrates the power of this ideology, but on the other hand highlights mothers’ own ethical considerations about their responsibilities as a mother: pushing as hard as possible for a better future of their children, even though the mothers may suffer as much as their children! Here, Kuan tries to go beyond the ‘dichotomies of power versus agency, reproduction versus resistance by focusing on moral experience and by locating the art of disposition in everyday life’. She provides us a much richer picture of understanding this ‘education fever’ that is fundamental to today’s intensive mothering practices in China.

Another difference between China and the West is discussed in literature about mothers’ employment. Following their work in studying women’s employment in China, 陶艳兰 (2013) and Tang (2001) highlight how work identity plays an important role in Chinese mothering. By interviewing seven middle-class mothers in Suzhou city, 陶艳兰 (2013) suggests that, similar to the West, motherhood identity in China has been influenced by traditional gender ideology, the devaluation of women due to their care roles and the scientification of parenting. However, the majority of mothers she studied still emphasised their separate work identity and returned to work immediately after finishing maternal leave, which was not just
about family income but their ambitions in their careers. These mothers extended the view of childcare as being only mothers’ work but actively drew on the childcare resources of their extended family.

Tang (2001) compares academic mothers’ experiences in China and the UK and explores how motherhood is constructed in two different countries and how academic mothers combine both work and childcare in different contexts. She interviewed 45 Chinese academic mothers from Yangzhou (a middle-sized city) and Beijing (capital) and 48 British academic mothers from Aberdeen (a middle-sized northern city in Scotland) and London, including four age groups of women: 25-34, 35-44, 45-54 and over 55. She demonstrated that both the Chinese and British academic mothers face many dilemmas and conflicts in balancing their roles as mothers and academics, but that ‘academic mothers in the two countries have benefited from the flexibility of time and space in academic work, which has enabled them to shift between office and home, therefore blurring the boundaries between the public and private spheres (p.iii)’. However, she also highlighted the differences in academic mothers’ experiences due to their different cultural and social contexts. For example, the Chinese academic mothers all worked full-time while the majority of British academic mothers worked part-time or had breaks in their careers. Another important difference is that ‘absentee mothers’ seemed very common among Chinese academic mothers, while fewer British mothers placed work before their children and far fewer had the experience of separation from their children (p.235). This demonstrates full-time working is much more prevalent for Chinese academic mothers than their British counterparts.

c. Cultural Studies about Mothers

The third type of literature in studying Chinese mothering is cultural studies which focus more on how the media portray today’s mothers. For example, Chen (2010) presents how the mass media in Taiwan portray a particular type of motherhood: technocratic, romanticized, middle-class ideological, professionalized and consumerist. Based on analysis of more than 800 articles in a Chinese database, Shen (2014) shows that the notion of the ‘hot mum’ has been transformed into the concept of ‘all-around hot mums’ who take care of both their families and their
careers. She argues that the media turn hot mums into subjects of consumerism and that the hot mum discourse is contributing to oppression rather than challenging power relations between men and women or the roles of father and mother. These studies highlight the prevalence of the gender order in today’s China, even though much less visible when disguised by the new image of self-reliant mothers and the celebration of their femininity.

Compared with much more diverse studies about mothers in the west, as stated earlier, the literature on motherhood in China is still only emerging. In particular, there is a lack of study of mothering experiences in the ‘first person’ (Ramaekers & Suissa, 2012). Furthermore, social class and other social positions are much less explored compared to in the West and the majority of studies have been focused only on middle-class women living in large cities.

However, Chinese feminist literature in motherhood studies has also highlighted China’s historical, cultural and social contexts. The discussion of how the education fever influences much of the intensive mothering in today’s China is a case in point. The historical and social analysis studies have also emphasized the long tradition of women’s participation in work in China and recent studies on mothering practices demonstrate how work identity tightly relates to women’s maternal identity in China. Nevertheless, there is another significant social phenomenon that influences Chinese mothering practices which has yet to become the focus of feminist literature – the prevalence of the intensive involvement of other family members, particularly grandmothers (sometime grandfathers), in helping childcare in both historical and today’s China. This is touched on by some feminist studies such as Tao’s (2013) when she pointed out how women actively use such family support in balancing their work and childcare roles. Nevertheless, it has not yet become a focus of current feminist research on Chinese mothering. This leads to the next section’s focus – discussing literature relating to the family context with an intergenerational approach in which to situate Chinese mothering and particularly the literature about grand-parenting and intergenerational transmission.

13 However, both Jin (2013) and Song (2012) pointed out the stratification of women’s status even in early Mao’s time. Even though better public child care was in place at that time, it could only cover about 24% of children and they were all in the cities (Jin, 2013).
2.1.3 Intergenerational Approaches to Childrearing

A. Grand-parenting in the West

The combination of greater longevity and lower fertility has given rise to ‘beanpole families’ with several ‘vertical’ but fewer ‘horizontal’ family relationships and structures in many western countries (Bengtson, 2001; Harper, 2005). This results in the rise of studies about grand-parenting in Europe and North America in the last two decades (Arber & Timonen, 2012). In their review of grand-parenting literature in the west, Timonen and Arber (2012, p4) pointed out that ‘a common theme connecting both earlier and more recent research on grand-parenting pertains to the ‘function’ of grandparents as ‘supporters’, ‘savers’ or ‘rescuers’ of the younger generations (Hagestad, 2006; Von Hentig, 1946)’. Specifically, the major issues covered include intergenerational solidarity, conflict and ambivalence; intergenerational transfers; grandparents as ‘child savers’ or ‘mother savers’ and typologies of grand-parenting styles etc. However, ‘earlier research on grandparenthood has had a strong social psychological focus and the dominance of US literature is notable, with the result that the impact of broader family systems and cultural contexts on grand-parenting practices has received inadequate attention.’ (Arber & Timonen p.8)

This inadequate attention towards broader family systems and cultural contexts becomes particularly problematic when studying Chinese grand-parenting (Burnette, Sun, & Sun, 2013) as the social, cultural and family contexts are significantly different in China compared to the West (Ko, 2012). For example, in America, custodial grandparenting is well studied (Hayslip Jr & Kaminski, 2005), and happens in poor families, those lacking resources and some ethnic groups (eg., African American communities). By contrast, in China, the grandparents in well-resourced families are equally heavily involved in the bringing-up of grandchildren as in those less-well resourced. Even for rural China where grand-parenting in ‘skipped-generation’ households stands in marked contrast to that in ‘skipped-generation’ households in the United States; grandparental support in China is not only a crisis response as in the US, but, very often, a strategy for enhancing the

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14 ‘Skipped-generation’ means families where parents are absent (dead, divorced or migrating for work) for most of the time and only grandparents and grandchildren live in the household.
extended family’s economic prosperity. Therefore, as Baker and their colleagues’ (Baker, Silverstein, & Putney, 2008) research demonstrates, these grandparents have better psychological well-being compared with grandparents who do not live in ‘skipped-generation’ households, unlike the US.

There is recent (mostly European) literature which highlights grandparents get involved to enable mothers to participate in the labour market (e.g. Herlofson & Hagestad, 2012). Such a ‘mother savers’ picture in some ways becomes more significant in today’s Chinese families. However, the grandmothers’ involvement in helping young children also relates to a traditional cultural idea of co-residence of three or four generations (Chen, Liu, & Mair, 2011; Ko, 2012). This means even during the time when Chinese women did not go out to work, the childrearing responsibilities were not ‘privatised’ as the mothers’ job but as a cooperation among different women (He, 1990a). Such generational cooperation was found in urban and rural, low-income, multigenerational, black, extended families in the United States by Carol Stack and Linda Burton (1993). They use the term ‘kinscripts’ to describe the interplay of family ideology, norms, and behavior over the life course’ (ibid, p.157) which share some similarities with grandparenting practices in China. However, in China, as discussed below, the grandparenting/grandmothering and mothering is more a kind of collaboration across generations compared to the black families in Stack and Burton’s study where grandmothers ‘substitute’ for mothers.

B. Grand-parenting in China

The prevalence and deep involvement of grandparents, particularly grandmothers, in childcare has been well documented in China since 1980s/90s. For example, based on the China Health and Nutrition Survey, a longitudinal survey (CHNS 1991, 1993, 1997, 2000, 2004) including information about families from nine selected provinces and regions with both rural and urban backgrounds, Chen et al. (2011) show that 45% of grandparents co-resided with children age 0-6 from 1991 to 2004. Furthermore, by comparing hours of childcare per week by co-residential grandparents and mothers in China, they found a very small difference between time spend on childcare for pre-school children between mothers and grandmothers. If one removes the infant group, grandmothers spend more hours than mothers in
providing childcare. In terms of non-residential grandparents’ involvement, their data also demonstrate that 27% of young children were cared for in paternal grandparents’ households, followed by 13% in maternal grandparents’ households. If we add the residential and non-residential grandparents’ intensive involvement in caring for young children, we may conclude that grandparents play the major role in caring for the young children in rural and urban China. In a study that combined surveys and ethnographic methods of four families in Xiamen between 2004 and 2005 (Goh, 2009; Goh & Kuczynski, 2010), researchers argue that the grandparents’ (mainly grandmothers) involvement in childcare is so intensive and prevalent that they contest the relevance of western concepts of socialization that emphasise the nuclear family and unidirectional patterns of intergenerational influence. Instead, they propose that childrearing in China should be viewed as a unit of ‘coalition’ between parents and grandparents (mainly mothers and grandmothers in most families).

However, different studies vary in understanding the ‘coalition child-rearing method’. For example, in the study of Chen et al. (2011) mentioned previously, the parents’ intensive involvement was viewed as evidence of intergenerational solidarity, a concept used by Bengtson (Bengtson, 2001). Furthermore, they also pointed out that the increasing support of grandparents in childrearing on the one hand reflects Confucian norms of filial piety in relation to intergenerational relationships and exchanges. Other studies stress how grandparents’ major caregiving role also indicates a significant cultural shift from emphasizing the adult children’s obligations towards their older parents to a more mutual care and reciprocal exchange, thereby giving filial piety a new meaning (Whyte, 2003). Such a cultural change in intergenerational relationships is also supported by Liu (2014). Based on life history interviews and in-depth studies of old people from two rural villages, Liu (2014) found that rural-urban migration has transformed intergenerational relations. The ‘intergenerational contract’ is re-negotiated in which both generations make investments and offer mutual support. The older people’s investment is mainly in the provision of childcare for their grandchildren. Furthermore, there is research which documents increasing involvement of maternal grandmothers’ in caring for grandchildren and their co-residence with adult children (Shen, 2013). This is another shift from the traditional paternal co-residence and the
central focus on the paternal intergenerational relationship in China (Chen et al., 2011).

This emphasis on the changing patterns and meaning of filial piety and intergenerational relationship seems to demonstrate that Chinese families are less patriarchal, so representing increasing gender equality in China. This is supported by other research. For example, in their quantitative analysis of China’s General Social Survey data in 2006, Hu and Scott (2016) find both patrilineal and gender values are less traditional. However, Shen (2011) argues that these changes cannot assume a change of ‘gender order’ (men having higher status and more power than women at home) in today’s childrearing practices. In her ethnographical study of what different family members do with a pre-school age child during a whole day’s activities in Shanghai, Shen analysed the power relationship between different family members, particularly between men (father and grandfather) and women (mother and grandmother) in two generations. She observes that the patriarchal tradition is changing in terms of the older generation possessing less power compared to the younger one: the grandfather has much less power in making important decisions than his son and the grandmother (the mother-in-law) gives up her power to the daughter-in-law. On the other hand, the husbands still hold higher positions at home than the wives in both generations.

In contrast to the emphasis on intergenerational solidarity and the change of intergenerational relationship, other researchers (Binah-Pollak, 2014; Goh, 2009; Goh & Kuczynski, 2010; Xiao, 2014) demonstrate the conflicts in values and methods of child-rearing between grandparents (grandmothers) and parents (mothers). For instance, in Goh’s (2009) ethnographical study in Xiamen, she found frequent conflicts between grandmothers and mothers due to their different values and practices in childrearing and consequently, both sides express pressure and dissatisfaction with their life-style as a result of such “coalition child-rearing methods”. This demonstrates how mothers’ feelings and practices are influenced strongly by the intensive involvement of grandmothers but this important side of mothering is still under-studied in literature about Chinese motherhood and grandparenthood.
One recent study by Xiao (2014) starts to connect mothers’ childrearing practices with grand-parenting. She interviewed 13 mothers, eight grandmothers and two fathers from 13 families in Beijing about their childrearing experiences. She found that mothers have the authority to decide how to look after the young children even though in many situations, it is the grandmothers who execute the mothers’ will. Some important jobs such as reading books and monitoring education are left to mothers whereas grandmothers are in charge of daily, more ‘trivial’ issues such as cooking for the children and family, cleaning, picking up children from schools etc.. Fathers are absent from childcare work to focus on earning enough money to support the whole family. This reverse power position between mothers/daughters-in-law and grandmothers/mothers-in-law is not achieved easily. Xiao (2014) demonstrates how family conflicts result but she also emphasises mothers’ active strategies in maintaining their authority in childrearing and at the same time creating harmonious relationships with grandparents, particularly grandmothers. Therefore, mothering practices not only include what mothers do with children in their everyday life, they also concern the way mothers manage intergenerational relationships in families.

Overall, the literature of grand-parenting in the West and China demonstrates the increasing involvement of grandparents in providing childcare on the one hand, but highlights the large differences in cultural, social and familial contexts in which grand-parenting is situated on the other. The intensive involvement of grandparents in today’s China has led some researchers to describe it in terms of a ‘coalition model’ of childrearing. However, overall, the focus on coalition childrearing is particularly rare when investigating Chinese mothering practices. Furthermore, most of the literature focuses on contemporary families and there is a lack of historical comparison between different familial and cultural contexts of grand-parenting in China. Therefore I argue that it is not only the grand-parenting that needs to be taken into consideration when studying Chinese mothering, but also the wider (changing) family context including different family members and the relationships between them. One such important family context is intergenerational transmission and some literature has started to pay attention to how mothering practices relates to the family processes that connect different generations. I am turning to this type of literature in the next section.
C. Intergenerational Transmission

The literature on intergenerational transmission\textsuperscript{15} is only emerging in the West and has hardly started in China\textsuperscript{16}. In Chapter 6, I will discuss this literature and relevant concepts in more detail. Here, I focus on some important research that connects mothering practices with this complex generational transmission process.

Connecting mothering within the generational transmission process helps us to see mothering as a collective experiences across chains of women within a family. For example, Rachel Thomson and colleagues (2011) interviewed 62 expectant mothers from two cities in the UK to study their experiences as ‘first-time’ mothers. To provide an intergenerational view, they also chose twelve women to take part in case studies where grandmothers, great-grandmothers and ‘significant others’ were interviewed as well as followed up by a second interview with the expectant mothers at least one year after giving birth. Such a design helped them to hear not only mothers’ individual narratives about childrearing, but also intergenerational narratives of mothering as a ‘coexistence’. This coexistence was eloquently described by Thomson (2008), ‘Families express the coexistence of the past and the present, with the past constantly reworked by contemporary demands, yet these demands being shaped by what has passed. As a daughter becomes a mother, she realizes her inheritances and turns her gaze into the future. Generational succession provides a rhythm and direction for these flows and the maternal can provide an entry point for understanding how historical change is experienced and mediated.’ (p.20-21). This generational succession also plays an important mediation role between individuals and the changing historical contexts, as argued by Thomson and her colleagues. In this study of Thomson (et al., 2008) the diversity of women’s experiences as ‘first-time mothers’ is made manifest through both horizontal comparison of women who share a historical moment and vertical comparison between intergenerational chains of women within families.

\textsuperscript{15}The definition of intergenerational transmission will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

\textsuperscript{16}There is one study that highlighted intergenerational relationships in studying mothering practices in China- Zhou’s (2010) ethnographic study about 7 pairs of mothers and their pregnant daughters in middle-class (the author’s term) households in Zhengzhou, the capital city of Henan province. However, in her study, she did not analyse chains of women and therefore fails to see the intergenerational transmission across two generations in these families or varied relational patterns between mothers-daughters in different families.
Reviewing motherhood itself as a part of intergenerational transmission can also broaden our understanding of changes and continuities of mothering practices within multi-generation families. For example, in Julia Brannen’s and colleagues’ (2004) study of twelve families with four generations of members (three generations of adult members), they compared women’s lived lives from the childhood period. This helps readers to see the intergenerational influence from the beginning of the women’s lives. Then they analysed the women’s accounts of bringing-up their children with a particular focus on how far women followed or rejected the role models provided by their parents. Such an exploration helps us to see the detailed maternal identity process which is not only shaped by the historical context but also by specific family cultures and intergenerational relationships. It also highlights how women made their own mark on what has been passed on to them. In addition, not only mother-daughter relationships were taken into consideration in their studies, but also father-daughter or even other family members’ (such as aunts or uncles) influence. Such an inclusive approach, as argued earlier, is more appropriate in studying Chinese mothers’ lived experiences.

The process of transmission shapes individual life trajectories in a significant way, which is very often neglected in understanding children’s outcomes as measured by psychological research. For instance, Nielsen and Rudberg’s (2000) studies of three generations of girlhood in Norway involved interviews with a sample of 18-year-old Norwegian girls, their mothers and grandmothers from 8 families. She explored how girls identified themselves with their parents in the process of the transition to adulthood. While she did not focus on mothering, the significance of upbringing and parental identification is highlighted in her analysis of these women’s accounts. As she argued, this identification is important to the management of gender for young women and also their later choices in education and marriage, both of which are crucial to social mobility.

The research discussed in this section provides a useful way of situating mothering within the family’s context – intergenerational transmission context. This type of literature locates motherhood as generational co-existence and regards childrearing practices as influenced by intergenerational transmission and relationships. Furthermore, the outcomes of mothering, through such an intergenerational
perspective, can also be extended to individual and family social mobility without ignoring historical and structural influences. As argued earlier, such an approach is particular relevant to Chinese mothering and is a gap that this thesis will seek to fill.

2.1.4 Summary of Reviewed Literature

In this section three main types of literature have been reviewed from both the West and China. In the West, until the 1980s, the study of motherhood is still dominated by the scientific discourses. In the last three decades, however, we start to see more feminist research providing a powerful critique of this narrow logic in understanding women’s lives. Furthermore, this blossoming literature moves mothers into the centre of studies as well as demonstrating diverse experiences of mothering from different social positions and cultures. Differing from the earlier social, historical and political analysis of women being oppressed by their reproduction and care roles, recent studies present a more complicated picture of mothering which demonstrates women’s agency in everyday childrearing without ignoring the structural inequalities in specific social and historical contexts.

In contrast, however, the fields of childrearing and mothers in China today are dominated by scientific discourses. This is partly to do with the history of the Chinese women’s movement and political contexts that focused on women’s equal participation in the economy. The literature on women’s daily childrearing experiences has therefore been limited. Nevertheless, changes in Chinese society and the influence of western ideas and literature have facilitated feminist researchers’ investigation of mothering. The methods and perspectives in the existing Chinese mothering literature are far less diverse than those found in the West. Nevertheless, some particularities of the Chinese context are highlighted by this literature. For example, the emphasis on mothering practices that have been shaped by the particular ‘education fever’ in China reflects different cultural contexts between today’s China and the West. Some research also highlights how Chinese mothers’ work identity constitutes an important part of maternal ideologies due to the long history of mothers as workers and the political legitimation of women’s participation in the workplace in PRC.
No matter in the West or in China, studying intergenerational relationships, grandparenting and family transmissions tend to be separated from the field of motherhood. I argue, however, that an intergenerational approach is essential in understanding Chinese mothering experiences. Some literature about grandparenting highlights the importance of studying Chinese childrearing as a ‘coalition’ between grandmothers and mothers. Nevertheless, I have found very limited Chinese literature that connects different generations of women’s experiences when investigating Chinese motherhood. A few studies that connect intergenerational transmission with mothering in the West provide some useful perspectives. These studies demonstrate how mothering is a sort of ‘coexistence experience’ across generations of women within families, how adult daughters identify or dis-identify with their mothers and fathers, shaping their particular practices in childrearing and how such an identification process impacts on these women’s practices and life trajectories. Another important aspect of these studies with an intergenerational perspective is their focus on historical change and context. This literature regards it necessary to study the structural context and family context (i.e., family culture, intergenerational relationships and transmissions) together when investigating individual practices.

This summary of the literature provides an important foundation for me to set out my research plan. In the thesis I will fill some of the gaps in researching motherhood in China with a particular feminist perspective that I will explain in the next section.

2.2 A Feminist Conceptualisation of Mothering

2.2.1 A Feminist Perspective

This thesis sets out to explore women’s experiences of mothering in China with a feminist perspective. However it is debatable what constitutes a ‘feminist’ research/perspective (Maynard, 1994). Many feminist researchers regard ‘the pervasive influence of gender divisions on social life as one of its most important defining characteristics. There are, however, differences over what this might mean.’ (ibid, p.14). My particular view on the meaning of such gender divisions is built on the existing feminist literature about motherhood/mothering in the West and China which highlights both the structural oppression on women, due to the essentialisation
of women’s reproductive roles, and women’s particular subjectivities and agency via their discursive childrearing practices. In particular, influenced by Toril Moi (2001), a feminist theorist who traces back to another important feminist tradition from de Beauvoir, my analysis of mothering experiences will not focus on ‘theories of sex and gender’, but aiming at create ‘a concrete, historical understanding of what it means to be’ a mother.

In Toril Moi’s (2001) theoretic critique about the current feminist literature as having focused too much on ‘theorists of sex and gender’ or their differences, she argues that,

‘The distinction between sex and gender is simply irrelevant to the task of producing a concrete, historical understanding of what it means to be a woman (or a man) in a given society. … Women’s bodies are human as well as female. Woman have interests, capacities, and ambitions that reach far beyond the realm of sexual differences, however one defines these. Investigations of the meaning of femininity in specific historical and theoretical contexts are indispensable to the feminist project of understanding and transforming sexist cultural practices and traditions. Yet any given woman will transcend the category of femininity, however it is defined. A feminism that reduces women to their sexual difference can only ever be the negative mirror image of sexism. … Beauvoir herself writes: ‘Surely woman is, like man, a human being, but such a declaration is abstract. The fact is that every concrete human being is always in a specific situation’ ’ (p.4)

Borrowing Moi’s powerful words, I see the women in the study as human beings as well as mothers. Any given mother will transcend the category of femininity/gender or good/bad mothers, however it is defined. Therefore, my feminist project is to produce a concrete, historical understanding of what it means to be a mother in a given society which can capture both the structural constraints^{17} and women’s agency. The aim is to complicate and broaden our understanding of mothering in China so that a ‘sexist culture’ may be transformed.

My feminist project also relates to the issue of intergenerational differences between socialist feminists between the 1950s and 1970s, and the current post-

^{17} Although structural elements are not only producing constraints on women, they can also provide resources (Brannen et al., 2004) which I will discuss later in the analytical chapters (Chapter 4, 5, and 6) and final conclusion (Chapter 7).
socialist/modern feminists in China (after the 1980s) (Song, 2011a; Wang, 2000). The particular revolutionary social background makes the older generation focus primarily on women’s rights in participating in education, in work, and overall, to make a contribution to the nation’s survival (in the Qing Dynasty) and development (in Mao’s China) (see section 2.12 above). The argument that ‘the personal is political’ is unthinkable to this generation which has no time to talk about or consider personal issues. However, rapid change in society meant the modern generation, including myself, finds inspiration from such a slogan, which was used widely in the western’s second-wave feminism. The new generation of Chinese feminists scholars, similar to their western counterparts in the 1960s and 1970s, set out to study women's perspectives and women's relations to hierarchies of power within personal lives with a view to changing it (Wu, 2005). Such huge shifts of focus may have caused misunderstandings between Chinese feminists across generations. My own experience in talking about motherhood with the older generation of Chinese feminists (see Chapter 1) is a case in point. Therefore, my particular feminist project of studying Chinese mothering across generations also relates to my efforts in creating dialogue with socialist feminists: understanding and comparing the three generations of mothers’ concrete experiences can help us see the historical contexts that different generations of Chinese feminists worked in and the impact of their efforts.

To fulfill such a project, I designed my research with the following features, building on previously discussed literature:

First, a historical perspective is applied by comparing three generations of mothers’ experiences in China. This is consistent with my particular feminist interest discussed above. Furthermore, as these three generations of mothers lived through dramatic societal transformations, comparing their experiences provides a great opportunity to ‘observe’ how changing structural elements shaped mothers varied subjectivities similarly or differently; and how mothers in different historical times challenged and resisted the structural determinants by their everyday and discursive mothering practices, including the meaning they associated with their ‘mundane’

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18 See (Zheng, 2010)’s analysis of some socialist feminists’ personal lives. They rejected marriage or gave their new-born babies to strangers so that they could focus on their work.
(Nielsen et al., 2000) practices. In other words, such a historical view makes the agency-structure dynamics more salient.

Second, I will focus on mothers’ everyday practices in childrearing. Such an approach is argued as making invisible maternal practices ‘visible’ (Daniels, 1987) which is particularly relevant in studying women’s agency. Here, I view agency as women’s capacity to ‘make room to move’ (Parker & Dales, 2014, p. 165) in the face of dominant power and discourses. ‘Agency is this capacity to negotiate with power in whatever form – as complicity, compromise, deviance or resistance – and with whatever motivation – whether it be intentional or unintentional, voluntary or involuntary, self-expression, self-interest or group interest.’ (ibid, p165) Therefore, a focus on mothers’ agency in their everyday maternal practices seems particularly apposite. Such a focus on everyday life is not new in Western literature studying women and mothers, but is still rare in studying ‘Other’ women, particularly Asian women (ibid). Therefore by studying Chinese mothers’ everyday childrearing practices, this research aims to fill such a literature gap.

Third, mothers’ first person view is central in this research, as seen as important by several feminist researchers (eg., Ribbens 1994; Ramaekers and Suissa, 2011). However, this does not mean this research aims at ‘presenting’ women’s voices. The researcher’s interpretation is regarded as equally important in achieving a particular sociological understanding of women’s subjective experiences.

Fourth, building on the existing literature on intergenerational studies about motherhood, women from a family chain (great-grandmothers, grandmothers and mothers) are compared and analysed. The analysis of mothering experiences starts from women’s experiences of being mothered before moving on their own stories of motherhood. This is followed by viewing mothering as part of family intergenerational transmission practices. Therefore, mothering practices are viewed as a generational ‘coexistence’ (Thomson et al., 2011) which are embedded within family practices (Morgan, 1996) and relationships.

Finally, mothers from diverse family backgrounds are studied in this research as women’s social, economic and political positions are viewed as pivotal in
understanding their everyday practices. This also fills the gap in the existing literature studying Chinese mothers. The focus on Chinese women’s experiences also contributes to the literature of ‘Other’ women in the West.

Overall, these approaches broaden our understanding of mothering experiences and counter the current scientific discourses in China. Therefore, these approaches together aim to reveal mothering practices connected closely to women’s other practices, roles and relationships within and outside families as well as situating women’s mothering experiences within their biographical time, family culture and historical time.

2.2.2 The Term

The feminist project of understanding mothering described above creates a problem of how to naming the practices that I studied in this research. ‘Mothering’ and ‘motherhood’ are two widely applied terms. The concept of ‘mothering’ emphasises the daily activities and therefore, mothers’ ‘doing’ to a greater extent than the concept of ‘motherhood’. However, both of them imply a narrow view (Phoenix et al., 1991) and incorporated within such terms is ‘the intensity and emotional closeness of the idealized mother-child relationship as well as notions of mothers being responsible for the fostering of good child development. (ibid, p.6)’. Furthermore, there is no direct translation of ‘mothering’ or ‘motherhood’ into Chinese. Only in the last decade, influenced by the medical/psychological studies in the west, ‘motherhood’ is introduced to China from Taiwan, where it is translated as ‘a profession of being a mother’ (muzhi). Such a translation, unfortunately, suggests a narrow view even more manifest.

In contrast, ‘childrearing’ shares more similarity with the original Chinese word (yangyu or yuer) which focuses on specific daily activities. However, it lacks an obvious emphasis on women and mothers’ experiences in the way that concepts like ‘mothering’ or ‘motherhood’ do.

For this thesis, the least helpful concept which is popular in today’s literature is ‘parenting’. On the one hand, ‘parenting’ studies, although sounding neutral, have
been mainly designed to study women’s experiences (Lee, 2014). Therefore, its neutral name hides the reality of gendered roles. More problematically, such a term’s emphasis is on a nuclear family relationship model: childrearing became an activity for only mothers and fathers. This again is something this thesis wants to challenge as it reflects little historical or contemporary Chinese reality. Finally, the usage of such a newly developed concept encourages scientific intervention in childrearing and the fact that parents have to learn a particular set of skills (psychologically and medically defined) to be ‘good enough parents’. As pointed out by Lee (2014), ‘Feeding children, talking to them, sleeping with (or separate from) them, and even playing with children have become areas of action subsumed under the overall umbrella term ‘parenting’, and there is ‘parenting advice’ relating to all of them. (p.6)’

Finally, ‘mothers’ practices’\(^{19}\) seems more suitable to describe what I am studying. Nevertheless, the emphasis on the subject – mothers – can reduce the importance of other family members’ involvement in childcare which, as previously discussed, constitutes an important part of Chinese mothering. In this sense, ‘mothering’ provide more flexibility as in English it can be used to describe either mothers or other family members’ childcare practices.

Although no concepts are perfect in expressing what I am studying in this thesis, the problem of naming phenomena that are commonly used in everyday life is not uncommon in research (Morgan 2011). Furthermore, as this research also takes an historical perspective (studying three generations of women’s experiences as mothers), the changes in meaning of ‘being a mother’ cannot be captured easily by only one term. As the later analytical chapters demonstrate, the oldest generation of women’s experiences of being a mother is more like a ‘status’, less is about activities towards children. In this sense, motherhood probably would be a better term. However, the youngest generation of mothers is more actively doing a mother’s job which is better described by ‘mothering’. Brannen and Nilsen (2006) discuss a similar issue in their study of fatherhood in Britain. As they point out,

\(^{19}\)It is Morgan's definition of family practices that I draw on particularly. See the detailed discussion in section 2.3.
‘not only is there change occurring in the enactment of fathering/hood at both agency and contextual levels, but that this is complicated by the changes that occur over time in the very concepts we as sociologists employ. In particular, we have been sensitized to conceptual slippages between fathering and fatherhood.’ (p.348)

In this research I will use motherhood, mothering, childrearing and mothers’ practices interchangeably to describe what I am studying, a strategy similar to that of Brannen and Nilsen and also promoted by DeVault (1990, p. 111):

Instead of imposing a choice among several labels, none of which are quite right, feminist texts should describe women’s lives in ways that move beyond standard vocabularies, commenting on the vocabularies themselves along the way. (p111)

2.3 Relevant Concepts

I find the following concepts are particular relevant and useful in researching Chinese mothering experiences with the particular feminist concern described above, including Mill’s discussion of ‘historical time’ and ‘biographical time’, Morgan’s concept of ‘practices’, Eagleton’s concept of ideology. There are other concepts such as work and care and intergenerational transmission which are also relevant to specific chapters and therefore, will be discussed in those chapters (Chapter 5 and 6).

2.3.1 Time

The historical time is considered central in shaping women’s experiences of mothering in this thesis and I found the support from the famous American sociologist C. Wright Mills. Half a century ago, Mills advocated making history central to sociology regardless of the research topic. Brannen (2015) summarised the four main reasons Mills gave: The first concerns a comparison of different historical societal variations; the second is the importance of understanding social change beyond the short term; the third is the need to avoid parochialism and provincialism; and the fourth is that an historical lens helps us to frame questions in meaningful ways – ‘It requires us to ask why something has persisted and under what conditions
this happened. Equally it helps us to look for the conditions that have let to change or disruption of a past practice or structure.’ (2015, p.9).

Mills (2000) further argued for the connection of two types of historical time in understanding any specific social phenomenon: ‘biographical time’ and the ‘historical time’ that the individual lives/lived in. The sociologist’s key skill, he suggested, is to use her/his imagination to make such a connection. Therefore, in all analytical chapters, I aim to situate the women’s stories within their particular historical contexts and a detailed description of the historical conditions of each generation’ is given before analysing the women’s accounts.

What Mills didn’t say directly but implied in his concept of ‘biographical time’ is the importance of an individual’s connections with her/his family. Biographical time has to be an intersection of ‘individual’ and ‘her/his family’ who shape her/his life trajectory in a significant way (Bertaux & Thompson, 2007a). Such a connection between an individual and her/his family is especially evident in this thesis which explores the chains of women’s experiences across three generations and the intergenerational transmission process. Therefore, this thesis not only aims to compare the changes and continuities of these three generations of women’s mothering experiences focusing on historical time; but also explores how individual experiences were shaped by their particular biographical time.

2.3.2 Practices

As noted previously, focusing on mothers’ everyday doing comprises a central part of my feminist project. I find Morgan’s definition of family practices is particular helpful in understanding mothers’ everyday practices. Morgan (1996) defines ‘family practices’ as including not only actions but also the value and meanings people associate with their practices. Therefore, I view ‘mothering practices’ as a ‘configuration’ (Widmer & Jallinoja, 2008) of mothers’ different activities and mental processes including, for example, how they arrange childcare and make decisions and carry on negotiations with other relevant people, be it employers, husbands, grandparents and so on, in concrete situations; and how they give meanings to these activities and decisions.
Morgan’s (1996, 2011) definition of family practices highlights their moral significance. ‘Family practices are not simply cognitively constructed. They also have some kind of emotional dimension, some sense of personal or moral significance.’ (Morgan 1996, p.192) This moral significance is intrinsic to, or at least inseparable from, most mothering practices. For example, mothering practices in most situations include both ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’ and the boundaries between the two are blurred. These emotional and moral aspects of mothering practices cannot be reduced to ‘shared knowledge’ as ethical decisions are made in specific contexts. Finch, Finch, and Mason (2003) have presented these specific and context-dependent everyday moral/ethical decisions by analysing the negotiation process within complex family relationships and circumstances. Similarly, when studying motherhood across three generations of British women, Brannen argues that ‘in many ways it seems to us that ‘negotiating responsibilities’ and the ‘ethic of care’ are two sides of the same coin.’ (2004, p.83). Ethic of care is a fruitful area developed by many feminists, for instance, as Tronto (1993) puts it, ‘the moral question an ethic of care takes as central is… how can I best meet my caring responsibilities’ (p.137). Therefore, such moral significance and context-dependent practices are intrinsic to practices involving caring, and mothering practices is one of the best examples.

Morgan’s definition of ‘family practices’ is also characterised by ‘a sense of fluidity or fuzziness’ (p.7). As he demonstrated, family practices cannot be defined merely by where the activities happen (at home or outside home) or who is involved. If we take into account ‘caring about’, it is very difficult to draw a line between what is, and is not, ‘family practice’. For example, he asks, whether it is a family practice to discuss family members with our colleagues at the work place. The ‘fluidity/fuzziness’ of family practices is particularly relevant when analysing mothering: it helps transcend the ideological separation of public and private spheres by recognising the connections between women’s practices in work outside the home and childcare. It also extends the discussion of mothering practices beyond the specific dyadic relationships (mother-child) and regards them as ‘embedded in larger networks of relationships’ (Widmer & Jallinoja, 2008, p. 6). This is an aim of this thesis, too.
2.3.3 Ideologies

The structural elements are also viewed as essential in shaping mothers’ practices in this thesis which changes in different historical time. In this thesis, I discuss dominant ideologies about motherhood and womanhood in different historical times as a way of capturing such changing structural elements. The discussion of ideologies is also a way to avoid the neglect of discourses that occurs in some practice approaches (Morgan, 1996).

Whilst there are many similarities in their meaning and usage, I use the term ‘ideology’, rather than ‘discourse’, as the former ‘stresses the social determination of thought’ (Eagleton, 1991, p. 28). In addition, ‘the force of the term ideology lies in its capacity to discriminate between those power struggles which are somehow central to a whole form of social life, and those which are not (Eagleton 1991, p.8).’ However, when using the term ‘ideology’, I also recognise it carries much baggage of misunderstandings and disagreements but at the same time ‘nobody has yet come up with a single adequate definition of ideology’ (Eagleton 1991, p.1).

I adopt one of the six definitions proposed by Eagleton (1991), that conceptualises ideology as ‘ideas and beliefs (whether true or false) which symbolize the conditions and life-experiences of a specific, socially significant group or class’ (ibid, 29) in a particular era. The ‘socially significant group or class’ is important here; as we will see in the following analyses, there is always one dominant ideology relating to motherhood that is talked about/mentioned by women of different social status at specific historical times. This is not saying that other groups do not have their own ideologies. Instead, this definition recognises the oppressive aspect of ‘ideology’: a dominant social class or group has more resources to ‘legitimatiser’ and ‘naturalise’ their particular view over those of other groups. The legitimatising process can be supported directly by the state with institutional and material support - as we will see for the oldest generation. However, legitimatizing processes can also be more subtle but still pervasive, as we will see among the youngest generation for whom intensive mothering becomes an important ideology in the context of little material support for such a practice.
2.4 Research Questions

As Kelly argues, what distinguishes feminist research from other forms of research is ‘the questions we have asked, the way we locate ourselves within our questions, and the purpose of our work’ (Kelly, 1988, p. 6). Having set out a feminist interest in studying Chinese mothers’ experiences, my specific research questions are now explicated:

1. How do current mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers recount their growing-up experiences?
   - How are the accounts different or similar across three generations and across different social-economic status?
   - How do women connect their growing up experiences with their later lives and particularly with their own practices as mothers?

2. How do current mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers recount their child-rearing practices?
   - How do these women locate their mothering experiences within their whole life histories?
   - How do these women connect their role and practices as a mother with their other roles and practices, such as being a wife, a daughter-in-law/daughter and a worker?
   - How does the way these women tell their stories demonstrate both the social construction and their own subjectivities and agency of being a mother at different historical times with different social-economic status?
   - How do these accounts from different generations of women demonstrate the changes or continuities of mothering practice in China?

3. How do mothers transmit mothering practices, family culture, and personal qualities across family generations?
   - What is this intergenerational transmission process in which mothers play a crucial role?
What has been transmitted, modified or rejected between mothers and daughters across family generations?
How different social-economic status impacts on such intergenerational transmission process and its results?

2.5 Summary

This chapter began by reviewing relevant literature for my research from the West and China. Three major areas of literature were researched and discussed here. The first is the mapping of childrearing and motherhood in both the West and particularly in China – the psychological and medical studies which demonstrate a particular scientific approach to mothering. The problems of these approaches were identified, including the omission of first-person accounts, a narrow concept of motherhood and pathological assumptions.

Then the feminist literature on motherhood in both the West and China was identified and discussed. In the West, two ways of understanding women as childcarers within feminist literature have been discussed: one is on the oppression that women received due to their reproductive and caring roles; the other is a more positive view that explores women's agency and power gained from the role. I also point to the new trend in studying mothering experiences in the West which highlights the diversity in experiences of women from different social classes and ethnicities. By contrast, the Chinese women’s movement has been influenced by national crises and politics than in the West. Women’s experiences as mothers have, until recently, been regarded as unimportant. The literature on motherhood only started to emerge in this century. The study of mothers’ first-person’s experiences in everyday life is rare. Most studies only focus on urban middle-class mothers in contemporary China. Nevertheless, some important Chinese characteristics of childrearing have been given attention in this emerging literature, including the importance of women’s work identity (due to the long history of women’s participation in the national economy) and the desire to encourage high achievement in education among girls in the context of the One Child Policy in today’s China.
The third type of literature reviewed focused on an intergenerational approach in studying families which has been neglected by most feminist literature in both the West and China. In this part, literature on grand-parenting and intergenerational transmission are particularly discussed. The grand-parenting literature highlights the significance of taking account of grandmothers’ involvement in daily childcare in both the West and China, but which is particularly important in Chinese families. The intergenerational transmission perspective widens our view of mothering and connects different generations of women’s experiences as a configuration. This approach also highlights how family contexts mediate historical change and the biographical trajectories of individual women/mothers. However, such an approach is rare in the literature on Chinese mothers and therefore is an important gap this thesis will fill.

Based on this literature review, I have clarified my particular theoretical interest – a feminist way of conceptualising mothering. I locate my feminist viewpoint within existing feminist debates, the intergenerational differences among Chinese feminists, as well as my particular understanding of Chinese women’s experiences. Then I summarised the five features of my research that reflect my feminist project. Following this, I discussed how I see the lack of appropriateness of dominant ‘terms’ in describing the complex mothering experiences. Then I have discussed three relevant concepts (time, practices and ideologies) employed in the study to better understand mothers’ experiences in China with my particular feminist concern. In the end, my research questions were clarified reflecting all of the above theoretical considerations.
Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter provides a detailed description of the research design, sampling and recruitment and the choice of research methods. Then, the detailed phases of research are presented and the issues that were encountered in each phase are addressed. The methodological limitations are then considered. Finally, the ethical issues involved in conducting this research are discussed.

3.1 An intergenerational case study design

To produce a concrete, historical understanding of what it means to be a mother in a given society across three generations is the central focus of the study (see Chapter 2 for specific research questions). Therefore it is first an historical study which aims to examine the historical context of three generations of mothers’ lives. It does so through a combination of interviews with mothers and recourse to a range of other sources: a) historical documents, including literature on China’s history since 1900, b) local history texts and old magazines focusing on women such as ‘Women of China’ 20 c) Informal interviews that were conducted with many local people including old men and women - about their lives in the past - local historians, and middle aged and retired clinic nurses to understand changes in childcare policies and institutional arrangements during these years; and d) Visits to a local history museum.

The study also has an intergenerational design so that mothers’ experiences and practices can be situated within their family contexts, particularly the contexts of intergenerational relationships and family transmission. I recruited families with three generations of mothers (great-grandmothers, grandmothers and mothers) so that individual women’s stories could be analysed in connection with the other two generations of women from the same family. Therefore, both larger/macro historical

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20[Women of China was the only national women’s magazine to circulate continuously during the years before the Cultural Revolution. The magazine first appeared in Yan’an on 1 June 1939 when the Communist Party was engaged in the resistance against Japan. It suspended publication in 1942 but was revived in July 1949 as Women of New China, under a resolution of the First National Congress of Chinese Women on the eve of the founding of the PRC. Women of New China was officially affiliated with the newly established All-China women’s Democratic Federation (ACWDF).]
context and micro family context are taken into account when interpreting these women’s stories.

Relating to its historical and intergenerational design, the study also adopts a case study approach (Yin, 2014). It does so for two main reasons. First, it take a holistic view of each woman’s account in the interview, including her life story, narration of growing-up and mothering experiences, and historical living conditions. All these different aspects of women’s lives make up a case. As Schwandt (2007) writes, ‘In case study, the case itself is at center stage, not variables.’ In this study it is not variables, such as the specific methods of feeding a baby or varied childcare arrangements which are compared, but the whole cases. For example, even if women adopt similar childcare arrangement or feeding method, the meaning of such practices can still varied according to women’s specific family and historical context. Therefore, when understanding these mothers’ practices, I take a whole case approach – including their biographical life trajectory, their family context and the specific historical condition they lived in. Furthermore, the study has two levels of cases. The first level is the case of each individual woman. These individual cases will be compared both across different generational chains to demonstrate intergenerational change and continuities, and within the same generation to demonstrate similarities and distinctions within a similar historical context. The second level of cases consists of the intergenerational family that is three generational chains of great-grandmothers, grandmothers and mothers. By taking several members of the female family chain the aim is to understand how motherhood and mothering practices are enacted and reproduced across time and family generations.

Second, since a case is necessarily ‘an instance of some broader phenomenon’ (Deacon, 2007, p. 366) the ‘cases’ are used to provide insights that go beyond specific instances. So, when comparing individual women from different generations and the chain of families from each other, I aim to understand generational changes and differences beyond these individuals and their families. Such knowledge transference is a different type of understanding compared with the meaning of generalization in studies using quantitative methods. In quantitative research, generalisation is achieved through a particular sampling technique (e.g.,
random sampling or stratum sampling) to reach a representative against a certain population (e.g., a local, a district or national population). In qualitative studies the ‘generalisation’ is achieved by either exemplifying the conditions in which X happens in Y conditions so that the reader can make their own judgment about the relevance of one or small number of cases to their specific situation; or by providing theoretical insights into a social phenomenon (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000).

3.2 Research Setting, Sampling and Recruitment

3.2.1 Research Setting and Participants

I chose to conduct the study in Bengbu, an inland city in the east of China. The rationale for the selection of this research site is that it is a typical middle sized city (with a population of approximately three million), in a middle sized inland province that is neither the most nor the least developed economically in China. Such a city holds the possibility of representing urban mainstream Chinese culture (see Appendix II) Furthermore, it is my home town which carries two merits for this study. First, it makes participant recruitment easier due to my own and my family’s social networks. Second, it makes understanding local history, cultural and language easier for the researcher.

In terms of choosing the three generations, I recruited the oldest generation of mothers who were born between the 1920s and 1930s, the middle generation who were born between the 1950s and 1960s and the youngest generation who were born between the 1970s and 1980s. As discussed in the historical background (Chapter 1), the three chosen generations have experienced huge social, cultural and economic changes in their lives. Therefore, the comparisons between these three generations can demonstrate the effects of historical transformation on mothering practices. Furthermore, I belong to the category of the youngest generation of mothers. This position may help me to get a better understanding of the issues around both motherhood and intergenerational relationships in contemporary China, but also

21 According to the public data of the 2010 (Sixth) Population Census of People's Republic of China, Bengbu is at average level in all main criteria, such as the main population, the education level, the proportion of urban and rural population etc. from the government website: http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm
requires me to be reflective about how my position influences the research, including fieldwork access, my relationships with the mothers, and interpretations of the data.

This study does not address the differences in practices and culture between urban and rural areas (due to limits of time and resources). However, families/women with a rural background have been recruited for this study for the following reasons: first, rural areas develop much slower than urban areas in China and therefore identifying rural women and families with low social-economic status is much easier than in an urban area. Second, the involvement of three generations provides opportunities for examining the impact of change as people move from rural areas to the city but maintain links with rural roots and cultures; many of the oldest generation came from rural areas, and some still live there or in the board between the rural and urban. Furthermore, about half the population living in city areas such as Bengbu still hold a rural *hukou*\(^{22}\). This Chinese residence system also means that the population of a city is likely to consist of both rural and urban residents. One family that holds a rural *hukou* is included in my study.

### 3.2.2 Sampling and Recruitment

Case-based studies typically involve a small number of cases and interactions between many variables, compared to statistical studies investigating a larger number of cases but with fewer variables (Brannen, Nilsen, & Lewis, 2012; Gomm et al., 2000). As Gomm et al. (2000) recommended, systematic sampling of cases can enhance the ‘generalizability’ (see section 3.2.1) of qualitative case-based studies. Therefore, the cases (families) are purposively selected based on my interest in understanding the social, historical, economic and family positions of mothers and their impact on mothering practices. The different social-economic status\(^{23}\) within

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\(^{22}\) The *hukou* system in the pre-reform era functioned as a de facto internal passport system to prevent rural exodus and an “entitlement” mechanism to limit most state-provided social goods to the urban residents. Today, the system has morphed to become an entitlement distribution mechanism rather than to stop migration. People seeking to change residence permanently or formally are required to obtain approval for *hukou* change from their local authorities. Formal moves crossing city, town and township boundaries are strictly regulated and require approval by the public security authorities. (Cai, F., & Du, Y., 2009, p. xxi)

\(^{23}\) The meaning of social-economic status varies for each generation. In this thesis, social-economic status (or SEIS) is decided by a mixture of social, economic, political and cultural indicators. See Appendix V for a detailed analysis of these women’s status.
each historical context is likely to influence mothers’ subjectivities and the material and institutional resources that were available to them (e.g., Colen, 2009). Furthermore, different social-economic background is also important in understanding intergenerational transmission (Bertaux, 2007; Brannen et al., 2004; Thompson, 2007). For these reasons, families with diverse social-economic backgrounds and three generations of mothers were targeted. Including three generations of mothers from one family also limited my capacity to recruit a large number of families due to both my limited resources and the difficulty of finding such families. I recruited twelve families and 36 women in total.

Identifying and recruiting families with all three generations of mothers was not easy and it was even harder to identify a range by social-economic status. I started my recruiting process during the scoping phase and kept recruiting throughout the six months in the field. All twelve families were recruited by personal contacts and a ‘snowball’ method. These personal contacts included my parents’ friends or former colleagues, my aunt’s and uncle’s neighbours, friends or colleagues and my friends. Ten of the families were recruited through my parents and my aunt/uncle’s personal contacts, which meant it was the grandmothers’ generation that was first approached. The other two families were recruited from amongst my own friends - one family was approached from the youngest generation of mothers and the other was approached from an institutional agency first, in this case the grandmother.

Recruitment made from personal contacts has several limitations and one of the most challenging is the difficulty in recruiting research subjects from diverse backgrounds. There are also important considerations regarding how much the interviewee will open up to someone that she actually knows (Liu, 2006). My own experiences in this study prove it is in fact a very effective method due to China’s specific social, cultural and historical background which I discuss below.

Many members of the grandmother/grandfather generation experienced life changes due to historical events and social transformation. My parents have worked for several different types of organisations and as a result their social connections cross several different industries and social groups. In addition, their generation grew up believing in ‘Egalitarianism’ and many of them still hold these beliefs. For example,
when my father worked as the head of state-owned factory, he had a much more equal relationship with his colleagues who worked on the shop floor than we can imagine today. When he left his jobs in state-owned factories and became CEO for large private companies his social network also expanded to individuals with a higher social-economic background. Therefore, he could reach families with higher, similar or lower social-economic backgrounds for me. For my mother, her social network was not only defined by her work, but also her social life: she made friends not only with colleagues, but also with cleaners, rubbish collection men, and vegetable vendors who had come from rural areas with low social-economic status.

The significant political shift during the Cultural Revolution (1966 -1976) period and the Reform period (late 1980s) disrupted my parents’ generation’s life trajectories and made some people fall to a low social-economic status from a relatively high one. My aunt and uncle unfortunately fell into this category. Their previous ‘iron bowl’ jobs were suddenly insecure and both were laid off in the late 1990s. This means my aunt and uncle live in an area and community with many similar people who have a lower social-economic status than my parents. Therefore, although it was still through my family’s connections, they could help me to reach families with lower social-economic backgrounds.

Finally, the greatest advantage of recruiting families who were known to me is that people were more willing to open up and talk to me as they know who I am. Most people living in a middle-sized city like Bengbu have very limited experience of being interviewed by a researcher. Approaching someone without a prior introduction can be very non-productive. I was treated with suspicion when I tried to approach people outside a kindergarten, park or medical clinic. Furthermore, as Liu (2006) demonstrated in her research, the really ‘open interviewees’ were normally those in which the researcher was known to her or her parents, instead of those who had a distant relationship to the researcher. I found this was also true with my research. As these families were recruited mostly from close friends/relatives’ connections, I was trusted during the interview process and found people generally willing to talk.
I interviewed three generations of mothers from twelve families (35 women in total\textsuperscript{24}). Due to the difficulty in identifying families that had three generations of directly related mothers and daughters, I recruited four families where one generation was the mother-in-law and not the biological mother. For these twelve families, there is a mix of families/women with different social-economic backgrounds, which I will discuss now.

Stratifying these three generations of women is difficult due to the huge change in the meaning of ‘class’ in the different historical periods and the significant differences from the normal usage in the west. For the oldest generation, the idea of ‘social status’ is more accurate than ‘class’ to describe how people were stratified at that time. Economic differences were reduced to a very low level (Li, 2010) for the great-grandmothers’ generation and part of the grandmothers’ generation. However, after the Reform and Open Door (1978) policies were gradually implemented across China in the late 1980s and early 1990s, rapid differences in people’s incomes became significant and, for the youngest generation, a more western style of ‘middle-class’ started to emerge. Due to these differences, I use ‘social-and-economic status’, instead of ‘class’, in referring to the social stratification of these women\textsuperscript{25}. Also, instead of simply presenting each family or woman in terms of low/middle/high social-economic status, I give a detailed rationale for the varied set of criteria used to stratify these women in their specific historical time. This detailed analysis – the historical stratification of women in China – can be found in Appendix V. It is worthwhile to point out again that even though I have tried to recruit women from a range of backgrounds, the aim of sampling is not to be representative of the general or certain populations, but to understand how different social positions impact on mother’s experiences.

\textsuperscript{24}There was one grandmother who ‘escaped’ from the interview setting and therefore, I couldn’t interview her, but collected her life data from other family members.

\textsuperscript{25}However, I use ‘middle-class’ or ‘upper-middle class’ when discussing the youngest generation because since the late 1990s and early 2000s a ‘middle-class’ has emerged as well as a shared meaning of how this concept is used in the West (Li, 2011), the period this generation of mothers grew up and became mothers.
3.3 Research Phases

The study design involves three phases and each phase includes several research steps.

3.3.1 Phase One

The scoping phase, (April to May 2015) had three main purposes. The first was to collect crucial historical and structural information which involving searching documentation and archives, informal interviews and other methods as described previously. These data were searched and examined throughout the whole study. Second, based on the participatory observation of local environments and informal interviews with different informants, the recruitment process was started at this stage. Third, the Biographical-Narrative-Interpretive-Method (BNIM) interview methods with mothers, grandmothers or great-grandmothers were piloted and some questions were refined (see Appendix VI)

3.3.2 Phase Two

The second, fieldwork phase (September to December 2015) entailed the main data collection. I employed an adapted BNIM interview method (see section 3.4) with families (three generations of mothers) mainly identified during the scoping phase. Alongside the interviews, the documentation/archive analysis was ongoing. I also observed interactions between the family members I interviewed and made field-notes. Finally, some informal interviews were carried out to collect more information about either the interviewed families (such as some informal conversations with other family members) or the local and national histories. For example, in some families where other family members were happy to talk, I asked some questions either about themselves or about the interviewed family members. In one family, a grandfather gave a long narration about his own childhood which was very helpful in furthering my understanding of the great-grandmothers’ lived life. Relating to the major topic of my study, I also talked to variety of mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers in an informal way to enhance my overall views of these three generations of women. In the following section 3.4, I discuss specifically the adapted BNIM interview method applied in this research.
3.3.3 Phase Three

In qualitative research, analysing and writing are interrelated. The third, data analysis and writing up phase (January 2016 to September 2017) included the transcription of interviews, summarising each interview material in a specific format first. Then, I moved on to specific chapters (4, 5, 6) to answer three different research questions. I combined thematic analysis and narrative analysis in each chapter and the specific analytical process varies as well as sharing some key BNIM features across three chapters. I explain these processes in details in section 3.5.

3.4 Interviewing

I adopted and adapted a biographic narrative interviewing method. This is a method ‘in which you ask somebody to tell a story of all or part of their life… This self-storying by them is then used as a basis for your understanding (and eventual narration) of some aspect of the historically-evolving psycho-societal reality/period/situation that they have lived through, have themselves been, or have inhabited and/or had effects on. (Wengraf, 2017, p. 3)’ From this description, it is clear that this interview method is characterized by eliciting the interviewees’ whole or partial life stories no matter what is the focus of the particular research. Such a design is based on BNIM\(^\text{26}\)’s particular epistemology as explained in the following.

First, the big (life) story matters because lived experience is perceived as ‘historically-evolving’ with the past, present and the future. Bruner’s account of narrative reflects such a ‘historically-evolving’ self– he states that ‘we constantly construct and reconstruct a self to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears of the future… resulting in the stories we telling about ourselves, our autobiographies.’ (Bruner, 2003, p. 210) As such a self is always evolving. Even though I am interested in women’s mothering experiences which happen in a particular life phase, I also want to know about their lives before that phase, their current life

\(^{26}\)The BNIM is a combination of biographical and narrative methods. It was derived from the interactionist and phenomenological research of Rosenthal, Fischer-Rosenthal and others in Germany in the early 1990s and was introduced to the UK by the Berlin Quatext School in 1995 and has gained considerable ground since then (Zhang, 2013). The leading English experts, Chamberlayne and Wengraf, have employed the method in several research projects.
situations as well as their future expectations, in order to understand how they make sense of their mothering experiences – their own subjective experiences.

Furthermore, this blending of time - no past is told without a present view and with a projection of the future – means there is no ‘objective’ past that is accessible from story-telling. This issue is recognized by many narrative methods (e.g. Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008; Bamberg, 2006) that have the aim of studying the lived past. One way to deal with this lack of access to the ‘objective’ past is proposed by Polkinghorne’s who argues about a human being’s particular linguistic/narrative existence which is the realm of meaning and therefore, ‘Research investigating the realm of meaning aims rather for verisimilitude, or results that have the appearance of truth or reality.’ (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 183) In the BNIM interview method, however, it takes a ‘critical realistic’ attitude to this: on the one hand, it agrees that all stories about selves or events are constructed (and are reflected mainly in the analytical process); on the other hand, it encourages researchers to search for ‘hard data’ (‘lived life’ in BNIM, explained further in section 3.5) and for contextual data (see below) during the interview and to create an interview environment that facilitates interviewees ‘re-living’ the past. Wengraf termed such subjectivity in the past as well as embedded within particular circumstance as ‘dated situated subjectivity’ (Wengraf, 2017, p. 29).

Thirdly, this interview method also relates to BNIM’s assumption and interests in exploring a ‘psycho-societal reality’. The highlights of the ‘psycho’ side are particularly evident in the ‘theory of the individual subject’ (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) in this interview method. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) use a psychoanalytical model of subjectivity as being always engaged in unconscious defense against anxiety. Based on such a model, the researcher assumes that the interviewee is always ‘motivated not to know’ certain things about themselves and always produces ‘self-defensive’ biographical accounts, told stories which avoid such knowledge. Agreeing with such a view, Wengraf (2000) argues that there are two such subjectivities in an interview setting: one is the interviewee, the other is the same ‘anxious and defensive’ interviewer. Therefore, strategies are developed in the biographical-narrative interview method to ‘control’ or deal with these two
defensive and anxious subjectivities so that the researcher can be nearer to the ‘real situated subjectivity’ of the interviewee.

This method, although congruent with psychanalysis’s assumptions on ‘self-defensive’ subjects, differs from it in its emphasis on ‘societal reality’. This societal reality is not only the immediate ‘social’, as in ‘social psychology’ (Wengraf & Chamberlayne, 2013, p. 68), but also an extensive understanding of local and global (‘glocal’ as termed by Wengraf (2001)) history and context, a sociological account of ‘outer-world dynamics’ (Wengraf & Chamberlayne, 2013, p.72). In BNIM, such a sociological account is essential in understanding the narratives which ‘mediate between an inner world of thought-feeling and an outer world of observable actions and states of affairs’ (Garro & Mattingly, 2000, p. 1). Furthermore, the interest in knowing the larger contexts also relates to the assumption about the ‘defensive self’ of interviewees who consciously or unconsciously omit/alter some important contexts and events in their stories in order to persuade the audience. ‘To avoid being over-persuaded and implicitly seduced by the interviewee and by their story-telling, for a critical and a realist understanding it is crucial, therefore, that the researcher/interpreter separately gathers together and considers as much hard biographical and contextual data as they can in order to understand the ‘dated situated subjectivity’ of the story-teller and of the history that they lived.’ (Wengraf & Chamberlayne, 2013, p.64) Because of this, Wengraf stresses that BNIM interview method ‘is best done in combination with other data-gathering and experience-gathering methods.’ (Wengraf, 2017 p.4). This is why in my research, documentary analysis together with, many other informal interviews and visits to museums were also carried out in the field to collect data about the larger contexts and hard data about individual narrators.

The features, outlined above, of the interview method are the major reason for me to adopt such a method. As my research about motherhood aims to explore how different generations of mothers give accounts of their lived experiences that connect different social domains (as described in Chapter 2), eliciting their life stories instead of asking specific questions about motherhood provides me with rich and complex material to work on later. Furthermore, its assumption about individual subjects helps me to be sensitive to both interviewees’ and my own defensiveness
during the research process. Its emphasis on data gathering on larger and longer historical contexts also suits well my historical and intergenerational design. Finally, as Wengraf, the expert who extensively developed this interview method in the UK over the past 15 years, states, a biographical-narrative interview method provides complex and rich materials to focus on later, regardless of the particular research focus and the later analytical process. This flexibility of combining different data and analysis methods proved useful in my research. The later section 3.5 will demonstrate my mixed methods in data-analysis.

However, I also have made some important adaptations to this method - particularly in its specific steps/strategies to fit my particular field context. For example, the BNIM interview method generally includes three interview sessions. Differing from the BNIM, the last interview session (session three) played a crucial role in this research. It used a semi-structured interview method to collect all the important biographical information of each interviewee. Therefore, an interview schedule (see Appendix VI) was developed to make sure that each interviewee would cover similar themes. In some situations, where telling a whole life story was impossible, the semi-structured interview plus narrative questions became the major interview method (four cases). Other adaptations will be explained later when I discuss the details of my interview methods.

3.4.1 Session One: Single Question about Life Story

I have mentioned that collecting the personal biographical story is a unique feature of the BNIM regardless of the specific research topic. The way of asking about the ‘life story’ is also special: the aim is to reduce the interviewer’s influence on the interviewee’s way of thinking, remembering and telling her/his story: first, only one question is allowed to be asked in session one (named, Single Question In Narrative -SQUIN); and second, the specific way of asking was designed beforehand to give as much freedom to the interviewee as possible and also to keep a certain consistency across different interviewees. Third, compared with some types of qualitative interviewing, the friendly chat at the beginning to establish a relationship with the interviewee also reduced interviewer interventions to a minimum. In most interviews I started my interview with a question like this:
'As you know I am researching the changing and continuity of mothering practices in China across three generations of women. However, in this interview, I would like to hear your life story. All the important experiences and events that happened to you. You can start from wherever you like. You can start whenever you feel you are ready and I will wait for you.'

The first sentence is a reminder to the interviewee not to go totally away from the major topic. At the same time the open question gives permission to the interviewee to decide how to tell her life story. This is consistent with the purpose of reducing the interviewer’s impact on the process of storytelling. Such an open question also provides a great opportunity for me to see how women connected their mothering experiences to other life experiences. However, in practice, this simple question was one of the hardest things about the whole interview. Although there were interviewees who were eager to tell their story (usually from the oldest generation and some from the middle generation) and therefore had no problem with such an open question, the majority of women (particularly from the youngest generation) found such an approach unfamiliar/uncomfortable and initially did not know how to deal with it. For those who found it hard, they asked me to pose more specific questions or for more directions. After trying it out in the scoping phase, I learnt to refuse such temptations and just repeated in a friendly manner something like this:

‘This is your story and only you can make decisions about what to tell and how to tell. I will wait for you and you do not need to worry about time - start whenever you are ready.’

All the women started to talk after no more than two repetitions of the encouragement given.

There were also situations where some women (usually the youngest generation) gave a very short and quick report of their life and signaled that they had finished telling their life story. In such cases, I would add another open question such as ‘Do you have anything else to add?’ or ‘What about your childhood?’ Very often, they would then start to tell more.
When these stories were being told, I intervened as little as possible. The most often intervention was ‘Hum (en 嗯)’, ‘Oh (ou 哦)’ or some laughter with the interviewee to keep her involved. Note taking was a good strategy to avoid too much eye contact and the impact of my own facial expressions or by my particular body posture. Apart from this function, note taking is very important and plays a particular crucial role in sub-session one. I had to note down the sequence of the events/experiences that the interviewee mentioned in her story as well as some of the words she used. These notes provided a good foundation for the following part of the interview (session two) when I asked questions in the same order as the interviewee had told them and repeated the exact words she had used.

Overall, these strategies in session one are designed to control the interviewer’s influence on the interviewee’s told story as mentioned earlier. Such uninterrupted and influence-limited life stories also provide a crucial base for the next step.

However, such a SQUIN method could not be applied in four of the interviews when it was either impossible to interview women on their own or/and the interviewee ‘refused’ to tell a whole life story. In the situation when there were others present, these women (all great-grandmothers) were easy to engage in a current conversation or shifted their own focus when such interruptions happened. When this happened, I always tried my best to bring the story back by reminding them that ‘you were saying..., and?’. In situations like this, I shifted my focus of not disturbing the Gestalt of the story telling to encouraging women to give detailed narrations of their major life transitions and to hold some uninterrupted moments. There were also two women who ‘refused’ to tell a whole life story. One was a deaf great-grandmother who could hardly hear my question. Then when she started to talk about her past, she always stopped after a few sentences and then commented that ‘it was much better now’. I sensed there might be some worries about either recalling the tough past, or suspicions about who I was. In this situation, I had to mix three interview sessions together by including narrative questions about some specific life periods according to my interview schedules and also questions from a semi-structured interview schedule I had prepared about the biographical facts of her life and others. The other was a grandmother (family Shen) who could not face the interview at all,
so I had to interview her mother (the great-grandmother) for the grandmothers’ biography (the lived life).

3.4.2 Session Two: Narrative Questions for Details

After session one (which lasted between 25 minutes to four hours in my research), the interviewee was asked to have a rest while I studied my notes. At this point I needed to decide fairly quickly the main questions that I wanted to follow up in session two.

In this second session, that lasted another one to two hours, my major aim was to ‘dig deep’ or ‘dig out’ stories that were mentioned or hidden in session one. Encouraging the interviewee to embark on detailed narrations of some crucial experiences/events was important in this stage. This was achieved by asking, sometimes repeatedly, for ‘more details’ (Wengraf, 2001, 2015). However, to reduce my influence, I always started my question by repeating what the interviewee had said first. For example, ‘You said ‘My mum fired two of my nannies’, could you tell me more how this happened?’ All the questions were in a narrative format, instead of questions implying a ‘yes or no’ answer, or a question of ‘why’ which leads the interviewee to a different mode of telling – a mode of reasoning for example. Self-reasoning or self-evaluations were common among these women’s stories and they are a valuable part of the data. However, what I tried to avoid in session two was to ‘direct’ the interviewee to rationalise which is characteristic of present-oriented subjectivity when recounting the past. Instead, a detailed story of the past was the most important aim for this stage of interview. The logic behind this was to try to create a situation to ‘lead’ the interviewee back to her subjective feelings of the past (‘dated-situated-subjectivity’ (Wengraf, 2001, 2015)) as explained previously. This reflects some similarities with therapeutic interviews where the therapist uses strategies to help the patient ‘relive’ their past.

However, such ‘push for details’ strategies, although theoretically sound, are hard to achieve practically. For example, according to the BNIM, the interviewer can push more than ten times to help the interviewee to really ‘go back to the past’ (Wengraf, 2015). However, in my interviews, I was constantly under time pressure: many of
my interviewees were really busy women and I did not have unlimited time and chance to interview them. If they had talked for a long time in session one, I felt it much more difficult in session two to push repeatedly on any particular topic. Moreover, I wanted to give time for session three which I found in the pilots and previous interviews to be very useful in collecting historical and contextual information. In this situation, I normally pushed once or twice for more details of any particular events that interested me. I made notes of all my interventions and the interviewee’s responses, both linguistic and non-linguistic in order to reflect on the data in the analysis.

3.4.3 Session Three: Semi-structured Interviews

The last session, although often regarded as unnecessary in BNIM (Wengraf, 2001, 2015), turned out to be very important for my research practice. Particularly, some women talked for a long time about their life history without giving some important facts about their lived lives (dates, places, type of jobs etc.). The consistent information collected using the schedule provided crucial information for analysing the women’s lived lives.

In the following, I move on to the next stage of my research - data analysis - and present the efforts that I have made to achieve valid interpretations of these women’s lived experiences.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data that were collected through the biographical-narrative interview method are stories: stories of these women’s lives which contain various themes. I treat these data as narrative data for two main reasons: first, they are told in story form; and second, they are viewed as a fundamental way of giving meaning to experiences (Bruer, 1986), instead of an accidental account of experiences or social events (Garro & Mattingly, 2000). This is to say, I have paid particular attention to both the form and content of these narratives when analysing the data. Each individual woman’s account of her life was analysed as a whole: what they say and how they say it (e.g., the sequence, the order they give to their life events, their linguistic and para-linguistic markers) was viewed as a construction of a particular self/subject.
This self/subject forms the foundation for me to understand smaller stories or varied themes in their life stories (eg, childhood, motherhood, or education and work). Furthermore, this construction was also regarded as a social and interactive one – the immediate interview environment, me as a researcher (my behaviours during the interview, and how I was perceived by the interviewee), and the particular ‘present phase’ this interviewee was at in her life during the interview were all contributing to the final product – her life story. This means reflexivity of such social process was needed throughout the data analysis. Finally, some features from the BNIM were employed in my analysis, although the application of them varied from implicit (Chapter 4 and 6) to more explicit (Chapter 5). What I mean by these different applications will be clarified when I explain my analytical method in detail.

3.5.1 Transcription- Familiarity with Each Interviewee

I transcribed all the recordings: not only all the linguistic content from both the interviewer and the interviewee (or other persons present) exactly the way it was told (in Chinese), but also all the para-linguistic features including laughing, crying, pausing, voice clearing, facial expressions and body positions. In narrative approaches, and particular the BNIM, para-linguistic features are as important as the stories themselves to facilitate a good understanding of an interviewee’s subjective feelings. I found such a transcription process often helped me to re-discover the stories of the interviewee which I probably neglected during the actual interview. In this case, I took further notes to record my thoughts and feelings occurring during the transcription process. The transcripts aimed to capture the real interview situation, including not only what was said, but also how things were said and in what kind of mood/emotion/interactions, all of which are important in understanding ‘defensive and anxious’ subjectivities in the interview process.

3.5.2 Summary of Each Interview – The Second Reading of Each Woman’s Stories

The next step in my analysis was to write a detailed summary of each individual case. This process was done by following the BNIM’s principle of separating ‘lived life’ and ‘told story’. The ‘lived life’ is basically interviewees’ biographical trajectories which can be corroborated by, for example, birth and death registers and
newspapers. Therefore, these personal, historical ‘facts’ contain a particular type of ‘reality’ that are less likely be changed or distorted by the narrator or the interview environment. The second type of narrative material is named the ‘told story’ in the BNIM. It includes meanings specific to the narrator, including some unconscious meanings, relatively independent of the social contexts of storytelling (Squire 2008, Wengraf 2001). The logic of separating these two types of data is similar to what I said earlier (section 3.4) about the importance of knowing the glocal context, relating to the assumption of the ‘individual subject’ as an ‘anxious and defensive one’. Here it is individual history – biographical data – being separated from the whole story telling and which therefore can be checked and analysed (relatively) independently from the rhetorical and performative stories (Butler, 2005). It is particularly helpful to look at the biographical trajectory first, before analysing the told stories, and in the end to bring these two together to achieve a rich understanding of the narrator’s subjectivity. This is the key of BNIM’s analytical process which is applied in Chapter 5. However, at the stage of summarising each of the interviews, I went through each individual interviewee’s data twice to summarise both their ‘lived lives’ and ‘told stories’ so that a) all interview materials were prepared for the later analyses; b) the summaries themselves helped me to read the interviews from two angles and hence also provided me with a rich picture of each woman’s life.

Apart from summaries of lived life and told stories, I also inserted a section ‘Interview Context and Encounter’ to highlight the whole interview setting as well as recording my first encounter with each woman. The interview setting and first encounter are regarded as having a crucial influence on the interviewee’s later responses (Wengraf, 2001). Therefore, I used this section to remind myself of the importance of the interview situations for further analysis, interpretation and comparison. For the interviews in which I managed to observe family members’ interactions, I also summarised these observations. A complete example of a summary of one grandmother’s interview materials can be found in Appendix VII.

In intergenerational research like mine, I can also compare and cross check one woman’s ‘lived life’ and ‘told stories’ with the others in a chain. This is a great opportunity to see if there is some inconsistent information among different
members of the same chain which would provide an opportunity to either ask again for some factual data (I went back to three women to re-check some factual data); or to analyse what these inconsistencies told me about these women’s subjective feelings and experiences.

After the detailed transcriptions and a summary of each woman’s interview, every woman was considered as a subject situated in her whole life story and her particular subjectivity emerging from such summaries. This means even though I did not discuss their whole life stories in every chapter of the analysis, this process differentiates my analysis from some thematic analyses where sentences/stories from the interviewees are analysed independently of whole life stories.

3.5.3 The Analysis Process of Each Chapter

A. Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, I focus on answering the research question about these women’s growing-up process. I first used NVivo to assist my thematic analysis in finding the key themes that I wanted to focus on in each generation: it could be the themes that most interviewees have mentioned (e.g., talking about caring mothers in the great-grandmothers’s generation) or sometimes it could also be the theme that was hardly mentioned except by one or two interviewees (e.g., telling stories of a biased/useless mother) which forms an interesting contrast. After deciding the themes I also decided the key cases (women) that could be analysed and presented as examples for such themes (see Section D for how these were selected). When analysing these selected cases, their historical contexts were highlighted and related to facilitate a contextual understanding of their stories. Finally, women’s accounts were also compared both within and across generations. As my research has an intergenerational design, I also made the connections of the chain of women in some families evident.

The above described process is very similar to a thematic analysis. However, the narrative feature – not just the content but also the form of telling - is also taken into consideration in some women’s cases. I particularly discussed the influence of the sequence of events mentioned by some women as meaningful. In addition, even
though these women’s accounts were used as ‘evidence’ to support a particular theme, instead of relating to their whole life story in general, when analysing some women’s stories I still connected their small stories with their life stories to better understand the meaning-making of these women. Finally, such a selection of small stories was carried out after the summaries of each women’s data and therefore implicitly applied the idea of treating women’s whole life account and their particular subjectivity as the foundation.

**B. Chapter 5**

In Chapter 5, the key research question is to understand the changes and continuities of women’s mothering experiences across three generations. I adopted a more typical BNIM analytical method, including analysing each selected woman’s lived life and making hypotheses about the ‘structure of the case’ based on the lived life data; followed by analysing her told stories; and synthesising the two parts to achieve a new understanding of the women’s whole case. Finally, I compared their mothering experiences within the same, and across different, generations.

**a. Analysis of the Lived Life**

One essential feature of the BNIM is the analysis of the ‘lived life’ before the ‘told story’. This is to ‘blind’ the researcher to the informants’ own interpretations of their lives which have a strong influence on their present ‘selves’. At this stage, I adopted abductive reasoning, to analyse the lived life ‘datum by datum’ to answer the following questions: what possibilities were available to her; what the actual selections that she made or excluded were; and what the consequences for the future were. The aim is to reach the ‘best’ explanation of her particular subjectivity emerging from all these choices and decisions made throughout her life.

The abduction method was originally introduced by Aristotle, but it was the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839 -1914) who developed it into an explicit theory of inference to complement inferential modes of induction and deduction as a third model of reasoning (Svennevig, 2001). It aims at providing the best explanation of existing facts by making a hypothesis based only on the facts and waiting for the verification of the next fact/datum. For example, when I started
analysis of a grandmother born as the oldest daughter from a military family in 1950s, I started to make hypotheses of what would happen to her next. As military personnel were particularly protected and respected from the 1950s to 1970s, I guessed she would have a relatively worry-free childhood. Even though she lived through the Great Famine in the 1960s, I guessed her family had survived. On the other hand, as the oldest daughter, her parents would have been very strict in disciplining her as well as requiring her to look after the younger siblings. Therefore, she might have felt a lot of pressure from an early age. This might impact on her relationship with different family members. Alternatively, if all her following siblings were boys, she could also be the one who received most care and protection, particularly from her father. In addition, her father’s military position could gain her admiration and respect so she formed a close relationship with him, as well as developing a similar personality. All these are only hypotheses which wait for the next part of ‘lived life’ datum to be verified or falsified. Through such verifying/falsifying process, the aim is to reach the ‘best’ explanation of her particular subjectivity emerging from all these choices and decisions made throughout her life, independent of her own interpretations (refer to Chapter 5 where at the end of the table of each ‘lived life’, I have summarised a ‘structure of lived life’).

b. The Analysis of the Told Story

I then moved on to the ‘told stories’. This is an analysis of not only what has been said but also how things were told, a focus on the linguistic and para-linguistic features of the text. In line with the BNIM, I paid particular attention to:

- The first few sentences that the interviewee said in the interview. This is regarded as an important orientation of the whole life story.
- The sequences of the stories emerging from uninterrupted (or minimum interrupted) interview. This demonstrates how the interviewee relates different experiences together (their own ‘system of relevancy’, (Wengraf, 2000, p.159)) which is important to understand their present subjectivity.
- The key linguistic maker in the BNIM is called ‘textsort’. Based on Breckner’s (1998) summary of literary theory, five basic types of textsort (Description - Argumentation - Report -Narrative-Evaluation) are used. Each type of textsort presents very different moods/feelings that the interviewee associated with the experiences she/he was telling. The specific meaning of
these five types of textsort summarised by Wengraf (2001, 243-44) and I explain in following.

The Five Textsorts:

- **Description**, namely the assertion of certain properties, but in a timeless and non-historical way. No attempt is made at story-telling/narration. There is a sort of timeless ‘anthropological presence’ about the described person, situation, whatever.

- **Argumentation**, namely the development of an argument and theorizing and position-taking usually forming a present-time perspective, often from a past-perspective, often a blend of the two. It is generally in a stand-alone form (not explicitly connected to the content of a particular narrative). Only sometimes is it in the form of an explicit ‘disagreement’ with an explicit counter-position, though one is usually implicit.

- **Report**. This is a form in which a sequence of events, experiences and actions is recounted, but in a relatively experience-thin fashion, such that it appears to be recounted from some distance.

- **Narrative**, namely the telling of a story by which event Y followed event X, and event Z followed event Y, either for causal reasons or just ‘because they did’. The story is not told in a very ‘thin’ way, like a bare report, but rather in ‘rich detail’, and sometimes even in the present tense by the narrator virtually ‘reliving from close up’ the sequence of events recounted. Often there are words in ‘direct speech’ as said by the actors in the story episode being narrated.

- **Evaluation**. The easiest way to think of this is as the ‘moral of the story’ – of a think report or a rich narrative – stated explicitly as such, usually before or after the story-sequence in question.

In Appendix VIII, I present an example of how I use these textsorts in analysing an excerpt of one woman’s interview transcripts.

I was also sensitive to moments where women seemed to lack the words to articulate their experiences (DeVault, 1990) which may signal ‘the realm of not-quite-articulated experience, where standard vocabulary is inadequate, and where a respondent tries to speak from experience and finds language wanting.’ (ibid, 103) I therefore listened carefully to how talk can signal problems by many pauses, repetition, laughing, silence or simply making little sense. For example, one great-grandmother could not find words to describe her mundane childrearing practices but kept repeating that ‘I just reared my children like small dogs’. Another great-grandmother used lots of government slogans for adults to describe how she reared her children. This type of communication signals important experiences of women’s
lives. Very often, these ‘ineffable’ stories are due to the fact that they go against cannons of what is expected of a good life/woman/mother (Butler, 1990) and such linguistic signals can suggest the ways in which dominant ideologies oppress the experiences of ‘muted groups’ (Ardener, 1972).

c. Bring Together the Lived Life and Told Story

The lived life and told stories were not expected to be consistent. The next step in the analysis was to compare these two types of data and thereby construct what is known in BNIM as the ‘case structure’ (Wengraf, 2001). In doing so I identified the lived experiences that were omitted, changed or downplayed in told stories by the interviewee, which disclosed more about the stories they found difficult to narrate. Furthermore, as I obtained data from all three women from the same chain, I was able to identify inconsistencies in the stories/experiences recounted by different members. The most important question to answer at this stage was ‘why did this person who lived a life like this tell her life like that in this situation?’ By answering this question, I aimed to achieve a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences of these women.

C. Chapter 6

In Chapter 6, I answered the research question about the transmission process. It is the chains of women that are the focus here. These women’s lived lives and told stories were connected to understand their subjective experiences, a process similar to what has been described in Chapter 5. For example, when I describe the three women as ‘strong’ in personality from one family, it is a conclusion based on their (told) stories but also on the choices they made during different life phases (lived life). However, in contrast to Chapter 5, when presenting the cases, the priority is given to intergenerational comparisons instead of presenting the whole case of each individual woman. That is to say that the analytical focus is on one family – looking across three women as a whole to identify what has been passed on, altered, or resisted. Such intergenerational comparisons bring another level to revealing women’s mothering stories. We can see how women used the same/similar language (words and sentences) to describe themselves without noticing the similarities across
the chain of a family. Or the daughter inherited/learned a particular capacity from her mother without articulating it in her story of being mothered or being mentioned by her mother in story of mothering. Hence, intergenerational comparison can also bring some untellable aspects of mothering practices which are nevertheless valuable (see in Chapter 6 how these personal qualities help generations of women in upward social mobility) and important in terms of forming their key life choices. Finally, the individual family cases were compared, and this shed further light on the complexity of the process of intergenerational transmission.

I have explained my interview and analysis methods in this research. However, there are limitations in these methods, some of which have been mentioned (e.g., some problems of application of the biographical-narrative interview method), the major issues will be addressed in Chapter 7.

**D. Case Selection**

The principles of selecting cases for case-based studies are diverse. Box-Steffensmeier, Brady, Collier, and Gerring (2008) summarised nine methods, including ‘typical, diverse, extreme, deviant, influential, crucial, pathway, most-similar, and most-different (p.646)’. According to such categories, I regard my method of selecting cases for deep-analysis and presentation as a combination of several of these. For example, in Chapter 4 I chose cases of women who are atypical/deviant (e.g., the two great-grandmothers who regard their mothers as ‘biased and useless’) or typical (e.g., one great-grandmother who recalled her mother as ‘caring and capable’, similar to the majority that were studied) or diverse (e.g., the mothers who had siblings and experienced boys’ preferential treatment as a contrast to their Only Child counterparts). In Chapter 5 I chose women who are ‘extremes’ in terms of the way they followed the dominant ideologies of motherhood at their time. In Chapter 6 I chose two families with many differences (e.g., mother-daughter relationships, their social-economic status and so on) as well as some important similarities (i.e., successfully transmitted some personal qualities across three generations). This can be described as a mix of ‘diverse’ methods and ‘most-similar’. However, in a study with a small number of cases like this, where the

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27 Some specific reasons of selecting a case/cases can be found in Chapter 4, 5 and 6.
complexity of many factors that impact on mothers’ childrearing in their specific circumstances/situations is the focus, every mother’s case is unique or there are important differences between the cases. Therefore, I find Mitchell (1983)’s ‘telling cases’ is a more appropriate description of how I made decisions on case-selection. A case is selected not because it is typical or atypical/deviant, or most-similar/most-different and so on, but is chosen to ‘make previously obscure theoretical relationships suddenly apparent’ (Mitchell, 1984, p. 239). For example, I chose the GG Li Bei’s case to demonstrate her experience of being mothered not only because she, like the majority of other studied great-grandmothers, regards her mother as caring and capable; but also because she recounted many concrete circumstances from when she was growing up which demonstrate the complex factors that influenced how she was mothered and what ‘being a caring and capable mother’ meant in 1930-1940’s China. In other words, such a case can facilitate a deep analysis based on my particular theoretical interest: mothering practices have to be understood within concrete family and historical situations and are situated within women’s roles - such as a daughter-in-law and a wife. The theoretical interest played an essential role when cases were selected. In a case study, where capturing the complex relationship between the actors, events and context is the aim, Mitchell argued that any extrapolation from the case material is ‘based on the validity of the analysis rather than the representativeness of the events’ (Mitchell, 1983, p.190). Therefore, the case is chosen because it can ‘specify the necessary connections among a set of theoretically significant elements manifested in some body of empirical data’ (ibid., p.202).

3.6 Ethical Issues

I received Ethical Approval from the (IOE) CFH ethics committee (See Appendix IX). Specific guidance from BERA (British Educational Research Association) and BSA (British Sociological Association) has been followed. As the requirements by BSA and BERA are stricter than the relevant Chinese ethical guidance for research, I did not apply for Chinese ethical approval.
3.6.1 Informed Consent and the Recruitment Procedure

Some standard procedures have been followed, such as opt-in sampling which means that no research activities will happen until all the written or oral consents have been received from all participants. The participants were also told they can drop out of the research at any time should they wish to. All of their names are anonymized. Whilst standard western procedures usually require written consent before commencing research activities, however, it was not possible to obtain written consent (see consent form, Appendix XI) from all participants.

First, two great-grandmothers could not write, so providing a written consent form is not only hard for them, but also the request itself might have embarrassed them and created distance between them and the researcher. Second, according to the recruiting procedure, most families were recruited through one generation (the majority through the middle –grandmother’s generation). There was no way for me to find out whether one family member has signed the forms for all of them: according to the signature I received from some families, I found the writing very similar. Third, I tried written consent forms with four families and found that they became extremely suspicious and confused when asked for a signature, particularly the older generations. The older women seemed to think that signing their name was a serious legal issue and so asking them to sign might put them off participating in the research. When they finally understood what the purpose of this consent form was, they found it strange; they considered verbal consent to be sufficient. As the recruiting process was hard anyway, to avoid frightening away more participants, I did not insist on a signature before the interviews. As Murphy and Dingwall (2007) have argued, the concept of informed consent does not easily translate effectively in many qualitative studies or, as in this case, across cultures. Instead, I focused on establishing a trusting and respectful relationship with all the participants and negotiated and renegotiated with participants throughout the whole study.

3.6.2 Ethical Issues in Interviews

Some researchers (e.g., Brannen and Moss, 2004; Brannen, 2015; Wengraf, 2015) who have used narrative approaches, including the BNIM, have suggested the process of interviewing can be therapeutic for some interviewees. This was also the
response I received from many of my interviewees when I asked how they felt about the interview at the end. One great-grandmother said to me that nobody ever listened to her whole life story and her family always found her nagging too much or that she repeated the old stories again and again. She was grateful that I spent seven hours with her.

However, the strategy of ‘pushing for details’ that is used in BNIM to get closer to the ‘situated subjectivity’ of the interviewees has also been criticised by some researchers who argue that the researcher is not a therapist and cannot be confident in his or her capacity to deal with all the consequences of pushing the interviewee to talk about the past. Agreeing with such a differentiation between the researcher and the therapist I was careful about what I asked and said to the interviewee. In most interviews there were moments and areas where I hesitated about pushing too much. For example, when a great-grandmother suddenly mentioned the death of her eight year old boy it surprised me totally as I was not aware of this dead child at all. Instead of asking any further questions, I sat with her in her long pause and, in the end, she carried on to explain the accidental death of the son and moved on to other topics. I did not ask further questions about this boy.

It could be argued that the same example could be interpreted as my ‘anxious and defended self’ stopping me from asking more questions as I was worried how I would face such tragedy as a mother myself (Wengraf, 2015). In other interviews including incidents of the death of children I asked a few more questions which ended up with the interviewees being willing to tell more. Maybe nobody ever gave them the opportunity to tell this dark part of their life experience. Overall, ensuring the interview is an ethical process is a hard one. As commented by Bernard (2011), ‘it is about what we can live with.’ My practice taught me that the more experience we gain as a good and caring listener, the more answers we can find in dealing with specific circumstances. As argued above the interview is a co-construction and I dealt with difficult stories in each interview as best I could, responding as a human, a mother and a developing researcher.

28 Based on my personal communications with several researchers who applied BNIM in their research projects.
Chapter 4  Growing-up as a Girl: Experiences across Three Generations

4.1  Introduction

This Chapter tells the story of how the three generations of women were brought up as girls in distinct social and cultural environments. These experiences are regarded as crucial to understand their mothering practices later in their lives. Consistent with my attempt of broadening the conceptualisation of mothering, the discussion of childhood is a way to connect women’s later motherhood with their early life experiences. As Glen Elder comments, ‘With an eye to the full life course, analysis is sensitive to the consequences of early transitions for later experiences and events.’ (1994, p.5) This is not to make claim such as early experiences determine women’s later childrearing practices. Rather, by studying the growing-up process, the ‘linked or interdependent life’ (Glen Elder) within families can be highlighted. Furthermore, as childhood is the starting point of someone’s biographical trajectory, focus on these memories in this chapter and then move on to later life phases of women (in Ch5 and Ch6) help us to see the intersection effect of individual biographical life trajectory, family context and historical time.

Since the publication of Ariès (1962) historical monograph ‘Centuries of Childhood’, it has been widely recognized that the concept of childhood is socially constructed, rather than merely a ‘universal biological stage in the life course’ (Shanahan, 2007, p. 411). Considering the large differences between the 1920s and 2000s in China in women’s understanding of when a girl became a woman, it is hard to define the ‘childhood’ or ‘growing up’ period as a simple function of age. In seeking to learn about women’s experiences of growing up in China, I adopt a flexible definition of ‘childhood’, and the main criterion for inclusion in this analysis is that the women’s stories relate to the period in which they stayed mainly in their family home. This means the period before they either started to have paid work outside the home (for the younger generations), or left home to get married (for the oldest generation). The age range of this growing up period ranges from infancy to about 26, as the older generations got married or started to work as early as 15/16
years old and the youngest generation delayed employment until they were around 26.

The main part of the chapter consists of a detailed description of each generation’s historical context and an analysis of their accounts of childhood. In the final section, I analyse changes and continuities in women’s growing-up experiences.

4.2 The Great-Grandmothers: Growing Up in a Patriarchal Family Society

4.2.1 The Sample in Its Historical Context

The majority of great-grandmothers (nine out of twelve) were born in the 1930s and all of them grew up in the first half of the 20th century, experiencing continuous wars and shifts of power between governments associated with distinct political ideologies (see Chapter 1). Most of them spent their young childhood (under ten-twelve years old) in the Republic of China (zhonghuaminguo), ruled by the Beiyang Clique (1912-1928) and GMD (from 1928-1949). They then entered paid work and got married in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), run by the CCP.

Although during the GMD’s golden ten years the urbanisation and modernisation process started, the process was slow due to the constraints of the nation’s slow economic development and the interruptions of wars. Before 1949, two thirds of the population still lived in rural areas (Wu & Gaubatz, 2013). The slow development of cities was reflected by the great-grandmothers’ childhood experiences: ten of the twelve great-grandmothers grew up in rural areas and did not move to the city until they were at least 16 years old. These experiences of rural backgrounds are reflected in their life stories. For example, after spending two thirds of her life in the city where she reared all of her five children, one great-grandmother still defined herself as rural when she talked about childrearing practices and said ‘I did not know how the urban people did it, that was how I did it (with my children).’ On the other hand, the rural and urban division during their childhood was not the same as today, where rural is characterised in terms of lower economic and social status when compared to urban. Quite the opposite in some cases, as one great-grandmother from a relatively well-off family commented about her traumatic experiences of marriage to a man from a poor urban background. She recalled the ‘tiled houses’ with proper
courtyards where she lived in as a girl and the small shed she was living in after coming to the city.

Such recalled memories of urban as being poor and rural as rich also reflect the particular living conditions when a new city, such as Bengbu, was established. Many cities like Bengbu were established as a result of a large engineering project (see Appendix II) which attracted many poor peasants who arrived because they could not make a living from their farming work or who lost their land due to political or natural disasters - effectively becoming domestic refugees. The living conditions in such emerging cities were by no means comfortable, even though there were many more work opportunities than in the rural area. This generation’s particular connection with rural life and their different experiences of migrating to the cities play a crucial role in shaping their practices and identities as young working girls, wives and mothers.

Nevertheless, all of the great-grandmothers, including those born to large, relatively well-off rural families, experienced a decline in living standards due to the continuous wars. In particular, seven of twelve great-grandmothers experienced ‘Running Away’ 29 from the Japanese army and commented either about losing everything or about the lowered living standards after they eventually came back. The wars, Running Away, and the decline of the family economy also caused illness and death. Many lost their fathers while they were children (before twelve), whether it was through death or the father going missing (many re-married without telling their wives and children until many years later). If we include the bad health of the father, then ten of the twelve great-grandmothers recalled a childhood with their father’s physical weakness or absence and their mother’s hard work (although it would be domestic work and farming instead of any formal employment) keeping the family going. This was an important contrast with the two younger generations where no grandmothers or mothers had similar experiences of losing their fathers at a relatively young age.

29In 1938, the Japanese army invaded the area around Bengbu. Many families, fearing the cruel treatment they might receive from the Japanese soldiers, escaped to other places, leaving all their belongings behind. This was called ‘Running Away from the Devils’ by the local people. In this thesis, I will use ‘Running Away’ as an abbreviation. (Resources from local Museum as well as local history such as (Editorial Board of Bengbu History, 1995) )
Growing up without a father was not unusual for these great grandmothers. However, this does not mean that they were living in a single-mother household. Instead, they all lived in extended households surrounded by paternal grandparent(s), uncles, aunts, and sisters-in-laws. Such a multi-generational and extended family arrangement provided the basic education in gender and filial piety practices.

As girls, these great-grandmothers observed the different roles their parents played: mothers with little education who dedicated their lives to housework, childrearing and caring for their parents-in-law or even sisters/brothers-in-law. Fathers either worked on the farm or, for those with some education, worked outside the household either running a business or working as a formal employee to gain a regular income. In addition to the differences between such breadwinner and housekeeper roles, these girls experienced the clear power differences within the household: the authority of the paternal grandparents above both of their parents, and their mother occupying nearly the lowest position within the large paternal household. Only their own daughters – these great-grandmothers – had less power than their mothers. This was the typical family power structure defined in Confucius’s famous ‘Three Obediences and Four Virtues’\textsuperscript{30} (\textit{sancongside} 三从四德).

On the other hand, feminist activities in the 1920s and 1930s increased people’s awareness of equal rights for girls and the GMD, regarded as a progressive party at that time, also pushed the idea of the ‘Modern Women’ (Ono, 1989). These political and cultural changes did not change the patriarchal system within and outside the family fundamentally, but did benefit the great grandmothers, particularly in two aspects: first, all of them avoided foot-binding, which had caused such pain and disability for their mothers and some older sisters. Second, some of the lucky girls from relatively rich families, or from a relatively open-minded family, were able to go to public schools\textsuperscript{31}. Considering the social and cultural environment where girls

\textsuperscript{30} The Three Obediences and Four Virtues (\textit{sancongside}) were sets of basic moral principles for women in Confucianism which also defined their place at home. The three obediences include to obey: her father as a daughter (\textit{weijiacongfu}); her husband as a wife (\textit{jijiacongfu}); and her sons in widowhood (\textit{fusicongzi}). The four virtues include morality (\textit{fude}), proper speech (\textit{fuyan}), modest manner/appearance (\textit{furong}) and diligent work (\textit{fugong}).

\textsuperscript{31} Public schools were not free schools but were different from private schools which were usually run by a male teacher and limited to boys. The earliest public schools for girls were established in 1901 and the first one in Bengbu emerged in 1919.
were discriminated against in their right to education, there is a clear and large difference in work opportunities and therefore the life trajectories/experiences between great-grandmothers who had no education or had very little (less than two years) from those who finished their primary education or even junior middle or vocational education. There are seven great-grandmothers who belong in the first category (none or little education) whereas there are three who finished primary education and the other two went on to junior middle schools. These better educated great-grandmothers managed to find a better job later in their lives working as administrators in the government or schools.

Having outlined the conditions and contexts these great-grandmothers grew up in, the following analysis will demonstrate how these women told their stories of growing up in such a context, particularly, their experiences of being mothered.

4.2.2 Motherhood through the Girls’ Eyes

Due to the lack of educational opportunities, all of the great-grandmothers spent the majority of their childhood at home. What did they recall about their patriarchal home and, in particular, their mothers’ lives? What comments did they make about what they saw as a child and how did they make sense of these observations and experiences? These questions are important for women growing up in the 1930s. As the ‘poured out water’, all of these great-grandmothers were regarded as someone who would marry ‘out’ at a certain age and become a member of her husband’s family, thereby disconnecting from her own. In this period, the age of getting married could be as early as 15 and typically, as demonstrated by these great-grandmothers’ life stories, was about 18 years old. Therefore, from the beginning,

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32 This was a common phrase people used to describe the ‘uselessness’ of having a girl in China. ‘Poured out water’ is a symbolic description of a grown up daughter married to another family and becoming a daughter-in-law for another family. As they were expected to play a crucial role in their husband’s family after marrying, her original family, particularly her own parents, would not expect her to support them when they were old. Instead, the daughter-in-law had to look after her parents-in-law when they grew old.

33 However, Li Xian (2010b) argued that even after being ‘married out’, these women still kept special connections with their own family, particularly their mothers, to provide mutual support. I agree with this insightful observation which points to the complexity of a daughter’s relationship with her husband and her own family. Nevertheless, as Li Xian explained in her own research, such continuous relationships did not change the fact that these women had to obey a special hierarchy in their husband’s home and the connections with her original family would only be useful when she faced a severely difficult situation in her husband’s home.
observing their mother’s living conditions in her husband’s (the girl’s father’s) home taught these girls about their future fate as well as helping them understand their current position as a daughter within her original home.

A. **A Capable Housewife and Caring Mother**

All the great-grandmothers, except for one, described their mothers as housewives – someone who has her place only at home. However, differing from the Western idea of a ‘housewife’ focusing on domestic chores and modern childrearing (Oakley, 1974), these housewives’ priority was to be a ‘good’ daughter-in-law, instead of a good mother or wife, to be able to survive in her husband’s family. The responsibility of taking care of her children, particularly her daughters, still mainly fell on these housewives’ shoulders but in tough conditions, many of them first needed strategies to survive, which was a crucial condition for their daughters’ survival.

a. **A Capable Housewife**

A ‘capable housewife’ and a ‘caring mother’ were the images these great-grandmothers used most frequently to describe their mothers. The capability of a mother, according to the great-grandmothers’ memories, included the capacity to make delicious food (eleven out of twelve great-grandmother talked about this), the capacity to make a living by doing whatever they could when the fathers were not around or became ill (ten out of twelve) (usually by selling groceries on the street, washing clothes for other families, making clothes or cooking for others, very often combined with their social skills of gaining neighbourhood support and respect), and, as Bei, described below, protecting their daughters whenever they could (three out of twelve).

GG Li Bei\(^{34}\) was born in 1932’s Beijing – which was different from most of the other great-grandmothers in this study who came from rural areas. She has one younger sister and one older sister and her whole childhood was spent in her paternal grandfather’s house, living with her mothers, aunts and grandmothers most of the

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\(^{34}\)I abbreviate great-grandmother to GG (and grandmother to GM, mother to M) when it precedes a name.
time. Her father, uncles and grandfather worked in another city which meant she saw very little of them. Although the start of her life was better compared with poor and struggling rural families, her description of her mother’s life was that it was heavily constrained by the patriarchal family structure. Bei mentioned that when she was three years old her father left home to work with her paternal grandfather in Sichuan (southwest China, far away from Beijing, which is located in the northeast), and then she said

‘We (three girls and her mother) lived with (paternal) grandma together. At that time, my mum had no job, just depended on the money my grandfather (and father) posted back. However, the money was always posted to my grandma of course, nothing for my mum. My mum had a bitter life...She had never had a good time. That period was totally feudal (fengjian)! My grandma, she played Mahjong every day, as a daughter-in-law, she (her mum) had to stand by her side to serve everyone, making tea, making cakes and preparing meals. Everything was done by my mum. So, she would go back to her own home from time to time, where at least she could have a relaxed week.’

However, the great-grandmother and her older sister seldom went to the maternal grandma’s home as life was not easy for her maternal grandparents and it was hard for her mother to take all three of them together. Normally, her mother would take the youngest one with her. Recalling this memory, Bei expressed no complaints about her mother’s absence; instead, she took it as normal and an understandable arrangement in the circumstances. ‘No, she could not take us.’ She spoke as if it would be silly to suggest that her mother could do it any other way. Then, she described their survival strategies when the mum was not around:

‘I and my older sister stayed at home. I was better than my sister, (tut, 呸嘴), my grandma did not like her, neither did my aunt. My aunt liked me. In the morning, I would tidy up her room, help her with something. When she had food, … in the north (of China), we made dumplings, when she made dumplings, she would give me some… after they finished their meal, she would ask me to go to their room to have some. My sister had nothing. The next door neighbour would give her some food. That was it. … Sometime,
they gave you… they made dumplings, but gave you wowotou\(^{35}\) (steamed hard bread roll), that wowotou had already turned white, and when you opened it, it was sticky inside, that was what they asked us to eat. So, we also had a bitter childhood.’

This bitterness of their lives, as Bei described, was always associated with food: the food they could get as a girl, compared to what other family members could eat. In Bei’s case, there were no boys and men around, but the patriarchal hierarchy also gave different powers between women. Bei recalled how their mother tried to ‘hide’ some better food for them:

‘My grandma ate differently from us. They ate steamed bread, we ate wowotou. My mum, what could she do?... She needed to make the bread for them, she had to go to their rooms to get the flour; the flour had to be put in their room, you had to go there to get the flour. In fact, my mum would always try to get more than she needed. After the bread was made, she would take some out for us then took the rest to them (her aunt and paternal grandparents). Where did she put the bread for us? We had an ancestral hall and there was a large incense burner that my grandma could not move. My mum would put the bread under the incense burner. When it was night time and they all went to sleep she would take them out to give to us.’

This story told by Bei not only demonstrates the hierarchy at home in everyday practices, but also, how their mother tried her best to protect her daughters within all these constraints. This was a balanced picture that Bei provided: her mother, on the one hand, would leave her two older daughters to find their own way to survive while she went back to her own home for support; on the other hand, she tried her best to devise strategies which would protect her daughters whenever she could.

\(b.\) \textit{A Caring Mother}

When the great-grandmothers described their mothers as capable housewives, they also very often told stories of their mothers being ‘caring’ or ‘kind’. Examples of being a caring or kind mother were usually related to these mothers’ non-violent way of talking and dealing with their children and maternal sacrifice - they put

\(^{35}\) Wowotou were steamed hard bread rolls made of coarsely ground maize and eaten by the poor.
everybody else’s needs before their own. For example, Bei emphasised that her mother

‘had a really good temper. She never shouted at us. I had no such memory. She always thought carefully about others. For example, if she cooked, she would never think what she would like to eat, it was always what other people, her children, husband, or others, wanted. … You could not find anything she did wrong. …She always nice to everyone, every child, even the grandchildren. No one complained about her.’

Considering the hard life both the girls and their mothers had to struggle with at this time, it might be that this generation of mothers pitied their daughters for their present and future situations. Therefore a little indulgence from their mother might be regarded as the only thing they could offer their daughter before they got married and moved to another family. Furthermore, these mothers had little power or authority themselves, living in a patriarchal family, and such a nice manner and indulgent attitude may reflect their own weak position within the family structure. Finally, some researchers (e.g. Fei, 1998; He, 2007) have documented that indulging young children (particularly younger than seven) is part of a traditional attitude towards children.

It is worthwhile to point out that the lack of imposed discipline from their own mothers referred to here in no way means that these great-grandmothers grew up in a totally free way! On the contrary, they learnt from an early period how girls should behave in order to be ‘liked’ and to survive – taught not necessarily by their mothers, but by other people with more power (e.g., as Bei’s recollection of the differences between her and her older sister’s treatment among other family members); furthermore, when the father and paternal grandpa were around, when girls were old enough (more than seven usually), these men took on a particular responsibility to help the girls learn their manners and their place at home. Therefore, the whole family structure and living conditions for mothers in the 1930s and 1940s China provides the possibility and even the ‘rationale’ for being ‘indulgent’ or ‘caring’, in the great-grandmothers’ words.

Interestingly, these capable housewives and caring mothers, described by these great-grandmothers, somehow matched the famous ideal image of a married woman
which existed in China for hundreds years – a ‘Virtuous Wife and a Good Mother’. None of the great-grandmothers used these words which probably demonstrated that the words were defined and used by men\textsuperscript{36} – be it their husbands or generally men with power in society. These great-grandmothers’ memories of their own mothers did not totally fit this political and idealistic discourse, which were popularised by men. Maybe the ‘capable’ and ‘caring’ mothers were the names these women chose to use against the meta-discourse about being a ‘Virtuous Wife and Good Mother’.

\textbf{B. A Biased Mother and a Useless Mother}

However, such a capable housewife and caring mother’s image did not reflect all the great-grandmothers’ experiences when they were young. There were two exceptions among the twelve cases.

\textit{a. A Biased Mother}

Sun Feng was born to a rural but relatively rich family in 1932 as the oldest daughter of three siblings. However, when she was five years old, the family ran away from their home to escape the Japanese army. It seems they travelled years before going back to their home town where they lived with paternal grandparents in a much poorer condition. Within Feng’s story of both her life and her childhood, she angrily criticised her parents. There were three things she complained about her mother in particular when she was young: first, her mother’s preference for her younger brother and, therefore, her neglect of her; second, her exploitation of her labour from an early time; third, her mother’s ‘doing nothing’ in response to her father’s violence and mistreatment.

\textsuperscript{36}At the end of Qing Dynasty (late 19\textsuperscript{th} Century), there were many discussions and debates around ‘Virtuous Wife and Good Mother’ which related to a group of elite men advocating a new China (and thereby new women). When the Republic of China was established, the GMD also encouraged a new ‘Virtuous Wife and Good Mother’ which emphasised women’s role as mothers to support a new modern country. Then, in the 1990s, ‘Virtuous Wife and Good Mother’ became a popular discourse again when, at the same time, many women were laid off, ‘forcing’ them back to their roles at home. All these discussions, however, seemed to be argued by men. Most of women in the first two generations felt uncomfortable when I asked their views of ‘Virtuous Wife and Good Mother’. A good discussion of the historical evolution of ‘Virtuous Wife and Good Mother’ can be found in (Lin, 2011).
She did not talk much about her mother when she recalled her childhood. But later on during the interview, when I asked her about her childbirth experiences, her anger towards her mother emerged: she said her mother did not look after her after she gave birth to a second daughter. Then she shifted the topic back to her childhood and commented,

‘Even though we were very poor, my mother did not suffer. In the evening, she went to bed very early, held her baby. Looking after her was all my responsibility. (I) took the food to her. She even went to toilet in bed.’

Did her mother really have a good life? It would seem unlikely considering the period and Feng said somewhere else in the interview (when she probably felt less angry with her mother) that her mother also had a tough life. ‘My father had a very bad temper. My mother suffered a lot from him.’ There was no detail of how her mother suffered within Feng’s story. When we relate such a missing area to Feng’s whole life story - where she wants to put across a story of suffering - then we can probably understand her intentional avoidance of talking about her mothers’ suffering as this would undermine the moral of her own story – about her own suffering - from her mother, her father and, later on, she also suffered in her workplace and from her husband.

The second story Feng told about her mother was an instance when she (Feng) was beaten suddenly and heavily by her father and ended up having a bleeding nose. Feng said, ‘She (her mother) was very good at covering up for him, she said, ‘this girl has a nose that is very easy to bleed.’’ Here, the violence was not from her mother, however, her mother’s lack of capacity or sensitivity to provide comfort to her and instead, taking the side of her father, made Feng remember this instance as something that demonstrated her mother’s lack of care.

Here, in both complaints (her mother’s exploiting her labour and lack of willingness to protect her from her father’s anger), the issues of gendered relationships and practices were crucial. The younger brother in this story was Feng’s mother’s first boy which probably meant he was her hope of getting some rest and protection from her husband and her husband’s family in the future. Her mother’s own suffering and
lack of power might make her treasure this baby boy even more. Feng, her own
daughter, would be the only person who had lower status than herself at home and
the only one she could rely on to provide help. Feng clearly saw all of this and was
compliant.

It was hard to know how much Feng was really angry with her mother as a little girl,
as the stories she told were all from her current point of view. For example, Feng
was silent about her mother when she first talked about her childhood, and it was
only later when she talked about her other sufferings, particularly, the lack of
support from her own mother, that she became angrier. In fact, in the beginning
when Feng talked about her childhood, she implied on many occasions that she was
a little companion for her mother in many different public situations: to learn to
make clothes with her mother, to participate in literacy classes with her mother and
so on. She mentioned these quickly and rather emphasised her own capacity to do
everything well as a little girl, without mentioning anything about her relationship or
interactions with her mother. This does not necessarily mean Feng was purposely
hiding some facts from the interviewer; it is perfectly possible that she
unconsciously silenced any ‘positive’ memories associated with her mother to make
sense of her later life. Instead, such silence demonstrates how memories of one’s
mother can be changed, made more complex, or heightened by one’s own
experience with childbirth and childcare, which were also constrained or facilitated
by the particular social, economic and cultural contexts (Thomson et al., 2011). Put
differently, if Feng had had more support/resources later in her motherhood period it
could have prevented her having to rely on her mother and given her some positive
experiences of being a mother herself, in which case she might have developed
different feelings and memories towards her own mother. This demonstrates how
our memories and feelings are shaped by a specific context. These contexts, in many
cases, are out of our control but impact greatly on our memories of our life and the
important relationships within our life stories (ibid.)

No matter what, Feng’s case demonstrates how a really tough living situation could
damage a mother’s image – if the mother’s own survival was under threat, she could
not direct sensitivity and care towards her daughters, particularly if she also had a
boy. This strong discrimination against girls has a significant influence on how Feng
treated her daughters. When she talked about her childrearing experiences, Feng said,

‘I hated so much my parents’ discrimination. For my children, I did totally the opposite. I did not ask the girls to do anything (means housework, added by the researcher) but taught boys of doing household. I might have gone a bit too far.’

In the following section that focuses on Grandmothers’ accounts of growing up, we will see that Feng’s daughter, Sun Xian, confirmed her mother’s claim of treating girls better than boys. She didn’t explain what she meant by ‘too far’ but it was probably associated with her painful experience of losing her only boy: as the youngest child, this boy didn’t survive the tough living situation and died aged two years old. Part of her being ‘fair’ to the girls is attributed to the changing political environment as will be described later – a mainstreaming gender equity policy that was promoted by the CCP publically. However, Feng’s early experience of being discriminated against as a daughter also motivated her to change practices when the political environment shifted. The importance of such individual experiences which motivate someone to change (or not to change) is evident if we compare GG Sun Feng with two other great-grandmothers who sacrificed their daughters’ education for their sons. This demonstrates that the changing of a political environment is not enough to support a shift of behaviours on its own.

b. A Useless Mother

There was another example of negative memory of their mothers from a great-grandmother. Instead of blaming her mother as ‘biased’, GG Wu Fang complained about her mother being ‘useless’.

Wu Fang was born around 1928, the youngest child and only girl in a relatively rich rural family. She described her father as ‘really capable and had lots of culture (wenhua, in China means well educated).’ Her father worked for a bank in Bengbu before he became ill. This was when Fang was about eleven and then her grandfather also became ill. As a result her sister-in-law gained control of the whole family, ‘and life started to be hard for us.’ The great-grandmother particularly
mentioned that her mother ‘was useless’, leaving her sister-in-law to gain the power to make decisions for the family.

Fang said very little about her parents and childhood overall, probably because it was such a painful memory of a sudden decline in her standard of living, from being in a relatively well-off and spoilt (as a little girl) environment to a poor household. To make sense of this, Fang put the blame on her mother – if her mother had had more power (‘capacity’), or a different personality (deciding to fight for her right to share the resources within a household), life would have been very different for Fang. However, we have too little information to make any judgement about whether any of the ‘ifs’ were a real possibility in Fang and her mother’s situation. Fang did comment about her mother’s life being really difficult and recalled Running Away from the Japanese bombs in the Spring Festival and the fact that her mother had to run on her little bandaged feet. Without knowing much more about the hardness of her mother’s life, we can only guess that the chance of her mother fighting for a more powerful position in her husband’s household was small. Nevertheless, Fang’s frustration about her mother’s ‘uselessness’ was real in the interview. This might be a reflection of her frustration towards her own life overall as expressed in her whole life story. Or, with occasional success stories of how she managed her own household and gained respect from the community, Fang’s expressed frustration towards her mother could be an ‘orientation’ (Labov, 1972) for her own story. Indeed, one can even argue that the early experiences of her mother’s powerlessness to protect her daughter were passed onto Fang so that she became determined to achieve a better life in no matter what kind of situation. This is reflected in Fang’s lived life and told stories where, even though married to a poor urban family at a young age (17) and without any education, her voluntary work in the Resident’s Committee37 earned her a good reputation. After her husband broke his leg, Fang worked ‘like a man’ in the construction industry. No matter how hard it was, she never gave up and raised her six children. This strong determination to improve or control her own life was passed on to her daughter, the GM Wu Min, who successfully moved up from a low SIES to a middle level via her own

37 “Residents’ Committees” emerged in the 1950s, initially as a way of managing the residents who did not work in state-owned organisations. All the members worked for free or were paid very little until about 10 years ago when the government increased the salaries and project fees for the Residents’ Committees.
determination in life (see Chapter 6 about Wu Fang, Wu Min and Wu Juan’s stories within the family chain).

The great-grandmothers’ generation told many bitter stories about their growing-up which reflects their particularly tough historical time. What about the next generation? They would grow up in a very different social and cultural environment which was usually described as the ‘growing up under the Red Flag’ generation. What would be recalled by this new generation of women and how they would tell their stories of childhood?

4.3 The Grandmothers: Growing Up Under the Red Flag

4.3.1 The Sample in Its Historical Context

Among the twelve grandmothers, eight were born in the 1950s and four were from the 1960s. Their median year of birth is 1956, with the oldest born in 1952 and the youngest in 1967. These women grew up during the early years of the PRC (People’s Republic of China), under Mao Zedong (from 1949 - 1976), a time that featured turmoil and various political movements. These movements either impacted on these girls directly or by impacting on their parents and thereby influencing their life trajectories.

The first new phenomenon these grandmothers faced was that nearly all (except for one grandmother who was born in a rural area) of their mothers had to work outside the home very soon after their birth. Women have needed to work after they became mothers in most societies, but the difference from older generations is that these grandmothers’ mothers all worked outside the home instead of alongside their housework such as selling some groceries on the street with their children around their knees.

Such a separation of productive and reproductive work also impacted on women who lived in rural areas. For example, the grandmother who spent all her life in the rural area witnessed/experienced separation from her mother even though her mother did not need to work formally in an organisation outside their home. This was caused by the political movements which increased rural women’s activities and
time outside the home, including participating in the many different meetings organised by the government or some extra work for the government. In particular, during the Great Leap Forward period (from 1958 - 1960) her parents had to work day and night to ‘produce steel’\textsuperscript{38}.

This separation meant new types of arrangements and alternative strategies were needed by all the mothers. In Mao Zedong’s period, the economic differences between families were very small \textsuperscript{39}. However, the differences in childcare arrangements demonstrate that even in such an economically more egalitarian society, women and their families were far from equal. Compared to the twelve great-grandmothers who were all looked after by their mothers when they were young and lived in inter-generational, patriarchal families, the childcare and family living arrangements varied much more for the grandmothers.

First, and demonstrating the highest social status arrangement, were children looked after by a government paid wet nurse and/or nanny. There were three grandmothers who enjoyed this when they were little and two of them also went to public kindergartens. The second arrangement was families who could afford to find paid nannies themselves and also sent their daughters to the public kindergarten. There was one grandmother who remembered a short period with a nanny and who then went to boarding kindergarten. Third, the most common way of arranging early childcare was for a mother to either ask her own mother to come to help or the family lived with paternal grandparents so when she was at work there would be someone there. Five families used this arrangement. However, what needs to be pointed out is that these grandparent’s help was not like today’s grandparents (for the youngest generation) who take the major role in looking after grandchildren. In

\textsuperscript{38} In 1958, the Chinese government launched the Great Leap Forward, aiming to hasten the pace of economic and technical development (Fairband, 2008). Partly due to unrealistic expectations and partly due to the lack of technology at the time, local government started to falsely report their achievement, which accelerated unrealistic expectations from the central government. People in all positions, ages and genders were forced to be involved into this ‘glorious’ movement with a belief that China could develop more than America within 5 years. One of the most frequent mentioned memories of this period is the ‘Making Steel’ movement which asked every street to build ovens to make steel. Many people used their good steel pans to make ‘steel’ which turned out to be useless. The Great Leap Forward and the false reporting atmosphere directly caused the Great Famine in the early 1960s.

\textsuperscript{39} According to the World Bank Report, in 1979, the Gini Coefficient was 0.16, nearly the lowest in the world (Li, 2010a).
the 1950s and 60s, grandparents’ help just meant there was someone there to keep an eye on the safety and security for the children and to cook for them. The fourth category of mothers/families was where no grandparents lived nearby. Instead, parents had to send their children to the grandparents or extended families in rural areas for a period to cover the childcare needs and two of the studied families adopted this strategy. Finally, there were two mothers who could not find any help and did not have a formal job when the children were young. Therefore, these mothers took care of their daughters on their own. Two of the families fall in this category, one urban and the other rural.

Many families had to combine more than one arrangement to meet the childcare needs for all their children. All these mothers had more than three children and five-six was the most frequent number of children among the grandmother in the sample. However, these five categories in some way demonstrate the families’ resources and status. As mentioned early, all the grandmothers whose children were cared for by nannies and kindergarten came from better family backgrounds whereas in the last two categories, the mothers who had little to rely on and had to send their children away were those with the lowest social status.

More importantly, relating to this chapter’s discussion, these different arrangements impacted on the grandmothers’ growing up experiences, ranging from a warm nanny’s care throughout the whole childhood and teenage years, to difficult separation from parents when being sent to a rural area, or some even might have life threatening accidents due to a lack of adult supervision. However, we will also find from the following cases that the physical or material sides of childcare arrangements did not determine whether these girls felt positive or negative about their childhood.

The Great Famine (from 1960 -1963) happened when these grandmothers were very young, most at a pre-school age. Many of them clearly remembered what it was like to starve and very often they also experienced separation from their parents (as a strategy to help these children survive, some of the parents sent their children to rural areas which in the early stages were less impacted by the Great Famine) or the death of siblings.
When they reached school age (between six and seven), all of the grandmothers in this study went to, and graduated from, primary schools. The majority of them (nine out of twelve) also went on and finished junior middle school. However, the influence of the Cultural Revolution marked their particular experiences in education. First, from the early 1960s, Mao Zedong had already started to emphasise the importance of ‘Learn from the Worker, Peasants and Soldiers’ (Bonnin & Horko, 2013). Therefore, even when they were in primary school, these grandmothers were already influenced by the idea that work in the factory and farm was far more important than knowledge produced by academic institutes. The knowledge and skills required to produce goods for a better country, therefore, were positioned higher than abstract and academic ones. As a result, an appreciation of practical work and skills was common among these grandmothers, and this was also influenced by the huge political meta-discourse on making contributions towards one’s country (no matter female or male). Such an appreciation and acknowledgement of the differences in knowledge and skills as well as the importance of making a contribution to one’s country instead of focusing on an individual’s comfort or development were emphasised by the ‘Up to the Mountain and Down to the Countryside’ movement in 1968 (ibid.). Mao Zedong decided the best way to educate these young people was to send them (primary graduates and secondary school students) to the countryside or to factories or the army (this movement was called ‘Down to the Countryside’ later as the majority of students ended up in rural areas). As a result, none of these grandmothers went on to further education after finishing or dropping out of junior middle schools. Five grandmothers ended up in the countryside for a period ranging from two to ten years; the rest of them ended up working either as full time employees in a state-owned factory or in some temporary jobs. No matter where they ended up, an early start to work (or learning to make a contribution) was common among all of these grandmothers.

The above drew a quick but very different picture of the growing up environment from that of the great-grandmothers. Now, we will see how these women recalled their particular childhoods. The following stories will exclude the parts relating to these women’s lives at work and in the countryside as the majority of grandmothers had already left home by this period.
4.3.2 Happy and Sad Stories of Girlhood

Compared to their mothers, the grandmothers provided many more stories about their childhoods. These longer and more detailed stories were usually recalled in a positive way in the interviews. Seven out of eleven grandmothers expressed happy or positive emotions when telling their childhood stories. This, again, was in huge contrast to the majority of great-grandmothers’ stories (of it being tough to survive as discriminated-against girls and witnesses of their mothers’ hard lives) and stories from the youngest generation focusing on many negative themes in their experiences, which will be discussed later.

Another distinctive feature of these longer and more detailed stories, compared to the other two generations, were the times these women talked spontaneously about their fathers. Four out of eleven grandmothers talked about their father much more than their mothers; and another two grandmothers talked about their fathers as equally important as their mothers during their growing up period. In addition, five grandmothers held very positive views on their father’s involvement in this. In contrast, only two of the great-grandmothers (briefly) mentioned their father and one of them held a strong negative view of their father.

In the following, I will focus on the happy/sad stories and stories of fathering through these grandmothers’ eyes. As explained in Chapter 2, motherhood/mothering is regarded as practices embedded within family practices and relationships. This is supported by the empirical materials of this generation of women who automatically talked about their fathers when recalling memories of being mothered.

When I call them ‘happy stories’, I do not want to suggest that all these grandmothers grew up happily with good living conditions and never felt hungry. Quite the opposite. Most of them experienced the Great Famine as well as lacking material things in childhood. However, in the interviews, these grandmothers

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40 Only eleven grandmothers were interviewed compared to the twelve great-grandmothers and twelve mothers. This was because one of the grandmothers was too upset about her past and could not face the interview. This has already been discussed in the chapter about methodologies and I will also analyse this unusual silence later in this chapter.
adopted a happy or positive mood when describing their childhood. Clearly, both their memories and their narrations were ‘selective’ which means they could have deliberately hidden some sad memories. Nevertheless, most of them wanted to express the positive feelings associated with these memories or happy moments and this in itself is meaningful. These moments include playing freely without adult monitoring or adults telling them off, being proud of their independence from an early age and their close relationship with their fathers.

Sun Xian (the daughter of Sun Feng, introduced earlier) was born in 1952, the second daughter of a family with five children. Her mother worked as an accountant for a public school and her father initially worked for the army then became administrator in school later. As a baby, Xian’s experiences were not very happy – according to her mother (Feng), Xian could not be breastfed as her maternal grandmother maltreated her mother because she had again failed to have a boy. Xian did recall stories about how both she and her mother were ill-treated by her maternal grandmother before she was two years old. However, in her own narration, Xian said she could not remember any of this and moved on to tell her own version of childhood – the happy moments she remembered.

‘A! We, our sibling group (her tone of voice changed into one of excitement). We, we were totally free-range style of rearing. (Laugh) Six of us, shoulder touch shoulder, 123456, (Laugh), we were all close to each other in age. (Laugh). I remember that when we moved to the number nine middle school, …, I just started school and my older sister was in school, all the others were still too young to school. … We have a big empty space in front of our house, many lands around our house, there were plants there. That school was surrendered by lands… In the evening, my parents needed to go for ‘political studies’, we were locked at home. We would open the window and climb out and it was crazy! Laugh! We were totally free in our childhood.(Laugh)’

She also talked about how they went to the classrooms to climb into the ceilings and did all sorts of exploration and adventures. This happy tone and laughter were different from other parts of her interviews where she either talked in a very calm voice or was a bit sad or regretful. It was only when she talked about this childhood that her voice and face lit up.
Xian’s happy stories were very interesting. First, her mother (Feng) talked about her own motherhood, particularly after Xian was born, as a trauma – being mistreated by her own mother. Clearly, Xian knew this part of the family story and she also mentioned this story to me, but she still decided to elaborate on a positive childhood experience. Second, in terms of childhood arrangements, Xian was one of the unlucky ones, with no nannies, no kindergarten, and she had to rely on her maternal grandma who seemed to cause trouble rather than provide help. Most of the time, as Xian recalled this period, children were locked in at home as there was nobody around, even at night. This particularly tough situation did not seem to stop Xian enjoyed her ‘free-range’ childhood. The ‘crazy playing’ also did not stop her working hard at school, which Feng mentioned proudly during her interview. However, compared to her mother’s bitter memory of her own childhood, Xian definitely benefited in one way from her mother. Previously, I have mentioned how the experiences of being treated badly by her parents as a girl made the GG Sun Feng decide to treat her daughters better than her boy. Here, from Xian’s happy memories of her free-play, we could see some results of Feng’s efforts: she played, ate, and was schooled the same way as her brothers. Furthermore, when Xian talked about the period of the Great Famine, she expressed her sympathy towards her younger brother who she thought suffered more than herself as ‘boys seemed needed more food than us, but he never was able to feel full.’ Xian also recalled her memory of feeling sorry for her little brother who was very often beaten by her mother when he wet the bed. These other details might help us to see what Xian’s mother tried to do and in some way, her effort in treating girls the same (or going ‘a bit too far’ as she reflects now) might help her daughter to possess some happy memories of childhood, even though this level of feeling could not be articulated.

Looking across the grandmothers’ generation, this playing freely was very often among their happier moments. On the other hand, the lack of such freedom or strong feelings of being discriminated against as a girl, sometimes created much more bitter memories of childhood, as in Chu Mei’s case below.

Chu Mei is the only grandmother still living in a rural area among all eleven researched grandmothers. In fact, her son and daughter-in-law are still rural
residents\textsuperscript{41}. If, for Mei’s mother’s generation, discrimination towards girls was common across all families, no matter whether in urban or rural areas, after the 1970s a difference in these attitudes began to appear between urban and rural due to Mao’s advocacy of gender equality in urban areas and the One Child Policy\textsuperscript{42}. This difference might have made Mei’s childhood even more unbearable. That was why, when Mei started to tell me her story of childhood she hesitated and then, once she finally started, she could not stop crying. ‘If only I was a boy’ is a sentence Mei repeated many times during her interview. When I asked her memories of how her parents reared her, Mei responded,

‘What is childrearing? From the time I could first remember, I do not know what rearing means. I tell you…Ai’you…From the time I remember, I have no idea what rearing means! I only know that I as a child reared my two younger brothers.’

After this, she started to tell a story of how she looked after her younger brothers when she was only six or seven years old herself. Her most bitter feelings were about her education, at which point in the interview she broke down. She could not go to school until very late (when she was around nine or ten) as her father needed her to help with the housework and childcare. Then, although she performed very well in both primary and junior middle school, her father asked her to drop out. She could not forgive him for this decision, and said she was clear it was because she was a girl. From there, she talked about the fact that she was nearly given away after being born – as the third girl, her father decided to give up on her by giving her to another family. However, it was her paternal grandmother who decided to let her stay. Nonetheless, as a third daughter with two younger brothers, Mei was destined to be one of the least popular children at her home.

Mei also recalled that the girls (all three of them) behaved in a really ‘mature way’ when they were young: nobody ever fought for better food over their younger brothers. ‘If there was food there, we knew we could not eat it, it had to be saved for our brothers. Nobody taught us, we just knew it.’

\textsuperscript{41} But, it seemed that Mei’s daughter might change her rural residence to an urban one as she studied in the city and is working there.

\textsuperscript{42} The One Child Policy was implemented much stricter in the urban area than the rural area – many rural areas still allowed more than one child if the first one was a girl (Greenhalgh, 1993).
Similar to Xian, as there was nobody monitoring the children, Mei should also have enjoyed her time for free-play. However, in a totally different way, Mei did not regard this as free play or anything positive. Instead, she felt strongly that, as a girl, even when she was playing without adults around, it was her duty to prioritise her brothers’ happiness and development. Worse than not enjoying her free play time, Mei was electrocuted during her ‘free-play’ and nearly died. This accident was caused by her younger brother, who pushed her over when they were playing in a partly demolished house, Mei said. But she did not blame him, instead, she talked about how unsafe the rural area was for the children and the problems associated with not monitoring the children. She then stopped talking about her own childhood and shifted her attention to a strong comparison of how she takes care of her own children and grandchildren.

This sad story of childhood told by Mei was very much dominated by gender discrimination: her enforced dropping out of school, heavy burden of looking after her brothers and the clear difference in treatment between boys and girls, none of which were part of Xian’s memories. Furthermore, even though both Mei and Xian were forced to stop their education after junior middle school, their reasons and attitudes towards school education made them feel differently about their similar experiences: Xian’s stopping education was forced by the government. This happened to everyone and came with a strong political argument for its benefit; whereas Mei’s stopping education happened after the Cultural Revolution when the value of education was recognised by herself, her family and the community she lived in. She was forced to stop only because she was a girl from a relatively poor rural family. These differences demonstrate the distinctions between the urban and the rural on the one hand and the change of political discourse and its impact on individual subjectivities on the other.

In addition, in terms of differences of social status, all these happy memories were told by grandmothers who came from families who used the first three types of childcare arrangement. In contrast, sad memories were only heard from the last two kinds of childcare situations – the mothers who had to send their children to grandparents who lived separately from them or who had no resources to rely on at
all. This demonstrates the social divisions in this generation of women’s growing-up experiences.

For example, in Xian’s story, their relatively secure playing area – living in the school, with similar aged siblings, meant they could play together - and, most importantly, her mother’s determination to reverse her own traumatic experiences of being discriminated against as a girl, might contribute to it being a happy memory for her. In the two sad stories told by the grandmothers, Mei’s story was dominated by gender discrimination but also reflected a worse living environment. This reflects the beginning of greater differences between rural and urban areas in China during the early industrialisation and modernisation period. The other sad story was also from one of the poorest/lowest status families where the grandmother and her sisters were sent to rural relatives at an early age. The hard life and crowded living situation in the rural area contributed to another negative memory for this grandmother. These two sad stories demonstrate how physical and materially low standards in the rural area, and the lack of support from their mothers in providing better conditions or closer monitoring, led to a harder childhood.

Finally, no matter whether happy or bitter memories, these are all stories told from the present vantage point. Considering all these grandmothers are actively involved in looking after their grandchildren, it is not surprising that, when they talked, they compared the past to their current situation – and there was a huge difference. This difference, in some cases, creates happier memories – comparing the pressure of study on their own children with that which these grandchildren experienced or are experiencing, these grandmothers might appreciate their freedom more. Alternatively, current living experiences created a bitter memory – thinking of all the intensive monitoring and nutritious food, and the warm and comfortable living conditions for their grandchildren or the education of their own daughters, the past can seem more unbearable to these grandmothers. Nevertheless, these (consciously or unconsciously) selected stories convey the real happy or bitter feelings which were meaningful to these women during their interviews and which connected their present experiences with the past in a way they chose, and will also connect with their feelings and actions in the future (e.g. how they rear their grandchildren).
4.3.3 Stories about a Warm Father

The involvement of fathers in looking after young daughters was higher in this generation (five out of twelve fathers) compared to the oldest generation’s fathers (none) and the youngest generation’s fathers (three). This period of an increasing father’s role in childcare was also associated with many of the happy memories told by these grandmothers and involved an extensive description of their ‘warm fathers’. These stories about fathers were all initiated by the grandmothers themselves, even after they were told the research was about mothering experiences. Five of eleven grandmothers initiated stories of their happy memories with fathers. These fathers tended to have relatively high social positions but it was not the determining element, as one father had the lowest social status. However, all these fathers seemed to be more willing to spend time with their children (at least daughters) at home, actively helping with the housework, and some of them had more time than their wives (or had more flexibility in their work) so that they could stay at home.

Two of the fathers had lower status than the mothers. In both cases the daughters, although they did not complain about their mothers’ work, recalled their closer relationship with their father. Also, in both cases, the daughters regarded their fathers as having a better ‘temper’ than their mothers (i.e., it would be their mothers who beat them, not their fathers).

However, there was one case where the father had a really high position and the mother, instead, was a housewife. In this case, the grandmother (Han Xu) started her whole life story by telling me about her father. It seemed her whole life trajectory, in some ways, was directly impacted by her father’s decisions. Her mother, in this case, became invisible, as her father had the resources to help their children solve all life’s problems. However, in her story about her father, what she emphasised was not her father’s power, instead, it was how her father educated them to not use this power to benefit one’s own family. Also, the fact that her father never had a fight with their mother and never beat his children was highly respected and loved by this daughter. He was still a strict father, not allowing children to do anything to damage his reputation, but such a high moral requirement was praised, instead of complained about, by this daughter in her story.
High respect for her father was also reflected in one grandmother’s story about how the father could make everything for his daughter, including all her clothes. This father’s unusual capacity to make things and to do housework was praised highly by the daughter and even the granddaughter. In this case, the father also spent more time at home than the mother who had to work three shifts in a textile factory.

In the following, I will present the case of the grandmother whose father had the lowest status but was loved by his daughter. This love towards her father is not a devaluation of mother’s care but instead, as we will see, a further defence of a different gender role from the norm.

In 1956, Wu Min was born as the third child of a poor family and there were another four younger siblings later. Her father worked in a SCO but then broke his leg so had to stay at home a lot whilst her mother tried all kinds of temporary jobs that she could find to support the family. At the beginning of her life story, Min said,

‘Anyway, I received more father’s love. My mother, very busy in earning money outside home, only father was around. (Interviewer: Er) My father was also busy, earned money, but, father cared more at home. (Interviewer: Er) My mother was out-going. She is still like this even for this age. (Laugh) I likes my mum. My own two children were brought up by their father, mostly by their father, I involved very little.’

Here, Min’s first statement demonstrated her preference for her father. She also argued in several places in her interview that her father was not ‘useless’ (her father stopped full-time work after his leg was injured) in earning money even though, in fact, her mother was clearly the chief breadwinner in her family. On the other hand, Min quickly related her having received more care and love from her father to her own childrearing practices in which, similarly to her mother, it was her husband who played a bigger role in taking care of their daughters. In fact, Min’s whole life story demonstrated that she was very similar to her mother in terms of her ‘out-going’ character and determination to succeed in challenging conditions. However, such a breadwinner role was still criticised, or not appreciated, by today’s mainstream discourse (Jin & Yang, 2015); this is probably why Min started telling her life story.

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43 Min successfully earned a large amount of money and changed her whole family’s status by establishing her own business – running a dental clinic.
by emphasising the importance of her father’s care and love and how much she enjoyed it as a little girl. It can be see a way for her to say that father’s love is as good as mothers, a defense for herself.

When asked for details of her childhood time with her father, Min talked about how he took her to search for treatment for her illness, how her father took her to the river to wash clothes together and that it was never the father who beat her. In telling these stories, Min kept shifting from stories about her father at home to the hard work her mother did outside the home and the fact that most of the time she had with her mother was outside, at construction sites (the main places her mother worked). Min’s effort to keep a balance between father and mother, praising her father without devaluing her mother is meaningful. Considering her own situation, such balanced arguments in her story reflect her own life experiences – in tough living conditions with a husband who earned little, women had to face the challenge and step outside the home if they were determined to change their life situation. However, such stepping out came with huge psychological cost – they had doubts about whether their children would be impacted negatively given the ideology of the necessity of mothering (the virtuous wife and good mother, see Chapter 5). Min, in her childhood story, wanted to demonstrate that it was OK when her father provided ‘alternative’ love and care to her.

This case of the ‘warm father’ demonstrates how the grandmothers’ stories of fathering can closely relate to their family conditions and their mothers’ other roles within and outside their families. Life pressures and the government’s overall policy to encourage women to participate in work when the nation badly needed human resources, pushed women to step outside of the home; at the same time, there were not many support systems available for these mothers and families to rely on to take care of their children. In this larger picture, some fathers, particularly those with lower status than their wives, or who were less capable in earning money, had to play a bigger role in childcare. Such a role was highly valued by the daughters. As Min’s case demonstrates, such a value not only reflected their memories of being cared for and being close to their fathers, but also demonstrates their personal struggles in their own motherhood, against a different ideology about women’s roles
in work and care from their own mothers (from a Liberated Women to the Virtuous Wife and Good Mother, see Chapter 5).

Now we are going to turn to these grandmothers’ daughters (or daughters-in-laws) to see how they were remembered as mothers in another different historical time.

4.4 The Mothers: A Modern Girl

4.4.1 The Sample in Its Historical Context

The majority (nine out of twelve) of the youngest generation (the mothers’ generation) were born in the 1980s, two in the 1970s and one in 1990. All of the mothers’ generation grew up in post-Mao’s China which was characterised by a series of reform policies aimed at introducing a market mechanism into China’s economic system. The ten year Cultural Revolution finished in 1976 when Mao Zedong died and the notorious ‘Gang of Four’ were arrested. Deng Xiaoping, one of the leaders who supported Reform finally took power in 1978. Three things that were the focus of this new reform government impacted on this generation girl’s growing up experiences in particular.

First, an emphasis on education, including re-opening the gaokao system as the only selection mechanism for going to higher education (instead of depending on someone’s family background used in the Cultural Revolution period), implementing nine-year compulsory education and the expansion of higher education later (see Chapter 1). All of these policies were a response to the need for people with knowledge and technologies to re-build the economy, industries and

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44 In June 1970, the Central Government abolished the admission policy for higher education which selected students based on the results of the standard ‘examination for entrance for university’ (gaokao). Instead, the new policy asked universities to select their students according to recommendations from the ‘mass’. This basically means that students were selected according to their background. The peasants, workers and soldiers’ children were regarded as having the purest background. Children from Black Five Groups, intellectuals, and revisionists were among the least likely to be recommended. However, in 1972, the examination system was re-introduced in the selection process, although it was very different from the traditional gaokao. The examination started in 1972 was designed to check some basic cultural knowledge of the recommended students. It was easier than the traditional examination and only the recommended students could take these examinations. In October 1977, after the Cultural Revolution finished, the leader at the time, Deng Xiaoping, announced the return of the entrance examination for university and the admission policy that was based on the standard examination results.
business and to improve people’s life standards. Therefore, education became the new focus for the country and the status of intellectuals changed dramatically, from being criticised as ‘Stinking Old Ninth (choulaojiu)’ to being praised as some of the most useful people and therefore, being of the highest social status. Consequently, parents of the mothers’ generation realised the importance of education for their children and many of them pushed for academic achievement, which resulted in intensified competition in school education. This was the common experience among the mothers’ generation but was alien to their mothers and grandmothers.

These changes are reflected in these girls’ experiences. From six or seven years old, all the mothers’ generation girls started to go to public primary schools, all of them finished junior middle school, and the majority went on to further education. As going to primary and secondary schools was no longer a big issue for the majority of girls in urban areas in the 1980s, the type of schools they went to became important, particularly when there was a clear hierarchy in the quality of teaching and resources between different schools (Kuan, 2015). During the 1980s and 1990s, China’s government kept trying different ways of differentiating schools to encourage them to strive for better quality by competing with each other; but, when such differences became too big, the government took measures to reduce the gap. This meant a constant change in education policy, particularly at local level, and to understand how to choose the best education route for their children could be challenging.

These experiences were also reflected in the girls’ stories, particularly when their parents did not have the resources or knowledge to facilitate finding the best route for them, and this was still a source of complaint today. The differences in schools’ quality (judged by examination results) was not a figment of the imagination of

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45 The ’Stinking Old Ninth (choulaojiu)’ is a Chinese dysphemism for intellectuals used at the Cultural Revolution period when intellectuals were ranked as the ninth within the black ninth categories.
46 According to four different local or national surveys of occupational status, conducted in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, professors, scientists, sociologists, physicists, lawyers and doctors were recognised as the groups with highest social status (Li, 2010a, pp. 34-41).
47 There are differences of how parents pushed their daughters for education according to their SIESs which is addressed later when analysing these M generation women’s stories.
48 These changes of policy were talked about by the interviewed women. I also interviewed local teachers to confirm such frequent modifications of educational polices, particularly relating to school admissions.
these women and their parents, but is demonstrated vividly by their stories of educational experiences (analysed in the cases below) and their results.

Then there was the One-Child Policy. In contrast to their mothers, who usually grew up in a family of around five children, members of this generation were the only child for nearly all urban families and the majority of rural ones. On the one hand, this raised girls’ status/position within a family, but on the other, caused the abortion of many female foetuses, particularly in rural areas, and resulted in an increasingly unbalanced gender ratio in new born babies\(^{49}\). Therefore, there is debate about whether the One-Child policy promoted gender equity, since parents have no choice between boys and girls. The general conclusion is that it has, though some reservations remain (Fong, 2002).

There are long debates, too, about whether this ‘special’ generation became less caring about others, less respectful of their parents and more selfish and aggressive/assertive among both academics and the public. Actually, the generation born in the 1980s has been described in negative terms for a long time, reflecting people’s critical or suspicious attitudes towards this first generation of only-children (Sabet, 2011). From these women’s account we can hear they are defending themselves from such images.

The third important change of this era is the rapid economic development due to the government’s Reform and Open Door policies which partly explain why this generation was described as spoiled (Liu, 2007, pp. 125-127) - the majority of parents (and all parents of the mothers’ generation in this research) tried their best to provide a rich material environment for their daughters. However, such economic development also meant a high women’s employment rate (see Chapter 1); by the time the mothers’ generation were born, nearly all of the mothers worked full-time for the state-owned factories, government or other organisations in the cities. Living arrangements also changed at this time from extended to nuclear families. Ten of the

\(^{49}\)The new-born boys and girls ratio started to increase in 1982 and reached its peak in 2004 at 121(121; 100). A recent drop to 113 in 2015 was reported from 115 in 2014. The normal boys and girls ratio is estimated as around 103 to 107 (data from the official website of the National Health and Family Planning Commission of the People's Republic of China: http://www.nhfpc.gov.cn/ztfl/s3578/201502/ab0ea18da9c34d7789b5957464da51c3.shtml).
twelve women from the mothers’ generation grew up with their parents, separate from their grandparents. In addition, there was less availability of grandparents’ help as many of the grandparents (eight out of twelve) were still working when the youngest generation were born. However, the government wanted to encourage women’s participation in work and therefore, by the 1980s, most state-owned factories or organisations established their own ‘free childcare centres’ (tuo’ersuo). These centres provided a free, but very basic, childcare service for children from as young as 72 days (when maternity leave stopped) to three years (He, 1990b). However, most of the mothers’ generation’s mothers tried to arrange some childcare for their daughters for the first year, including help from grandparents who did not work, or even great-grandmothers, and finding nannies who could have their children during the day. There was a tendency to delay sending their children to the ‘free childcare centre’ until their child reached one year old. The majority of the mothers’ generation spent about two years in the childcare centre until they were 3 years old which was a legitimate age for going to public kindergartens in cities.

There was further informal support from the workplace for mothers at this time: the working environment was much more flexible/tolerant in allowing women to fulfill their roles in childcare. For instance, colleagues would not complain about someone leaving early or arriving late if they were a mother with young children, or female colleagues would offer help to each other at work. Most work places would accept the presence of children. This flexibility, although helpful, demonstrated the expectation that women fulfill dual roles as both full-time workers and the main carer for their children during the post-Mao time. Many of the women in the mothers’ generation remembered going to their mother’s working place as a ‘playground’, meeting new friends, or doing their homework. These working places included the Police Bureau, factories, schools and hospitals.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, particularly after Deng Xiaoping’s ‘Southern Tour’ in 1992\(^{50}\), the Reform policy started to accelerate and extended its impact to

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\(^{50}\)To reassert his economic agenda, in the spring of 1992, Deng made his famous southern tour of China, visiting Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and spending the New Year in Shanghai, using his travels as a method of reasserting his economic policy after his retirement from office. On his tour, Deng made speeches and generated large local support for his reformist platform.
the majority of the population, including the mothers’ generation’s parents as well as these women’s lives. First, the introduction of the market mechanism and a new emphasis on efficiency caused the bankrupting or closure of many state-owned factories, which started a new trend of laying people off. As much research demonstrates (e.g., Liu, 2007), it was middle-aged women who were impacted most by this trend. In this research, we hear stories of how this resulted in a tougher life for these girls’ mothers and how this in turn impacted on the girls’ growing up experiences. On the other hand, some ‘brave’ ones resigned their ‘iron bowl’ work and start their own business (‘Jump to the Sea’) (Hurst, 2009). This was a huge change in people’s values as they used to be connected strongly with the workplace and believed it would provide everything for them as long as they worked hard. However, when the security associated with an ‘iron bowl’ job disappeared, belief in the system and the need to work hard for the country/government was also shaken up. Particularly those who ‘jumped to the sea’, adopted different values which were promoted by Deng Xiaoping’s new economic policy: individualism and capitalism (Rofel, 1999). Those who became successful (and rich) by ‘jumping to the sea’ also shifted their belief in the value of education as they observed many success stories of becoming rich without being educated. Therefore, in the 1990s, there was also a new trend of arguing about the usefulness of education and this was the period when many of these girls went to secondary school (Hao, 2009). Such different families’ fates and parents’ choices would leave a clear mark on these girls’ life trajectories.

4.4.2 The Stories of Growing-up

The omission of stories about poverty or tough living standards was one of the greatest differences between the mothers’ generation and their mothers and grandmothers. None of the mothers mentioned not having enough food, clothes or any other economic aspects of life. Instead, many of them talked about how their parents tried hard to buy the best food, clothes or even musical instruments for them. However, this was not a generation that recounted the happiest memories of childhood. Although they all recognised the fact that they were raised in a much more well-resourced environment than their parents, the majority of mothers talked

Although there was debate on whether or not Deng actually said it, his perceived catchphrase, “To get rich is glorious” (致富光荣), unleashed a wave of personal entrepreneurship.
about more negative themes such as being strictly disciplined (‘guan’) by mothers or fathers (eight out of twelve Ms), being beaten (seven out of twelve Ms); the lack of push or support for their education (six out of twelve Ms); conflicts when they were teenagers (five out of twelve Ms); ‘ruthless’ fathers (four out of twelve Ms); the feelings of loneliness (four out of twelve Ms) and the frequent fights between parents (two out of twelve Ms). Interestingly, although this generation was commonly regarded as a ‘spoiled’ generation, only two Ms mentioned such experiences. In the following, I will use some Ms’ narrations to show how these women talked about their growing-up experiences in the different historical context.

A. Strict Guan, Rebellious Teenagers and Parental Love

Strict guan51 (管 discipline) was common among the majority of the mothers’ generation’s stories of childhood. But the focus of ‘guan’ varies, including punishing girls’ being ‘naughty’, not allowing girls to play freely out door, restricting their interactions with boys when teenagers, being pushed to study harder, and educating girls in gendered and appropriated behaviours (‘proper’ girls’ behaviours). However, no matter what particular focus of guan was mentioned by these women, they usually talked about a particular period of ‘being a rebellious teenager’ in their stories. Depending on who executed this strict guan, these girls could be particularly rebellious towards that parent. On the other hand, as discussed earlier, some researchers (e.g., Chao 1994) highlighted such strict guan as having a different meaning from ‘authoritarian’ that applied in Western psychology and parenting literature. To guan children strictly did not conflict with parents’ expressing their care and love to their children. This was also reflected by these women’s recounts of parental love even when discussing how much they disliked the strict guan of the past. In the following, I will use Shen Meng’s stories to demonstrate such a complicated but important topic in her childhood.

51 The concept of guan has been introduced by Tobin (1989) and was extended by Chao (1994). They explained that ‘guan’, as Chinese parents named their disciplinary activities, literately means ‘to govern’. It has a very positive connotation in China, because it can mean ‘to care for’ or even ‘to love’ as well as ‘to govern.’ Therefore, as demonstrated in these women’s stories, when they mentioned too strict ‘guan’, it usually implied a negative meaning of ‘guan’; but when some older generations complained about not enough ‘guan’ they associated this word with positive feelings. See Chapter 2’s discussion.
Sheng Meng was born in 1982 to a low SIES family. Her father was a worker with the Long-Distance Bus Company and her mother, a warehouse keeper for a factory, was laid-off in the early 1990s. After being fired, her mother worked in a local supermarket as a temporary worker. If we imagine a spectrum of strictness of discipline, Shen Meng’s parents were definitely at the very strict end. Meng’s stories demonstrate a strong emphasis on not wanting to lose face in front of others, particularly, anything that demonstrated an interest in material goods would be discouraged firmly. Meng told two stories as examples of how her parents guan her strictly, which always ended up in a ‘fierce beating up (yidunbaoda)’. The first story was about some visitors who bought presents for Meng when they visited her home. As a child, she was attracted by the colourful packages and she touched these presents before the guests left. After the guests were gone, she was beaten for demonstrating impatience towards the presents. The second story was when Meng and her family were visiting some other people’s home. At meal time, there was one plate of ham very near to her. As Meng argued that ‘I was just bored with their conversation so I could only keep eating.’ She finished the whole dish and the host noticed that and offered to give her another plate of ham as it seemed she really liked it. After they went home, her father beat her to teach her that she should never eat too much as it showed other people that you really liked some kinds of food.

This strict ‘guan’, mainly executed by her father, caused Meng to strongly dislike him since she was little and when she was a teenager there were constant fights between them. Shen Meng used a word like ‘ruthless emperor’ or ‘dictator’ to describe her father and described herself as extremely rebellious towards him, particularly as a teenager, ‘Whatever he said, I would be against him.’

Although Meng particularly blamed her father as the one who executed the violent discipline, she also mentioned that her mother also used physical punishment on her, particularly when it came to issues about the correct behaviour for a girl. Her father said to her there were two things that should be absolutely avoided as a girl: ‘being greedy for food and being lazy for work. (haochilanzuo)’ This comment was made after another beating when he saw her eating snacks on the streets with her friends. This particular emphasis on girls’ behaviour was, again, very common among nearly all the mothers’ generation’s (nine out of twelve) growing up experiences. The
common things mentioned by these women were: not being allowed to play outside like the boys once they went to secondary school (for some, even starting from primary school), special attention given to what girls wear (not too short, too tight or too colourful) and being very alert towards their relationship with boys. As demonstrated by Meng’s stories, when it came to girls’ behaviour, both parents would agree with these rules.

Such strict guan made Meng want to escape from home and affected her decisions about the choice of senior high school (she deliberately chose to go one that was far away from home) and her efforts to find jobs away from Bengbu. However, in the end, Meng chose to come back to the hometown after her parents’ had made several phone calls. As she said, ‘they loved me so much and I could not leave them …’

Where did Shen Meng find her parents’ love under such violent and strict guan? First of all, although both of her parents were strict, there was a clear difference between the methods her mother used and those of her father. Meng commented with great respect how her mother would write letters to communicate with her about some difficult issues, particularly when she was a teenager (see more in Chapter 6). She gave an example of how her mother wrote her a letter to explain the fact that her pet dog died when she was not at home and tried to encourage her to face it bravely. This contrast was probably the main reason that Meng kept a really good relationship with her mother even though she also complained that her mother was a bit too ‘traditional’ and ‘nagging’ sometimes.

Then, regarding her father, even though Shen Meng had long term relationship issues with him, she argued on his behalf in the interview that it was because of his hard working conditions outside the home that made him have a bad temper at home. ‘My mum had told me very often that how my father was treated badly outside and asked me to tolerate him. ... I know that he loves me even though I could not accept his method.’

This combination of strict and very often violent discipline with gentle care and effective explanation of why the parents were disciplining in such a way did not stop the girls’ recognising their parents love. Instead, all the mothers who experienced
strict *guan* in childhood argued for their parents at the same time and repeatedly said how their parents, in fact, loved them very much. Shen Meng’s story is a typical example of such complex emotional relationships between these girls and their parents. Similar to Shen Meng’s stories, the other six mothers (the mothers’ generation) also recalled their memories of being *guan* strictly and it also resulted in a rebellious adolescence and later on, a strong feeling of ‘escaping’ from home. Interestingly, in the end, none of them achieved their goal of escaping and all of them emphasized their strong feeling of responsibility towards their parents and their wanting to live close to them.

How to understand such complex relationships and these mother’s generation women’s choices and stories? First, I have mentioned the existing literature (eg., Chao, 1994) about the particular Chinese parenting practices (*guan*) that cannot simply be explained as a ‘authoritarian’ style but as a combination of close monitoring and providing care. Second, all these stories were told from the present view when these ‘daughters’ have become mothers themselves. Such a transition of their identities (i.e., from daughters to mothers) probably also made them understand more the difficulties that their parents faced before and the hard work of childrearing and, therefore, to express more understanding.

**B. Materially Spoilt?**

This picture of harsh discipline seems to be contradictory to the spoiled generation picture painted by the media or some literature (see the historical context). However, in these women’s memories, there is one aspect about which they never complained – a materially much improved living environment. Some of them said directly that they were ‘spoiled’ by this material support and many others regarded their parents’ efforts of providing nutritious food and good clothes as a way of expressing love.

For example, Chen Tian was born in 1985 to a family that enjoyed a little better income than many others due to her father’s ‘jumping into the sea’ – he successfully ran his own business for ten years (however, her family is still belong to a middle level of social-and-economic status, see Appendix V and Chapter 6). She recalled always enjoying the good food that her father bought for her and how she
redistributed it generously with her playmates. In Tian’s story, she had a particularly bad relationship with her father due to his ‘bad temper’ and the many ‘beatings’ she received. Nevertheless, she argued in her interview about her father’s love towards her being partly to do with his generous attitude to whatever Tian wanted materially, from clothes to food to expensive musical instruments and computers.

Then, in Shen Meng’s case, as we saw earlier, her parents belonged to the lowest social-economic status both within the researched twelve families and compared to a national survey (Li, 2010a). However, even in this family, as Meng said herself, her parents never let her down in terms of providing enough nutritious food and good clothing, ‘as a child, I never felt I was lacking something (from a material point of view).’

These stories were recounted by the women in a way to show how their parents’ cared very much about their children growing-up in a materially (relatively) rich environment. This is a big contrast from the last two generations where material deprivation was present in nearly all the different households and a feature of the women’s stories. Such a contrast is probably what ‘spoilt’ means when used by the media or some of the women. However, as we have seen in Shen Meng’s and Chen Tian’s stories, spoiling materially does not mean lacking discipline.

C. Pushing for Education and a Lack of Educational Support

This generation grew up in a society that puts much emphasis on education. In a way, the importance of education (or culture- wenhua in everyday language) has always been a special feature in Chinese society. However, the grandmothers’ generation experienced a sharp change in such cultural traditions when it was deemed admirable to learn from workers, peasants and soldiers but not intellectuals. Such a historical change means the grandmothers’ generation have complicated attitudes towards their daughters’ education. Furthermore, as all the mothers’ generation grew up in dual full-time workers’ families, their parents’ busy schedules

52 See Mather (1995)'s discussion about how education is treated as a key means to prepare a boy to establish himself so that he can ‘make a name that resounds to later generations’, a final aim of filial piety since ancient China. The One Child Policy incentivised more parents to ‘push’ their children, both boys and girls, since the late 1970s.
very often meant they lacked parental support for their education. Finally the sudden economic gain from marketisation also produced a new ideology of education being useless in the 1990s.

All these different experiences from the grandmothers’ generation seem to have impacted on their daughters’ experiences in parental support (or lack of it) for education, which is also associated with the SIES of these women’s families. All four girls from the low SIES families mentioned little about how their mothers invested time in educating them from an early age compared to many middle SIES girls’ recall of their mothers’ closely monitoring their education and it being sometimes associated with a strict guan.

For example, Sun Lei was born in 1980 to a middle-class family where both of her parents were officials. Her memories of childhood describe a ‘serious mother and kind father’ (yanmucifu 严母慈父) and she complained about how her mother only worried about her study rather than her other interests. She recalled the story of how she was really interested in drawing and won several competitions in the city. However, when her mother found this ‘interest’ distracted her too much from her studies, she forced her to stop it and removed her from the school drawing club.

In contrast, the only complaining story about a lack of educational support came from the Mothers from families with low social-economic status. Shen Meng again provided a very vivid emotional story about how her parents could not support her education even though she did well in school.

Meng went to an average primary school where she performed very well, both academically and socially – she was particularly proud of her capability as a little broadcaster for her school (boyinyuan). However, when she was graduating, the selection of students by entrance examination was cancelled and all of the students

53 In terms of differences between primary and secondary schools, the major distinction in quality (judged by academic results) is among the Key primary and secondary schools and average ones in the 1980s and 1990s.
in her school were automatically transferred to an average junior middle school. Meng said it was possible that her parents could have paid a bit more money to change her to a good junior middle school, but her father decided not to. Meng regarded this as a bad decision which had a huge impact on her life. Then, when she graduated from senior middle school, she found it really difficult to make decision about which universities/colleges to choose. She could choose to apply for universities directly but it would involve the risk of not being successful. If she wanted to be safe, she should apply for post-secondary institutes (Appendix XII) where she would have a better chance of admission. She was really torn apart and needed her father’s advice. However, her father did not want to help her at all and Meng remembered that she cried so much as she felt nobody from her family could give her any information to help her at a very crucial point of her life.

In Meng’s account, it is not about her parents not supporting her education. However, navigating the complicated and changing education systems to make good decisions on behalf of their daughter was beyond her parents’ capacity. A similar situation is also described by some grandmothers when they recounted their mothering practices and therefore, it became a significant ‘regret’ in their story (see Chapter 5).

Finally, two women from upper-middle level SIES families, talked about their mothers’ lack of care about their education. Zhao Jia was one who actually did go to university. However, she attributed her relatively successful education to her grandfather’s support rather than her mother’s. To compare, her older brother had never been able to go to university as her mother had put little emphasis on it. In Zhao Jia’s case we will see in Chapter 6 how such a lack of care about education relates to a particular strong personality and independency as well as a distanced relationship between mother and daughter, demonstrated through three women in the family chain.

The other mother, Li Wei, was also from a well-resourced family and grew up in Shanghai. She held one of the lowest education qualifications of all the twelve interviewed women from her generation. Her mother had to leave her care to her maternal grandmother (GG Li Bei) and so had much less involvement in bringing
her up. In addition, similarly to Zhao Jia, Wei’s mother is a successful business woman with strong career-orientation and Li Wei also has a distanced relationship with her mother. Her complaints about her mothers’ (lack of) support for her education will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Overall, from these women’s accounts of their parents’, particularly mothers’, attitudes and practices in supporting (or not supporting) their education demonstrates a complicated picture of ‘educational push’ in China. How they recount these experiences relates not only to their family’s SIES but also their current SIES. For the two women from upper-middle SIES families who also enjoy a comfortable life currently, although they complained about their mothers’ lack of support, overall, they do not feel strongly about their level of education. In contrast, Shen Meng’s long and emotional account of her lacking support demonstrates her current struggle (see Chapter 6) in striving for a better life. Although she successfully moved up the social ladder compared to her parents, her tough life made her feel more pain about what she lacked, namely better educational qualifications. For other women (e.g., Sun Lei) who secured a middle level SIES much easier than Shen Meng, their complaints about educational pushing focused on how their mothers or fathers had been too strict with them and they expressed a desire for better parental understanding of their psychological well-being and/or other talents. Such a focus reflects today’s dominant ideology of childrearing for many middle-class families (e.g., an emphasis on psychological well-being and investment in extra-curricular activities) and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

D. Preference for Boys in the Modern Times

As mentioned earlier, the One Child Policy did raise the status of most girls’ at home. In the cities, most families treat their only daughter the same as they would boys – with high educational expectations and strong emotional attachment. However, there were two women from the mothers’ generation who talked about their experiences of being rejected as a girl even in the urban area. There were another two women who talked indirectly about the differences between girls and boys. For the two women who experienced rejection, one was from a relatively high social class and economic background whereas the other was from a low one.
Zhao Jia, born in 1977, had a relatively high social-economic background as her father worked in a high position in local government and her mother was a manager in a factory and later on became a successful business woman. Her experience of being rejected happened when her parents were living apart and preparing for divorce (which, in the end, never happened). Jia was rejected by her paternal grandparents and aunts who said they only wanted her brother. Therefore, Jia went back to her maternal grandparents home to find her mother, who was at work, but her aunt came out to ask her to go, as they also did not want a girl. Jia said this left ‘a shadow in my heart’.

Wu Juan, born in 1975, came from a much poorer family. Her father was a factory worker and her mother was an assistant in a local dentistry clinic. Juan’s mother had Juan when she was only 19 years old and was thrown out of her family with no support for childcare at all. When Juan was little, her parents had to send her to her paternal grandparents, who her parents did not get along with. Juan remembered clearly that her grandparents and aunts would talk publically that they did not like Juan as she was a girl. Instead her sister, who behaved much more like a boy, was given much more attention.

These stories were told by the women in a bitter way, even though, compared to what their grandmothers experienced in a very patriarchal society, they were much better treated as girls. In both cases, these girls were not the only child as they were both born before 1979, the year of implementation of the One Child Policy. They could compare themselves to other girls who were an only child and who suffered much less discrimination; the observed differences might therefore have made them feel worse.

Interestingly, the other two women who compared the different treatment of boys and girls also had siblings: both have younger brothers. One is from a rural area (where it was legal to have two children if the first one was a girl) and one is in the city (her younger brother was ‘illegal’), but from a low SIES\textsuperscript{54}. These two girls, when telling their stories, both argued that their parents did not treat them

\textsuperscript{54}But later, she witnessed the huge success of her father's business and therefore, the change in her family's living standards.
differently. However, talking about the time after they married, they started to comment on the differences in terms of parental attention, care and material support between them and their brothers.

According to the differences between these four women who have siblings and the rest who do not, it seems that the ‘only child’ girls received less discrimination within their families. However, these girls’ stories also demonstrated the difficulty in changing families’ attitudes of preference for boys whenever there was a chance to ‘choose’. This is consistent with the literature about the rising rate of abortion of female foetuses in China after the implementation of the One Child Policy. This is not to say that all these girls growing up from families with siblings turned out worse than the Only Child. However, these stories warn about having a too simplistic view on how One Child Policy changed or did not change families’ preference towards boys and puts a picture of a linear progress in gender equality in modern China into question.

### 4.5 Summary

This chapter has focused on the growing up experiences of three generations of women in China, drawing on the stories told by the women from twelve families. Important changes in these women’s account can be seen which were shaped by the changing social, cultural, political and economic contexts in which they grew up, as well as the particular biographies of their families.

The great-grandmothers’ accounts contain more bitter stories than the other two generations due to the particularly tough historical context in early to middle 20th century China: the wars, absences of fathers, declining family living standards and prevalent poverty and evident gender inequalities both these women and their mothers suffered from. This is probably why their accounts focus very much on how their mothers dealt with daily difficulties, most of the time effectively (as a capable housewife and caring mother), but sometimes failing to protect their daughters (as a useless mother). In the worse situation, a mother would sacrifice the daughters’ interest to favour a boy or to obey/support her husband’s harsh discipline towards the daughter as GG Sun Feng recalled.
In a different historical period (the second half of the 20th century) when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established a socialist country, the grandmothers’ generation grew up in a much less discriminatory environment: women’s participation in work was encouraged and the majority of girls’ basic needs such as food and clothing would not be denied and they enjoyed better access to education compared to their mothers. In fact, compared to the other two generations, this generation told the happiest stories about their childhood. This is also the generation who had the most positive memories about their fathers’ care. However, these relatively happier stories do not mean there was no suffering. Due to the slow economic development of the country, most of the girls still experienced many deprivations, particularly during the Great Famine. Also, these happy memories do not mean they enjoyed a lot of their mothers’ care. Instead, they talked about a ‘free-range style’ where they were just left alone most of the time due to their parents’ busy working schedule or the many political movements that they had to participate in day and night. This ‘free-range style’ for many, recalled from today, was a happy one as they could play with other siblings, whereas to others with worse living conditions it was a dangerous one. This was vividly expressed by Chu Mei’s story of ‘no experience of being reared’ but her experiences of the difficulty of rearing her little brother since she was 6 years old. Such differences also demonstrate the particular historical time when the development gap between urban and rural started to increase quickly.

The youngest generation of women grew up in a modern China where market reform had started (since 1980s) and capitalism started to change the ‘pure’ socialist society. None of these women told stories of a lack of food, but remembered being ‘spoiled’ materially. As the ‘Only Child’ (most of them), girls were treasured as much as boys. However, these women’s accounts contained more negative experiences which reflected another side of the historical context. One is to do with women’s increased participation in work, which meant all of these girls grew up in a dual earner family. To make the situation more difficult, in the urban area many couples chose to live separately from their parents which meant these girls also had much less support from grandparents. Many grew up in institutional care (free-childcare centres) and spent much time at home alone when they reached school age. Living in a much smaller-sized family (nuclear) can probably explain why these
women encountered more relational problems with their parents. Differing from their parents’ experiences, these girls also were under greater pressure regarding education as society started to promote the importance of knowledge and technology and hence schooling for children. The heated competition within a selective education system meant many women recounted pressure from parents or blamed a lack of support from parents for their unfavorable career route today. Finally, compared with stories of warm fathers told by the older generation, this generation complained about a ‘ruthless’ father who was much less involved in daily childcare responsibilities but played a big role in pushing for education or emphasizing particular ‘girls’ behaviours’. Such a change has been recognised by some researchers who see a ‘backward’ trend in terms of gender equity in China, compared to the early Mao Zedong period. They have argued that the new individualism and capitalism (Geng, 2012) (Yan, 2009) in China encouraged men to be masculine (Song, 2011b, 2012). This helps us to understand the complex picture of gender in this period which does not present a lineal progress when comparing three generations.

Another clear difference across generations lies in how childhood was experienced. Both the great-grandmother and the grandmothers’ accounts demonstrate children were expected to self-manage their lives in most situations, although the great-grandmothers’ generation’s memory of such self-management was much more bitter due to the harsh living conditions for girls and their mothers. In addition, many family members, not just parents, were regarded as capable of disciplining these children when needed. In contrast, the recounts from the mothers’ generation demonstrate childhood was much more monitored, protected and also disciplined/guan by the parents, which was probably why they complained more about being disciplined. In addition, a special teenage stage combined with the concept of teenage rebellion only emerged during this generation. Such a focus on a special childhood and teenage phase probably partly explains the negative themes that were mentioned more by women at the mothers’ generation even though they enjoyed a much better material life and more equal support.

These sharp changes all impacted on these women’s experiences of growing up. On the other hand, not all of the girls of the same generation experienced the same type
of childhood. The particular biographical time and family situation explains differences between the accounts of women within the same generation.

For example, some of the women from the oldest generation, even though observing their mothers’ difficult life at home, still recognised their mothers’ capacity in managing a livelihood as well as protecting their daughters; whereas the others blamed their mothers’ lack of ability to support girls and who sometimes even made their lives harder. Here, a family’s own patriarchal culture and its structure and resources seemed to impact on the mother’s capacity in providing care for, or exploitation of, their own daughter. For example the fact that GG Li Bei’s father and grandfather were not around might provide more room for her mother to adopt strategies to protect her, whereas GG Sun Feng’s father seemed to be particularly powerful in controlling his wife. Furthermore, these influences can be transmitted to the next generation(s) as Sun Feng and Wang Fang’s stories demonstrate. Sun Feng purposely treated her daughters better than her son due to her own memory of being discriminated against by her mother and Wang Fang’s determination to strive for a better life as her reaction to her mother being ‘useless’.

For the grandmothers’ generation, there was an increase in ‘warm fathers’ in these women’s accounts, more than the other generations. However, this still only came from half of the grandmothers’ stories, which demonstrates how particular family cultures and relationships impact on such arrangements. Within these grandmother’s memories of warm fathers, there were fathers from low SIES, middle SIES or relatively high SIES. Therefore, the SIES on its own cannot explain why some fathers were involved much more than others. Even in a low SIES family, as Wu Min’s story demonstrates, her mothers’ particular personality – outgoing and striving for a better life – seems to play an essential role in creating the particular conditions that her father had to get involved more at home. Interestingly, Wu Min also identifies her own similarities with her mother in this personality, which impacted on her own mothering practices – her husband was involved more than herself.

For the mothers’ generation, however, the market reforms made a family’s SIES influence the girls’ growing up experiences in a more salient way. For example Shen
Meng had many more emotional stories to tell about the harsh discipline or the lack of parental support in education compared to girls from the middle level who complained about too much educational push. On the other hand, particular family characteristics can also play an important role. For instance, in terms of educational support, two girls from upper-middle SIES families also complained about their mothers’ lack of care about their education. These two girls’ situations also present their particular family culture and relationship: both had distanced relationships with their mothers and both mothers were strongly career-oriented and successfully managed their own businesses.

Another clear difference across families in this generation is the distinctive experiences of discrimination towards girls from different families: the family with an only child and the family with two children. In the latter case (four families), all of the women recounted their unhappy memories of being discriminated against and said they were impacted greatly by this discrimination.

When comparing these women’s accounts, we need to bear in mind the research method used in inducing these life stories. First, all stories were told from a present point of view, therefore the emotions, arguments, evaluations and defences demonstrated through these childhood stories were influenced by these women’s current positions and life experiences up to the time of the interview. It is no surprise that the younger generations talked more about childhood experiences than the older ones, although some of the oldest great-grandmothers told their childhood stories at length! Age is definitely relevant but did not determine the way they told their stories. Then, relating to the topic, these women’s current position in childrearing also impacted on their memories of their own stories. Both the middle generation and the youngest generation are involved in childcare on a daily basis. For the middle generation, their observations of the current emphasis on early development and education, the care towards even minor issues such as feeding time and method reminded them about their own mothering experiences and experiences of being mothered. As most of them chose to tell a positive experience of childhood and emphasised free-play and a lack of monitoring, this might be also be a response to today’s intensive mothering phenomena (Jin & Yang, 2015) which they did not agree with. In terms of the youngest generation, most of them are willing to join the
intensive mothering club even though many of them felt they lacked the resources and time to implement this. However, their disagreement with the ‘traditional methods’ and their determination to create something different and ‘better’ for their children might make their recall of childhood more negative than it actually was.

The second relevant aspect of this research method (BNIM) is that all the stories about childhood belonged to bigger stories - the stories about their whole lives. Therefore, although analytically this chapter discussed these stories independently, it is important to remember the influence of the bigger life stories on the partial ones. This means, these childhood stories also served a purpose in telling a larger or more ‘coherent’ story of these women’s lives. For example, some comments about their childhood or parents could be an Orientation (Labov, 1972) of their whole life stories. It is beyond the remit of this chapter to connect all these childhood stories with larger life stories. Furthermore, many narrative researchers (e.g. Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Phoenix, 2008) have argued that small stories have sufficient value and richness to be analysed on their own. However, Chapter 5 and 6 will pick up where we leave here: looking at these women’s life stories in a more integrated way when discussing their mothering experiences and intergenerational transmission processes.

Finally, this chapter has focused on women’s memories of their own experiences of being brought up. These stories are helpful for us to understand how women perceived the care they received from mothers and other family members. Across all three generations, we hear both complaints about and understandings of their mothers and fathers, no matter whether it was in the hardest environments or in materially sufficient modern times. These ‘understandings’ demonstrate children’s awareness of their parent’s limits within specific conditions and therefore, they are tolerant of an imperfect childhood. It is, maybe, this intergenerational understanding and ‘forgiving’ that keeps all ‘problematic’ families and relationships together and which, itself, is transmitted successfully between generations. In the next chapter, we will look at how mothers told stories of their own childrearing experiences.

55 Bhopal, Brannen, and Heptinstall (2000) have similar findings in their study of children's care in families through the perspectives of children in the UK.
Chapter 5  From ‘Liberated Woman’, ‘Virtuous Wife and Good Mother’ to Full-time Mother

5.1  Introduction and Concepts

In the previous Chapter, mothering practices were described and analysed through the eyes of their daughters. This chapter focuses on women’s accounts of their own childrearing practices. It explores how mothering connects with women’s other roles and practices, including that of worker. The first section reviews some feminist literature on women’s care and work and clarifies how the varied types of ‘work’ these three generations of women engaged in are conceptualized and classified. Then I moved on to analyse six women’s detailed lived lives and told stories from three generations. As in Chapter 4, each generation’s historical context relating to mothering practices and women’s participation in work are described first. Then, in line with the BNIM’s analytical process explained in Chapter 3, each case is presented in two separate sections: the life history summarised by key ‘Life Phases’ (Wengraf, 2001, p.286-287) and the told stories, before synthesizing to reach an understanding of these women’s stories of motherhood.

5.1.1  Work and Care

Feminist researchers (Brannen & Moss, 1991; Oakley, 1974; Segal, 1987; Stacey, 1950) have argued that the ideological separation of work at home from the work outside it, and the different principles and values assigned to these two distinct gendered spheres, has abstracted the worker from the conditions of his or her reproduction. This reproduced women’s oppression and dependence on men. In women’s experience, however, the two spheres are not separate. Therefore, connecting these two separate spheres, and recognizing the value of reproductive as well as productive labour have been a priority for feminist researchers. These researchers have recognised women’s role in reproduction (such as Sevenhuijsen (1998)’s and Tronto (1993)’s concept of the ethic of care deriving from women’s role as a carer), identified the invisibility of women’s unpaid emotional labour (Lynch, 1989), and treated women’s housework in a similar way to employed work (Oakley, 1974). By focussing on everyday practices, women’s lives can be understood as full of hard choices, negotiations, and continual reconstruction of
identities in both public and private spheres (Brannen et al., 2004; Finch et al., 2003; Gerson, 1986). In this chapter, I analyse mothers’ experiences of childrearing in the context of managing paid and unpaid work in different historical periods.

Unlike British mothers who experience periods of being a full-time housewife (Brannen et al., 2004), the three generations of mothers in this thesis were/are nearly all working mothers (see their work trajectories in Appendix XIII). The particular social and political environments made non-working mothers (housewives) either impossible or undesirable in socialist China (from 1949 onwards). It is only very recently that a being a full-time mother has started to become acceptable and even desirable, although it occurs only in a few privileged families (Shen, 2014). Therefore, for the majority of women who lived in China during the period covered in this research (from 1920s to 2015), being a mother also meant being a worker.

The above discussion about women’s work at home and outside home gives the word ‘work’ multiple meanings which need clarification. In this thesis/chapter, ‘work’ includes all types of labour (physical and emotional) which is undertaken either at home or outside the home and relates to both production and reproduction. I use ‘paid work’ as a term that denotes women’s work to make a living. The form of paid work undertaken by mothers has varied significantly across the three generations. For the great-grandmothers’ generation, some were full-time employees of state-owned organisations or the government; many others worked in all sorts of non-contracted types of job: construction work, farm work, or making clothes/food either for other people or to sell on the street. For the grandmothers’ generation, everyone had full-time jobs, and they were mostly employed by state-owned or collective-owned enterprises. When Economic Reform started, there were also increasing numbers of women involved in establishing their own or family businesses since the late 1980s. The majority of the youngest generation are full-time employees but the type of jobs vary much more than those of their mothers and there are also more part-time jobs available when they became mothers. Therefore, when I refer to the particular form of paid work that women were/are involved in, I

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56 Some of the middle generation were laid off from state-owned factories and forced to become housewives, about which they felt betrayed and shamed, see Chapter 1/4.
may also use specific terms such as ‘full-time jobs’, ‘temporary jobs’, ‘farm/agricultural work’, ‘family business’ and ‘part-time jobs’.

However, there is another type of unpaid work that takes place outside home. For example, several great-grandmothers worked voluntarily on ‘Residents’ Committees’\textsuperscript{57}. Therefore, I will use ‘work outside home’ to include both paid work and unpaid work that does not relate to one’s domestic work at home. In terms of women’s unpaid labour within a family, I will use ‘domestic work’, ‘housework’, ‘childcare’ or ‘emotional work’ to describe the specific labour that women are involved with.

5.2 The Great-grandmothers’ Generation

In Chapter 4 we saw that nearly all\textsuperscript{58} of the mothers of the great-grandmothers had no experience of working outside home as full-time employees. By observing their own mothers (their roles, places, and interactions with other family members), the great-grandmothers grew up understanding that a women’s place was mainly at home and women’s work meant mainly housework, childrearing and caring for other family members. In fact, from their stories of growing up, we can see that many girls started to help their mothers to do housework or to look after younger siblings early in their life, both as home education for girls and as useful labour. As girls, most knew very well their unwelcome position in the home and waited for the moment that they were married, becoming a member of another family and detached from their own.

However, what women observed as girls changed dramatically once they became old enough to leave home and were ready to ‘repeat’ their mother’s life trajectories. After several wars (refer to Chapter 4), in 1949 the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was established by the Communist Party (CPP). This ‘new’ government claimed their political departure from the GMD, the Imperialist Western countries and Confucianism and declared the country would follow a new political ideology:

\textsuperscript{57}‘Residents’ Committees’ emerged in the 1950s, initially as a way of managing the residents who did not work in state-owned organisations.

\textsuperscript{58}Except for one great-grandmother from a rich and high status family in the city and another one who gained some employment through her daughter after she was more than 40 years old.
modern Marxism (Rofel, 1999). Specifically, this new government actively and publically advocated two new directions: an equal society for everyone and a modern nation. Improving the status of women was a specific goal based on Marx and Engels’ theory that social reproduction is an integrated process under socialism (Cook & Dong, 2011; Engels & Morgan, 1978). In particular, under the Marxist doctrine that women’s emancipation is contingent on their participation in socialized labour, women’s full participation in paid work was regarded as a key goal to realise women’s liberation (Cook & Dong, 2011; Rofel, 1999). To achieve the goals of a modern country, great resources were invested in establishing large factories and new industries with help from the former Soviet Union59. This also meant a great demand for human resources in nearly all industries.

Two major actions were undertaken by the state to ‘free’ women from their ‘burden’ at home (Song, 2011b). First, the new socialist government established some institutional support for childcare. However this support varied significantly according to women’s positions60 in their full-time jobs. For example, the 56 days maternity leave would not be given to mothers61 who had not gained full-time worker status from a State-Owned Enterprise (SOE). The ‘free nannies’ service could only be enjoyed by women who held high enough positions in government or whose husbands had senior positions and, at the same time, the women were full-time workers themselves. For the majority of others, there was no direct childcare support for the first few years when children were heavily dependent on adults62. This limited institutional support did not challenge the fundamental gendered role of childcare responsibility and household management: it was mothers who were responsible for managing the home and providing care for their family (Wang,

59 About 47 projects were established with the help of the Former Soviet Union covering many areas such as construction, energy and raw materials development.
60 For the great-grandmothers’ generation, there were women who also enjoyed some institutional support based on both their own full-time work position and their husband’s higher job positions. However, this only happened in one case out of twelve great-grandmothers. This did not mean that men’s work was less important. Most of the men still possessed higher job positions and salaries than their wives, and, therefore, contributed more for the material living of the whole family. However, in terms of institutional support for early childcare, women’s own job positions seemed to be more important. Both of the detailed cases of the great-grandmothers demonstrated this point.
61 Seven out of twelve great-grandmothers had at least one or all of their children before they gained full-time worker status in SOEs.
62 Both the free-childcare centres and the public kindergartens only became popular during the grandmothers’ generation, as mentioned in Chapter 4.
1949). In fact, even though the new government promoted the image of ‘liberated’ women, it created the ‘female worker’ instead of changing the gendered role of women at home. Women were expected to make the same contribution as men to building a new nation, but also had to be the ones to take care of home (Jin, 2006). This ideology paradoxically made women’s unpaid domestic work, including the mundane work of childrearing, invisible and difficult to talk about.

The second action taken by the CCP was to challenge family forms – using the CCP’s language - to break the ‘patriarchy’ and ‘feudal’ kinship - which devalued women’s position at home (Rofel, 1999, p. 25). Kinship was associated with a particular loyalty and prioritisation of one’s own family. The new socialist government wanted to redirect such loyalty towards nation building, a less private purpose. Therefore, the government publically supported young couples separating from their parents’ homes (fenjia) and at the same time transferring their loyalty from older family members to the new (mother) country. Such a separation, to some extent, empowered some great-grandmothers (such as GG Zhao in the example below) from the constraints of a patriarchal family. On the other hand, this separation disadvantaged others (such as GG Zhu also analysed below) who did not work for any SOEs and badly needed the older generation’s support for childcare.

All of these changes started to happen at the time of the PRC’s establishment (1949), which was the year that the majority of great-grandmothers reached 14 to 21 years, an age where they were expected to be ‘married out’ like their mothers. In fact, the majority of them married during this period – nine out of twelve great-grandmothers married before they were 22 years old. Each had their first child in the same or the following year63. However, different from their mothers, nine out of twelve great-grandmothers had to find paid work when they became mothers. The three great-grandmothers who did not have any paid work before getting married all lived in a rural area or spent most/all of their lives in rural areas, where the country’s new political and economic changes had less impact compared to the cities. As mentioned earlier, for the women who lived in the city (before they got married), working in either temporary or full-time jobs was not only an opportunity but also an

63 All twelve great-grandmothers had their first child between 18 to 25 years old, with the majority between 20 and 23.
obligation. For women who could find paid jobs with high enough status in an SOE, the government provided great support for their roles as mothers. They had to work extremely hard and many of them suffered from chronic health problems as a result. For the majority of women who could not find stable and full-time jobs or were at the lowest level of some SOEs, they also felt obliged to work to improve the family's living conditions and most of them suffered from the double burden of work and childcare. The following two cases demonstrate how these two groups of great-grandmothers recount their mothering practices in a context in which the mundane work of childrearing was still invisible.

5.2.1 The GG Zhao Xue: A Liberated Woman

A. Lived Life

The following table 5 shows the lived life of the GG Zhao Xue which including the glocal context and her key life events and transitions. At the end of the table is my hypothesis of the structure of her case based on her lived life data only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glocal Context</th>
<th>Year (Age)</th>
<th>Major Life Events/Transitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japanese Invasion War (1937-1945)</td>
<td>Less than 10</td>
<td>Her parents separated&lt;sup&gt;64&lt;/sup&gt;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil War between the GMD and the CCP (1945-1948)</td>
<td>1940 (9)</td>
<td>Xue started primary education as the first (only) girl who had gone to school on her father’s side of the family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1941 (10-17)</td>
<td>Xue’s mother took her to Bengbu (city), living &lt;sup&gt;65&lt;/sup&gt; with one of her cousins from her father’s side who worked as an underground CCP member in the early 1940s. Her mother sold groceries on the street to support their lives and Xue’s study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1948 (17)</td>
<td>Xue was chosen by the government to work for the CCP (the Public Security Bureau) and she dropped out of secondary school to work full-time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Period of</td>
<td>1952 (21)</td>
<td>After refusing several proposals from older and senior officials, Xue married the man she chose herself, who</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<sup>64</sup> There was no concept of 'divorce' at her parent's time, therefore she said it was not a divorce.

<sup>65</sup> They rented a large house together with her cousin's family. However they did not share cooking or finance and so this was still regarded as living 'separately' by Chinese custom and by Xue.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socialist China (Mao’s period: 1949 - 1976)</td>
<td></td>
<td>worked for the same Bureau. The year before this, the first Chinese Marriage Law was issued which legitimised her ‘freedom’ to choose her own husband.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political movements starts (1956-1976)</td>
<td>1954 - 1958 (23 - 27)</td>
<td>Xue gave birth to three girls and was assigned a free nanny chosen and hired by the government who not only looked after her children but also helped with housework. In addition, the government also paid extra money for buying food for young children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1958 (27)</td>
<td>Her husband was labelled as “Rights” in 1958 and was removed from his work position. Xue had to support seven family members’ (four children, her mother and her husband) living on her own salaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Famine (1960-1963)</td>
<td>1960-63</td>
<td>The government provided extra food for her family due to Xue’s excellent work performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1964 (33)</td>
<td>Xue gave birth to her last child, a son, and due to the difficulty of the birth and long-term illness caused by extremely hard work, she decided to have an operation to remove both her uterus and ovaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1076)</td>
<td>1966 (35)</td>
<td>She and her husband divorced around this period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform and Open Door – mixture of capitalism and socialism (1978 - )</td>
<td>1966 – 88 (35 -57)</td>
<td>She worked for four different Bureaus as a senior manager (such as being director for some divisions). Two of her children (one daughter and one son) found their jobs in the same bureau where she used to work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1988 – 2015 (57 - 83)</td>
<td>Xue became a representative of the retired cadres and has worked voluntarily since she retired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived life structure:</td>
<td></td>
<td>An independent life focusing on her work: Xue’s first life transition happened when she started education, as the first and only girl in her family. At the similar time, her parents’ separation and her mother’s decision to move from the rural area to an urban area enhanced her education as well as making her more independent. Her cousin’s influence and the early start of her job for the CCP defines her focus of the rest of her life: work. This focus hasn’t been changed by her role as a mother or a wife. In fact, her hard and high quality work won her the resources to be independent from her husband, to gain childcare support and to raise all her children on her own.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B. Told Stories

a. Initial Response

With such a life trajectory, at the beginning of our encounter Xue immediately started to talk about her extremely busy work for the government which had caused her to suffer from insomnia since she was 22 years old. Then, after hearing my research question, she quickly claimed that

’I do not have experience of childrearing. In the past, it was the Supply System — the government provided nannies for me. I have four children, the first two children were brought up by nannies and the last two by my mother. My mother was still working at that time, but I asked her to stop working to rear my children.’

She said all of this in a reporting style, with no tone of regret, guilt or self-blame which puzzled me for a long time, until I understood how her work provided crucial resources and support for her role as a mother (discussed later).

b. ’We were different from today’

The most fluent narration of her life was all about her work. Xue felt particularly strongly about the differences between today and the past and was determined to convey this message. For example, she argued strongly and with a raised voice about

66 Xue explained in the interview about the “Supply System”: most things you needed for living were supplied by the work unit/government, including accommodation, three meals a day and transportation etc. Therefore, everyone only had a basic salary, about nine yuan per month, which was also equal among people from different positions. There was a special subsidy of 0.5 yuan for every woman and man. For women, the purpose was to buy necessary sanitary products (i.e. this meant proper toilet tissue at that time), whereas for men, it was to buy cigarettes. Then, there were ‘generous’ subsidies for children: for each child they would be given nine yuan to buy anything needed for the children. Therefore, at that time, according to the great-grandmother, there was a saying that “if you have one child, you could become a ’middle-class peasant’; two children, you would be an ’upper class peasant’ and with three children, you became a ’landlord’!”

67 Her mother was one of the two great-grandmothers’ mothers who had some employment experience. Xue’s mother became a worker as a result of Xue’s position at work, starting around 40 years old.

68 This was also my first interview and I naively thought the great-grandmothers brought up their own children, at least in the early years, through many stories I had read before. Furthermore, as a mother today, we take some models of mothering for granted: for example, even if women had to ask for other people’s help in childrearing for them to be able to work, these mothers would feel guilty. All of these assumptions were challenged in the first interview.
the impossibility of ‘falling in love’, as depicted by today’s TV Soaps, when she started to work. She explained in detail about special rules (28-5-Regiment policy for men\textsuperscript{69}) for deciding who could get married. She also gave long arguments about why she did not want to marry the senior officers but to choose her own husband. However, this did not produce a story of ‘finding a true love for the rest of her life’. Instead, Xue talked little about her husband and emphasised the fact that even after being married, they still lived separately and could only spend Saturdays together. Following that, she described how her work and life were totally managed as a solider where little private life could exist apart from the work, including private interactions between wife and husband, mother and children. Asked whether the idea of ‘virtuous wife and good mother’ was popular in her time, Xue made a sound of disdain and responded that:

\begin{quote}
 ‘We only talked about work. We were the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) at that time and the requirement was extremely strict. I could finish my work around 2:00 am and had to get up at 6:00 am to run (a compulsory morning exercise) with colleagues. Then, we usually had an hour of study (studying government’s documents) and had breakfast together at 8:00 am. If you could not finish your work by midnight, you enjoyed another free meal at night. … Everything was planned and regulated…. We were different from today.’
\end{quote}

Living separately from her husband and regulated by such a strict timetable, being a mother would have been a totally different story compared to today. That was why Xue’s evaluation about ‘we were different from today’ repeated several times in her stories demonstrated her strong feelings of telling a ‘real’ story about the past that would not be judged by today’s standards, particularly relating to her role as a mother.

To prove what she said, Xue found a photo of her marriage where both of them wore the green army suits and smiled modestly to the camera. She pointed to the writing on the bottom, emphasising, ‘the PLA.’

\textsuperscript{69} Only a man who was more than 28 years old, had belonged to the CCP for at least 5 years and was at Regiment-level and above could get married. Everybody else, no matter who you were, were not allowed to fall in love with anyone! If you were discovered, you would be expelled. You had to get permission to fall in love.
c. A Broken Story about Childrearing

In contrast, when Xue did talk about childrearing, her long, fluent narration with strong argumentations (like above) changed to a different style – a broken story.

‘For the children, (we) put their morality (pinde 品德) as most important. So at our home, [stopped for several seconds], in general, (it was about) being diligent and thrifty in managing the household (qinjianchijia 勤俭持家).’

Then she moved on to explain the Supply System and how little she and her husband earned monthly with a much smoother way of telling stories. Then she stopped for several seconds, went back to the topic of childrearing,

‘In general, for children, as we lived in dormitory, first, for, [paused] children, was about being diligent and thrifty [laughed]. Very simple, because the (requirement of my) work was really strict. Children were not allowed to violate the disciplines and laws (weijiweifa 违法乱纪).’

Here, Xue’s narration was hard to make sense of as there were so many pauses and broken sentences as well as shifts of focus. Her laugh and her repetition of the same words – being diligent and showing thrift in household management (qinjianchijia 勤俭持家) – after her effort in searching for alternatives (shown by her having several pauses in one sentence) imply her own feelings about the inappropriateness of choosing such words. As DeVault (1999:104) pointed out, such broken speech alerts us to the hegemonic ideologies that constrain the articulation of women’s experiences through ‘standard vocabulary’ (see alsoArdener, 1972). Considering Xue was facing a researcher with a Western education background and telling a past story from the present-time, the difficulty in fitting her stories with today’s set of vocabulary and its values about parenting was not surprising. The language she chose was the one used in the adult’s life: “qinjianchijia” was a slogan the government used to encourage every family to manage their life economically and

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70 This lack of words to describe mothers’ real experiences in childrearing was not just for the great-grandmothers generation or for Chinese women; in fact, as Ramaekers and Suissa (2011) argue, it is still true for today's mothers who feel it hard to talk about their mothering experiences without using psychological terminologies and therefore, their recounts are shaped by a particular scientific logic implied by these terms.
“strict requirements and not being allowed to violate discipline and laws” were key for managers, workers and citizens. Compared to today’s request for ‘child-centred’ and psychologically logical parenting, Xue’s words expressed a very much ‘adult-centred’ and ‘strict’ discipline.

However, these words make sense in her specific conditions: when generally there were few resources in society, qinjianchijia was another way to tell children to lower their expectations and desire for materials; strict requirements meant they needed to listen to the adults and ‘not mess about’ which could be a protective factor when adults generally had little time to monitor children’s activities. In fact, when Xue told stories of childrearing, she mostly talked about how to discipline her children. This I will discuss next.

d. Disciplining children

There was not much narrative of childrearing in Xue’s interview. The example of how she blamed her daughter even when she did nothing wrong in a conflict with other kids was an exception. She said that she heard of the conflict between her oldest daughter and the boy from the neighbour.

‘The other people who saw what happened told me, ‘It was not your daughter’s fault. You shouldn’t blame her.’ However, I still went to the neighbour with my daughter to apologies. The other people kept saying, ‘it was not your daughter’s fault. Your daughter was blamed unfairly (chikuile).’”

Then, Xue explicitly commented how the neighbour was only a driver whose wife had no job and had too many children, which implies that, compared to her, they did not know how to educate/discipline their children. This explains why she emphasized in this story how other people saw her daughter as the victim, but she still insisted on disciplining her daughter. This implies that having proper jobs helped a woman to know how to be a good mother: they would ‘blame’ their children even though their children did not cause the trouble, as this demonstrated their higher expectations of their children.
C. Synthesis of the Lived Life and Told Story

As mentioned earlier, even when Xue said that ‘I had no childrearing experiences’, I could not sense feelings of regret or guilt. After listening to both her lived life and told stories, I started to understand the positive meanings of such a claim: she was proud of getting support from the government so she did not need to focus on daily childcare but contributed to more meaningful work – building a new country. Through the stories about her work, it became clear how such a meaningful job also provided crucial support to her children: she was assigned free nannies and extra money for the children; she supported all seven family members when her husband was punished during the ‘Against Rights’ period; during the Great Famine, the protection and support from her employment was even more valuable. This demonstrates that she provided the necessary material basis for her care role even though she did not have time to ‘be there’, to cook meals or to put the children to bed. It is her hard work that makes all the above achievements possible: Xue argued strongly at the end of interview: ‘This was not depending on men’s (occupation/position), it was depending on women’s (to gain the free nanny’s support)!’ Therefore, even though she found it hard to tell a smooth story of her daily childrearing practices, Xue did tell a narrative story of strictly disciplining her daughter compared to women without a job. This demonstrates that working provided women with a different view of, and expectations for, their children, an important criteria when judging mothering practices in her view.

These stories demonstrated that Xue was proud of being recognised, awarded and accepted as a ‘liberated woman’. Women could ‘hold the half sky’ and a woman’s place should not be constrained by the home. This image and discourse of a liberated woman empowered women such as Xue to be positive about themselves. Therefore, combining her lived life with her told story, I think the key story that Xue tried to tell is: I am proud of being a liberated woman who could work for the country and also proud of being a capable mother who won support for my children’s survival and development through my hard work.
### 5.2.2 The GG Zhu Yu: An ‘Irresponsible’ Mother

#### A. Lived Life

The following table 6 shows the lived life of the GG Zhu Yu, following the same format as the GG Zhao Xue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glocal Context</th>
<th>Years (Age)</th>
<th>Major Life Events/Transitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1933 (0)</td>
<td>Zhu Yu was born in a rural family as the only daughter. She had two younger brothers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese Invasion War (1937-1945)</td>
<td>(2-3)</td>
<td>Her father became ill and he could not work properly to support the family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil War between the GMD and the CCP (1945-1948)</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>Yu’s mother died and she moved to live with an aunt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of P.R.C.</td>
<td>1949 (16)</td>
<td>Yu took one of her brothers to the city – Bengbu. They stayed with relatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(18?)</td>
<td>By doing housework and making clothes for her neighbours, Yu gained social support from her community, which helped her younger brother to find a job in a SOE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(21)</td>
<td>Yu got married to a man working in a SOE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>Yu had her first daughter and moved out from her husband’s family, establishing their own home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political movements starts (1956 - 1976)</td>
<td>1956-61 (23 -28)</td>
<td>Yu had a son and two more daughters. The youngest was given to a relative to raise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Famine (1960-1963)</td>
<td>(29)</td>
<td>She had her last child, a son. The same year, she started to sell noodles on the street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Revolution (1966 -1976)</td>
<td>(40 – 50)</td>
<td>Yu and 6 other women started to make clothes for the community. Later, their hard work earned them a good reputation and the district government decided to change their organisation into a big collective factory. She worked until she retired at 50, in 1983.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform and Open Door (1978 -)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mixture of Capitalism and Socialism modern China (1980-)</td>
<td>(50 – 57)</td>
<td>She looked after her son’s child – her grandson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(57 – 82)</td>
<td>She lived at the countryside with her husband, growing some vegetables and crops to feed themselves. She refused to move to the city to live with her adult children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lived life structure</td>
<td>A life striving for improvement: the illness of her father and the loss of her mother pushed Yu to being independent early. She demonstrated a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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strong will to be better by choosing to go to the city with her brother on her own. Her excellent social skills and the best use of her existing skills gained her a good reputation and the opportunity to work with others, until in the end they ‘established’ their own organisation and became employees for a Big Collective-Owned Organisation (BCO).

Table 6 The lived of life of GG Zhu

B. Told Stories

a. Initial Response

Yu’s life story was not one about woman’s liberation or contribution towards her country as Xue’s was. However, her life trajectory also demonstrated a strong woman never stopping to strive for a better life for her family and in some ways, achieving this successfully. However, after knowing my research was about childrearing, Yu started her life story negatively,

‘Aha…Our experiences… How to talk? Our life was really bitter. [Laugh]. We started to live independently since 22 years old, since 22 years old. At that time, it was so poor, aha, really did not know how to deal with it. Having children, aha, really, …Now, the children all said that we had too many children and were irresponsible, and had not brought them up properly.’

She clearly did not perceive early ‘independence’ positively or to be ‘liberating’. Instead, in her later story, she gave more details about how an extreme lack of living resources (nothing apart from one single room, living with a young baby!) forced her to go back to the rural area for a period to do some temporary farm work in order to survive, whereas her husband could live cheaply on his own and save his monthly money to buy basic furniture and living resources for their ‘independent’ home. Then, the key theme of her childrearing stories emerged: she is currently blamed by her daughter as being an irresponsible mother.

71 Such an achievement can only be clear when comparing with other great-grandmothers with similar backgrounds: Yu did not lose any children compared to 5 other great-grandmothers who lost at least one child. She also managed to gain SOE worker’s status for her brother, and became a BCO worker herself, compared to the other four great-grandmothers with no education like her who had never gained such an opportunity.
b. ‘I should prioritise the other child!’

Her daughter blaming her for being irresponsible made Xue’s whole interview and life story a defence, with many argumentations. One of the longest and repeated argumentations was about breastfeeding.

At an early stage of her life story, she initiated the topic of breastfeeding - a story that she had to feed her nephew at the same time as her first daughter, who was born at a similar time. She explained that this sister-in-law did not have children for ten years until she had this boy but found she had no breast milk to feed him. As Yu had also just had her oldest daughter, her mother-in-law persuaded her to feed her nephew as well. However, this boy drank so much and so violently that he broke one side of her milk gland (*naigenzi*奶根子). Therefore, she had less milk for her own daughter and gradually ended up feeding the rest of her children on one breast only, which she said was never enough.

Then, she argued,

‘Now everyone said, who did not feed their own child first? It was a girl, so what? Aren’t girls better than boys? Everyone says like that. (I) felt it was hard for her (her sister-in-law) to have a child. I felt, my child … a bit less … was ok, (I) should prioritise the other child.’

Then I asked what she meant that she prioritised the other child. Yu did not answer my question directly, instead she carried on her arguments supporting her decision,

‘(We) were good sisters. Being sisters meant we ate from the same bowl, not many differences (from each other). (I) felt, as we had such a good relationship, she had a child, and it was a boy, mine was a girl and I was very young. Even if my daughter died, I still could have more children. She had one after so many years, not easy. Just like that.’

Similar arguments were repeated about three times in her interview, which demonstrated her difficulty in finding what she judged to be recognisable and acceptable explanations to support her decision under current ideologies about mothers and children that are totally different (see discussion later). How could
someone sacrifice her own child for other people? How could a mother argue that sisterhood was more important than the life/health of her own child?

Such questions were asked from today’s child-centred view of childrearing within an affluent modern society. However, in Yu’s case, which was similar to many human societies in history, the survival of the adults/parents was the priority. Without the care and support of adults, the life chances of any child were small. Therefore, adult-centred logic in childrearing not only was accepted but also reasonable. Bearing this in mind, we can interpret Yu’s story of breastfeeding as being a mothering story that encompassed and recognised mothers’ other roles. She was a young mother and at the same time a daughter-in-law and a sister-in-law. These two other roles were both very important to her at both a practical and moral level. In a patriarchal society, Yu needed to listen to her mother-in-law who ‘persuaded’ her to help her sister-in-law. Furthermore, as a good sister-in-law, she felt obliged to help as a ‘moral’ person. Therefore, in the adult’s world, this was not neglect towards her own daughter. This was self-sacrifice because she saw the other woman’s suffering. Yu knew exactly how this help could ‘save’ her sister-in-law who had already suffered from family violence for many years due to her perceived problem of not being able to have a baby. Connected to this, the argument that ‘boys were more important than girls’ should not be viewed simply as Yu’s preference. It has to be considered within this whole family relationship and realisation that the survival of this boy was important as it could save the sister-in-law in a society/family where boys were preferred. Unfortunately, judging by today’s new ideology on motherhood and children, such an ethical support towards others was blamed as showing ‘irresponsibility’ to one’s own children or as a bias towards boys.

c. A Bowl of Noodles

From Yu’s lived life, we know that for a long time she could not find a stable job. However, Yu’s childrearing stories also closely relate to her working practices outside home. As she needed to be very flexible and alert to finding whatever work she could, a flexible attitude was taken towards childcare itself: ‘any children older than two years old could be left at home on their own’, as Yu explained. For the
younger ones, she would travel with them on her back, to wherever the job was. This was how Yu described her childrearing practices:

‘I got up before dawn, prepared food for a day, and for my husband, put children on my back and walked miles to find work. It was such a bitter life. Children today would not understand.’

Indeed, her daughter’s blame demonstrated how this daughter did not understand the hard life her mother had gone through. However, Yu chose to tell another different story about how her work helped her children’s life later.

‘That was 1962, at the Long-Distance Bus Station, I worked with a girl to sell noodles. I was in charge of making the noodles and she sold noodles there. My back, was (hurt) from that time, I made tens of Jins of noodle, all by my hands. After the noodle was made, not much oil, nothing else, just the noodle, I gave a bowl of noodle to my children. Other people felt it was great, Aha! They all felt envy. [Smile]’

Through other people’s comments, Yu was telling a story of how her hard work produced better food for her children which was one of the most important symbols of a good life at that time. Although this was not a long narrative, Yu gave a vivid picture of the quantity of noodles she made, her hurting back and the warm noodles without oil. The specific time she talked about – 1962 – also reminds us that this was at the time of the Great Famine, which gave extra significance to this story. Her smile at the end of story also felt like she was reliving that happy moment – the satisfaction of giving her children a bowl of freshly cooked warm noodles when other children were dying from lack of food.

C. Synthesis of Lived Life and Told Stories

From Yu’s lived life, we have seen her efforts of changing her own and her family’s life continuously within extremely harsh living conditions. She also seemed to care about and care for many different family members, including her brothers and her sister-in-law as well as her own children and husband. She also presented a warm-hearted attitude and excellent interpersonal skills in helping neighbors. She

72 However, the other daughter, GM Zhu Lin who was interviewed was much more sympathetic towards her mother and disagreed with her sister's blaming attitudes.
73 Jin is a traditional Chinese unit of weight. 1 jin = 12 kg.
successfully gained important material and social support for her children through her hard work in making a living and maintaining a good social network so that she could rely on others’ help with childcare when needed. However, in Yu’s stories, she still experienced difficulty in telling a positive story of motherhood. Hence she used long argumentations in her interview to support the moral side of her decision to prioritise her sister-in-law’s child. Defending herself against one of her daughters’ blame was a core theme of her mothering story. Nevertheless, in the detailed narrative about the bowl of noodles, we can still feel Yu’s pride and satisfaction about what she had achieved in the past as a mother. Putting this information and the stories together, I summarise GG Zhu Yu’s mothering story as: I was blamed as an irresponsible mother, but I disagree as I did my best for my children and the whole family.

5.2.3 Summary

The two great-grandmothers presented above have different social-economic statuses and told very different stories of childrearing. Under the public promotion of women’s participation in work as creating ‘liberated women’, GG Zhao Xue’s story was unsurprisingly dominated by her high status work. Although GG Zhu Yu also worked hard both within and outside home, her long-term temporary jobs made her less able to tell a very positive story of herself as a working mother. In particular, one important part of her work – helping neighbours and relatives – would not be regarded as important by the government.

However, there are significant similarities between these two women’s stories. First, there is a lack of ‘guilt/regret’ in their childrearing stories. Even in GG Zhu Yu’s case when she is blamed by one of her daughters today for being irresponsible, she still argued strongly for herself and refused to tell a ‘regretful’ story of motherhood. Second, work outside home was important for both great grandmothers and as good mothers they provided substantial support for their children through their hard work. Third, they both expressed ‘adult-centred’ attitudes towards childrearing where children were expected to fit into mothers’ work conditions. These common aspects are undoubtedly supported by the particular dominant ideology of womanhood and motherhood at that time in which women were encouraged to engage in paid work.
Even though not every woman felt ‘liberated’ and not everyone enjoyed institutional support, this ideology still empowered these mothers to be strong and positive about themselves as mothers across different social-economic backgrounds.

5.3 The Grandmothers’ Generation

The grandmothers in this research were born in the 1950s and 1960s. In Chapter 4, I showed how these women grew up in a situation that was different from their own mothers: at home, they took their mother’s working (outside the home) for granted and their mother’s absence made some of them recognise or highlight their father’s presence (see GM Wu Min’s growing up story in Chapter 4). Outside the home, the new state (the PRC) promoted the idea that girls were equal to boys and both genders went to the same schools. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, such a more egalitarian opportunity of education was interrupted by the Cultural Revolution (CR) and, particularly around 1968, by the new ‘Four Faces’ as Mao called them. These ‘Four Faces’ included ‘Face the Rural, Face the Grass-roots, Face the Workers and Face the Borders’. Among these, three related to rural areas, the exception being ‘facing the worker’ (see Appendix III for a more detailed explanation about the CR). Therefore, the majority of young people who graduated from primary and secondary schools between 1968 and 1970 were sent ‘Down to the Countryside’ and they were called the ‘educated youth’ in rural areas. In this research, five of twelve grandmothers went to rural areas when they were around 15-16 and spent between three and ten years there before finally moving back to the cities. Such an experience was very often commented on by these women as a mark of being part of a distinctive generation. Interestingly we will also see how this made some women who lacked such experiences feel different (see GM Chen Rong’s story later).

One important impact on their lives and motherhood from spending their youth in a rural area is clear: those who went down to the countryside married and had their children later than the others, which for some made a difference in terms of the number of children they had. The grandmothers’ generation was also hit by the One Child Policy (refer to Chapter1): eight of them had only one child. For the other four, two were able to have two children because they did not go to a rural area and
they married and had children earlier: before the year of implementation of the One Child Policy (1979). For the other two, one was in a rural area and therefore was allowed to have two children and the other was illegal. In general, all grandmothers married later than their mothers. The median age of getting married in the grandmothers’ generation was 24 years, compared to around 20 or their mothers. The majority of them also had the first child later than their mothers except for two grandmothers, both of whom avoided the fate of going down to rural areas.

In terms of work experiences, all grandmothers started paid work before they married, ranging in age from 14 to 19. However, there were substantial differences between them. The first was the workplace they were assigned to and their positions within the organisation and the second was the huge transformation of work due to the impact of introducing the market mechanism into state factories in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Liu, 2007). Competition between the new private companies and the State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) encouraged by the government in the 1980s made many (two third of SOEs, see Liu 2007) bankrupt. As a result, the government started a new trend of redundancy and it was middle aged women who were hit hardest (ibid). Among the twelve grandmothers, three of them experienced this huge change in their working life. On the other hand, a more open attitude towards business and markets also provided opportunities for a better life to other grandmothers: four grandmothers started their own or a family business as a result and managed upward mobility for their whole family. Needless to say, such experiences impacted on these women’s work identities on the one hand, and their value as a wife and mother on the other. At the same time redundancies started to happen in 1990s. The government and public media started to demand ‘virtuous wives and good mothers’. A new ‘mumism’ emerged from the 1990s (Song, 2011b). For example, one famous male sociologist argued that women working like men was ‘too advanced’ and negatively affected family relationships’(Zheng, 1994). We will see in the later example that these working mothers adopted different ways of responding to the new ideology that emphasized women’s place in the home.

74 The national level will be called State-Owned Organisation (SOO), the highest status; the provincial and municipal levels are called ‘Big Collective-Owned Organisation’ (BCO) while the district and township levels are called ‘Small Collective-Owned Organisation’ (SCO). Sometime, people group the BCO and SCO together to call them Collective-Owned Organisation (COO). The State-Owned Enterprise (SOE) is used to describe all these different types. See Appendix V for details.
Finally, another important condition of mothering in this period requires attention—the grandmothers’ relationships with their husbands at home. Six of the grandmothers’ stories mentioned frequent fights with their husbands; four suggested a lower position than their husband at home and their main responsibility for domestic work; and the other two seemed to present a much more equal position with their husbands at home and did not report much conflict. Interestingly, these three different types of relationship with their husbands also related to the women’s work positions and identities. For the first group that had many conflicts, initially all these grandmothers held a similar status in the work place as their husbands but then three of them took the advantages of marketization and started their own business, thereby generating more income than their husbands’. The other three women became equal with their husbands in work positions. For the group that accepted men’s domination at home, all were in lower social status jobs (defined by their occupation and income) than their husbands’ and two of their husbands generated significant amounts of income therefore transforming the family’s economic status. Three of them also experienced being made redundant in their mid-40s. The last two grandmothers who presented an equal but less volatile relationship with their husbands were of similar social status (occupation) to their husbands’. However, the last category should be treated more cautiously as it could be that these two women deliberately hid their marital conflicts from the researcher.

In the above, four aspects of grandmothers’ lives were highlighted: their experiences in CR, their age of getting married and its impact on the number of children, their working trajectories and their relationship with their husbands. The following two cases were chosen because of the differences in the grandmothers’ lives, based on the four aspects: GM Jiang Ping who went ‘Down to the Countryside’ started her family business when the situation at her workplace worsened and developed a conflictual relationship with her husband. The other, GM Chen Rong, did not go to a rural area, accepted a ‘male dominated’ model and stayed in similar jobs for most of her life (in which she demonstrated little interest). Another important difference between GM Jiang Ping and Chen Rong was their original social-economic status: GM Jiang Ping came from a relatively high status family (her father was a senior officer and her mother worked for a SOE) and GM Chen Rong came from a relatively low status family (her parents were sent to the countryside to work in a
primary school as the ‘Stinking Old Ninth’), even though, after becoming mothers, their social-economic status became the same (middle level, see Appendix V). In later analysis, I will analyse how their parents’ status impacted on their mothering experiences.

5.3.1 The GM Jiang Ping: A Regretful Mother

A. Lived Life

The following table 7 shows the lived life of the GM Jiang Ping, following the same format as the great-grandmothers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glocal Context</th>
<th>Year (Age)</th>
<th>Major Life Events/Transitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political movements started in 1956 and carried on until finishing of Cultural Revolution</td>
<td>1955 (0)</td>
<td>Jiang Ping was born in a rural family as the second oldest child among six children: one older sister, two younger sisters and two younger brothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>She moved to Bengbu with her family. Her father became a senior officer in local government and her mother worked in a clothes factory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Famine (1960-1963)</td>
<td>(7-18)</td>
<td>Ping was academically advanced throughout her primary and junior middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture Revolution (1966-1976)</td>
<td>1974-1976 (19-21)</td>
<td>She went ‘Down to the Countryside’. However, this countryside was very close to the city and was next door to the place where her father worked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(21 -23)</td>
<td>She came back to the city at the time when only small collective-owned factories were recruiting, therefore ending up in a lower status organisation with tougher working conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Child Policy started in 1979</td>
<td>1980 (25)</td>
<td>She married in June. Her husband was the son of one of her father’s best friends. The marriage was forced by her father and she went through phases of fasting, refusing to talk to her father and refusing to talk to her future husband. In the end, the death of her husband’s mother made her feel extremely guilty, so she gave up and married her husband in the same year that his mother died.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform and Open</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Her only child (daughter) was born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Door policy started since 1978</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>When her daughter finished primary school at 13 years old, she paid 3000 yuan (300 pounds) for her to go to a better secondary school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankrupts of many SOEs and the redundancy of female workers in 1990s</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Her father died.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997 – 2004 (42-49)</td>
<td>49-59</td>
<td>Her factory was failing and she decided to quit her job and start her own business – running a restaurant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>49-59</td>
<td>She forced her daughter, who was working in NB (a city 800 kms away from Bengbu), to come back home. As a condition of her daughter coming back, Ping invested all her savings to open a restaurant by the train station for her daughter to run and Ping and her husband helped. However, this family business failed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>She worked for her husband’s friend for about ten years. She developed a heart problem so stopped working at 59.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Her granddaughter was born. She and her daughter’s parents-in-law helped with childcare together: they took it in turns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The One Child Policy Stopped in 2015</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Her daughter wanted to try her own business again. This time, she rented a place in the canteen of the best secondary school. Ping and her husband were fully involved in establishing and running this business with their daughter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived Life Structure</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ping was born into a family with a relatively high social position. However, her life changed after the CR but she was never satisfied with an average life and never stopped fighting: her marriage, her jobs and education for her daughter. She was still starting a new business with her daughter at 60 years old when the interview happened.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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75 As the quality between schools varied greatly and parents became more concerned about children’s education, from the 1980s good schools found this extra way of making money. If the child did not get a high enough score for admission to their ideal school, through some channels their parents could choose to pay a large sum of money to 'buy admission' for their children. Usually, your child had to be close to their academic requirement, however, in some extreme situations, if the parents were in a really powerful position, they could get their children into the best school even their children were far below the academic requirement.
Table 7 The lived life of GM Jiang

B. Told Stories

a. Initial Response

Ping’s overall narration was very fluent and after I asked the first interview question, she did not stop talking for two and a half hours. She was one of the mothers who, despite knowing my research topic, still focused their life story on their own life. For Ping, her initial response was to talk about her early childhood when she and her younger sister lived with just their father in another city (Hefei) and how her father sacrificed his food intake to protect his children. She evaluated this first story, ‘Seeing my dad eating roots left a deep, deep memory on me for my whole life. Therefore, I always have a very strong relationship with my dad and I really respect my dad.’

This initial response and her evaluation of her relationship with her dad demonstrates how she identified strongly with him. In her first story about childrearing, we can see how Ping talked about her parental love, particularly her father’s love, in supporting her in the early days. Later I will discuss how her father’s influence shaped Ping’s mothering experiences.

b. (Grand-) Father’s support in early childcare

The beginning of Ping’s motherhood story demonstrated a ‘better’ childcare arrangement compared to most of Ping’s counterparts. A ‘free childcare centre’ was regarded as crucial for many women, even though there were many comments about its poor quality (five grandmothers commented about the poor quality of the care services). Ping talked about how her dad asked her younger brother to look after her daughter first until she found a trustworthy nanny, paid for by her mum. Therefore, she delayed the use of poor quality childcare services (even though it was free) until her daughter was about one and a half. Then, her father took on the responsibility of looking after her daughter for about two years after he retired which meant her daughter did not need to go to kindergarten. When evaluating this period of her father’s support, Ping mentioned three times her feeling of her father’s love and support. However, when she talked about her own childrearing, her regret and guilt
about her daughter became evident, a big contrast with how she talked about her father’s care towards herself and her daughter.

c. **Failing to support her daughter’s education**

When Ping talked about her mothering experiences when her daughter was older, her story took a different focus: on her own efforts in supporting her daughter’s education. She started to teach her daughter Chinese characters and ancient poems when she was only three years old. She said that, at that time, many of her colleagues envied the fact that her daughter could read so many characters and recite so many poems at an early age. When her daughter was in primary school, she also asked her colleagues to buy cassettes so that she could read English to her daughter, something unheard of at the time. Another large investment she made was to buy an electronic keyboard for her daughter when she was in primary school, costing more than ten times her monthly salary. All of these investments and efforts were rare compared to other grandmothers’ stories (and my own experiences) of growing up.

However, these efforts did not bring the desired outcome. Ping’s daughter did not go to the best middle schools and did not have the opportunity to study at university. Ping did not criticise her daughter in any respect, instead, criticising herself as not being ‘capable enough’:

‘So, I never worried about spending money relating to Yuan’s (her daughter) education. But, it seemed that (because) my own culture (meant education) was only at junior middle school level, later, I went to the countryside, but, I did not think about, … all of us (who went to the countryside), did not study again, or tried to pass some examinations to obtain new qualifications, … I was only at a junior middle school level and could not compete with the ones at senior school level. Therefore, my own culture level was not very high, which impacted on my support to my daughter later, I could not match her level.’

Ping’s was a very complicated narrative in which self-blame is mixed with self-defence. Ping blamed herself for not having a high enough level of education. However, her years of education were very typical among the grandmothers’ generation (see Appendix XIV) and Ping was in education for the longest period (eleven years) compared to the others. She seemed to recognise this and hence also
tried to defend herself – ‘all of us did not study again’ which means it was not her personal personality/competency that stopped her pursuing higher education. But, in the end, she was still determined to be the person that took the whole responsibility for the failure of her daughter’s education: ‘I could not match her level.’ This evaluation suggests strong self-blame in a situation that, clearly, she was not to blame for (e.g., her daughter’s lack of efforts/motivations or her husband’s little involvement). Why did she refuse to let ‘others’ be part of the reason for this painful story?

Such an insistence on taking complete responsibility in a situation where she need not can be read as strong agency: it was a story about me, not others, even though I failed. This explanation is consistent with her lived life which also demonstrated a strong personality. However, another important structural reason relates the new ideology of motherhood that she refused to comply with.

d. ‘I own my daughter’

Ping’s confession about her lack of support for her daughter’s schooling focused on her mistake in changing her work career. By her daughter’s second year of Second Middle School (SMS), Ping decided to leave her job in an already nearly bankrupt COE factory to start her own business: running a restaurant. This brave career transformation increased the family income significantly and also was supported by both her husband and her daughter. It was a joint decision within the family. Nevertheless, when recounting her decision from the present-time, she regarded it as a big mistake:

‘People these days would give up their jobs in government76 to provide better support for their children’s schooling, to, to, to, to help her (her daughter). First, I did not get some private tutor to help her. Second, you resigned your job and went to start a restaurant! I went out early in the morning and did not come home until the middle of night. Yuan could only have lunch in our restaurant, and had dinner with my mum. I asked her to live with my mum who could cook her breakfast and dinner. The grandma, my mum, only could say to her that you should study. But Yuan already felt it very difficult (about her study) and there was a trend of making bracelets, she made lots of those. So, I started my business

76 Working for the government was, and is, regarded one of the best jobs for women.
when she was at second and third year of SMS. Therefore, I feel I owe a lot (duibuqi) to my child. I am very guilty. So, no matter how much hard work there is involved in setting up this new canteen, I feel I have to help her. I owe a lot to my daughter.'

In her remark ‘I owe a lot to my daughter’, which was repeated twice, she suggested a strong negative evaluation of herself. When she started to evaluate her decision to change jobs, she even changed from the first person (‘I’) to the second person (‘you’). This change of ‘subject’ can be read as a way of distancing herself from a painful experience; or it can also be read as a way of quoting what others had said about/ or to her. No matter what the reasons for this sudden change of style, it signals the strong emotional feelings that Ping associated with this particular incident: changing her career at the wrong time.

Ping changed her job around 1997, the period in which many female workers in S/COEs were made redundant and told to ‘go back home’. Instead of staying in a job with no future, and focusing on her daughter’s education, Ping chose to try establishing her own business. Her ambition was successful: their restaurant was expanded three times within three years. However, recounting from the present-time when her major worry was about her daughter’s life (her daughter has gone through several difficult periods in finding a good job and she married a man who earned less than her), her own view of success in this enterprise became more negative. Maybe the self-blame is a way of self-questioning: why did I not stay at home to be a ‘virtuous wife and good mother’ as the society advocated? She would not ask (at least publicly) why it was not her husband’s fault. The society, both then and now, believed in gendered responsibility for childrearing: it was the mother, not the father, who was blamed for their children’s (lack of) growth and development. Ping has clearly felt the pressure from such a dominant ideology.

C. Synthesis of the Lived Life and Told Stories

In the beginning of Ping’s story, I highlighted her initial response, which focused on her close relationship with her father. At the end of her story, the central place of her father became clearer: as the most loved child Ping respects and loves her father deeply and she wants to be the same outstanding ‘woman’ in the public world. Such
an ambition was encouraged by both her growing up experiences and her parents
and particularly her father, but was hit hard when society went through a huge
transformation: a ‘liberated’ woman was questioned instead of being respected.
Interestingly, Ping clearly ‘inherited’ her father’s ambition and hard work, which led
her to change her mind when society called woman ‘back to the home’. However,
her story of her childhood and her father’s support in caring for her daughter also
demonstrates that she wants to be as good a parent as her father. This was seriously
challenged by a changing childrearing culture when mothers’ role in helping their
daughters’ education became the most important task for married women in today’s
society (since 1990s). The dilemma that Ping experienced between becoming a
useful woman, as her father encouraged, and being a good mother as her daughter
‘needed’, was shared by many of the grandmothers. The pain caused by this
dilemma made Ping tell a very regretful mothering story. However, this was not a
sad story. The fact that Ping narrated so fluently and took complete responsibility for
the ups and downs in her life demonstrated her strong agency. In fact, from her lived
life, we can see how strongly she kept trying her best. In fact, the interview started
just when a new phase in her life started: she is now trying her best to help her
daughter establish an individual business again! Therefore, I summarise the key
story that Ping was trying to tell as, ‘I wanted and tried to be as useful as my dad,
but I regretted not being good enough for my daughter. However, I own my life
story, including these mistakes, and I haven’t given up supporting my daughter
further.’

What about the story of someone really confined with the role of ‘a virtuous wife
and good mother”? Will she tell a more positive story? Will she express a similar
strength of will in driving her own life? I turn next to grandmother Chen’s story.
5.3.2 The GM Chen Rong: A Virtuous Wife and Good Mother

A. The Lived Life

The following table 8 shows the lived life of the GM Chen Rong with my summary of her case structure at the end.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glocal Context</th>
<th>Year (Age)</th>
<th>Major Life Events/Transitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Great Famine (1960-63)</td>
<td>1963 (0)</td>
<td>Chen Rong was born to an urban family as the youngest child among five (two girls). Her parents were primary school teachers. Her mother gave birth to seven children but only five of them survived.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Cultural Revolution (1966-76)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6-16)</td>
<td>Her parents were sent to the countryside to work and labelled as ‘the Stinking Old Ninth’. Rong finished her primary school and JMS which were frequently interrupted by health problems (colds and fever).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>Her mother persuaded her to stop further education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(16 – 18)</td>
<td>Rong passed the examination to be a worker and started to work in a local secondary school’s factory as her parents did not want her to be a teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(18 – 21)</td>
<td>Rong changed her job to a different factory in a different secondary school, producing chalk because the distance from home to the previous school was too great for her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1984 (21)</td>
<td>She married someone who taught in the same school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>She had her daughter (her only child). During the early months, neither her mother nor her mother-in-law provided much help. Nevertheless, her health improved greatly after she had her daughter and she rarely became ill again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Redundancy stated from early 1990s</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1985 – 1993 (22-30)</td>
<td>She changed her position from worker to administrator, then librarian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>When her daughter was one year old, her husband went to the countryside to start his</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

77 After experiencing the CR, her parents felt teaching was a risky job (they were called the ‘Old Stinky Nine’) compared to workers who were praised as the great ‘proletariats’. This was also reflected by a higher salary for workers and a higher requirement to get into the factories – there was an examination that needed to be passed if you wanted to become a worker but not for being a teacher around that period.
own business (for ten years) and only visited home at weekends.

(30) When her daughter was eight years old there was an opportunity to transfer to work for the government which she refused.

(33) Rong became a school nurse. Her husband came back home to work in the school again.

(37) A special government policy allowed some workers to transfer their status as a cadre (Cadre Worker). She managed this change but was assigned into the lowest level of cadre. She did not change this level of cadre again.

2015 (52) Her granddaughter was born and she played a big role in helping her daughter. Her daughter moved to live with them.

Lived life structure Rong’s mother’s negative working experiences seemed to result in her low expectations for Rong and this also left a mark on Rong. In addition, Rong’s poor health led to a low expectation of work and a life focus on the women’s role at home: Rong’s mother’s low expectations and her health issues seemed to dominate her early life experiences (education and work) before she had her daughter. Then, after having her daughter, Rong worked in many ‘relaxing’ job positions and played the main role in raising her daughter and managing a household.

Table 8 The lived life of GM Chen

B. Told Stories

a. Initial Response

Before I asked any interview questions, Rong had already said ‘I have nothing to tell and I do not know where to start.’ After I explained my research and asked the first question, she repeated again, ‘I really have nothing to tell.’ Then, she talked about her health problem as a focus of her early life.

‘My mum had me when she was young. I had very bad health … My education was impacted. … After graduating from JMS, my mum said, “Your health was too bad and you should not carry on with SMS, you should take my place at work.”’

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Rong’s repeated evaluation of ‘having nothing to tell’ was not just a modest gesture at the beginning of her interview. Instead, we will see that she also came back to a similar self-evaluation at the end of her interview. Her narration about her health and its impact on her education and career was also very ‘passive’: it was her mother who made decisions for Rong in her key transition moments. Such a ‘passive’ tone seemed to penetrate her whole life story, particularly when she described crucial moments of career transition which I will move on to now.

b. ‘Relaxing’ work

In Rong’s story, the sense of agency about changing her life or work as GM Jiang Ping told in her story was absent. Instead, she talked about her transitions in work passively: it was her mother who ‘persuaded’ her to stop studying, to choose a job as worker instead of teacher and to change from a large school to a small one. When I asked her feelings about these changes she said, ‘My mum was called the ‘Stinking Old Ninth’. She had enough of that. At that time, I was young and did not know anything. I would just do what I was told’, a passive expression of her actions. The criterion Rong used when she was comparing these jobs was whether the job was ‘tiring’ or not. When the opportunity of working for the bureau came up, she explained,

‘I wanted to be relaxed (tukuaihuo), [laugh], (I) was lazy, because in school, there were holidays which was not the case if working for the government. I considered about the child, if I did go there (Education Bureau) and I would not enjoy holidays and it would be very busy. At that time, I did not think about status, and…, could not think about all these elements. We were too simple and did not think about the future development.’

Rong’s explanation started with a negative self-evaluation – ‘being lazy’ and ‘wanting to be relaxed’. Her laugh also demonstrated her unease with such an ‘evaluation’. However, she tried also to argue for herself: it was not just about being relaxed but was also about being constrained by her childrearing responsibility which required her to stay in a job that was not of very high status but had more flexibility. Reviewing her lived life we find that when her daughter was one year old, her husband went to the countryside to start a new business with his friend, and
this lasted for ten years. This meant, for the first ten years of her daughter’s life, Rong was the main and in many situations, the only, carer. In 1993 when she was offered the opportunity to change her job, her husband was still working in the countryside. In such a situation it was not surprising that Rong did not take the offer.

This situation was echoed by several grandmothers in my research and in Liu’s (2007), particularly those who said they wanted a less tiring job. A relaxing job was by no means an easy life for these women; instead, it meant a busy and possibly lonely one for the grandmothers who could not rely on their own parents or parents-in-law, and a less exciting one compared to their husbands who went on to either further education or to start a business (‘Jump to the Sea’). Many S/COEs had policies to encourage their workers to go for further education/training; on the other hand, the government promoted the idea that ‘Rich is Glorious’ and relaxed some regulations to encourage individual business. In my research, half of the grandmothers’ husbands went on to further studies or started a business when their children were young. For these grandmothers, while their husbands were pursuing a better future for both themselves and their family (for between three to over ten years), as ‘virtuous wives and good mothers’ they were not opposed to such efforts. Instead, a focus on home was necessary, which required a much more flexible job, described by these women as a ‘less tiring’ one.

The differences between these men and women’s lives were critical. They not only resulted in many ‘less educated’ women than men and later made many women extremely vulnerable to redundancy (Liu, 2007); they also pushed more women into taking on all the home responsibilities, which has been viewed by some Chinese and Western feminists as a ‘backward’ trend in terms of gender equity (Evans, 1995; Hayhoe, 2004; Liu, 2007; Song, 2011b; Stacey, 1983).

c. The silence about her daughter’s education

Many grandmother’s stories of mothering focused on their daughters’ education, just as with Ping. However, Rong only briefly mentioned her daughter’s education:

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78 Even though they were very similar at the starting point, due to Mao’s equalisation policy in primary and secondary education when they were younger (see Chapter 1).
‘She went to BS kindergarten (the best one), then the No. 1 Primary school (the best one) and she successfully passed the examination and went on to No. 2 Secondary School (the best one). She was ok in JMS, but after going to SMS, she did not want to study hard anymore.’

She used her daughter’s lack of effort in education as a coda to finish her educational story. Such a silence regarding her daughter’s education reflects the little involvement Rong felt she has had in this ‘important’ issue. As her daughter’s interview demonstrates, it was her father who played a crucial (and negative) role in pushing her to study hard in a rather violent way. In all these conflicts between her husband and her daughter Rong played a passive role – letting her husband to decide everything (and this was confirmed by her daughter). That probably explains why she did not talk much about this aspect.

Here, there was a clear division of responsibility, not only in terms of breadwinning and care, but also in terms of which specific roles husband and wife played in childrearing: men with better knowledge of the outside world were regarded as more capable in ‘managing/guiding’ their children’s education than women, and this situation was not uncommon in the grandmothers’ generation when women had a lower status job or were less educated than their husbands. Rong could not say much as she was not regarded as qualified to talk much.

In this way, it is possible to say that Rong’s story, although showing less regret about her lack of capacity in mothering, was more passive than Ping’s story. Ping’s stories of regret were about her own efforts in supporting her daughter’s education.

d. Mother’s instinct: ‘I just knew it.’

However, there was one story that Rong initiated with a much more positive tone, a story about her weaning practice. The story started when she compared today’s childrearing with the past. She mentioned the fact that it was very easy to feed her daughter as she had plenty of breast milk compared to her daughter’s current struggle. Then the story changed quickly to her decision about weaning her daughter when she was ten months old. When I asked how she made such a decision, she said she knew that after ten months old there was not much nutrition left in breast milk
and as her daughter did not eat anything apart from her milk at that time, she decided
to wean her. She said her decision was criticized by some people, including an old lady living nearby.

‘She said I was too young to know how to do it. The children cannot be weaned this early. They would feed children to several years old, blablabla. I did not listen to her.’

When I asked how she knew what she was doing was right she laughed and said,

‘I just knew it. I don’t know why I know it.’ It is here that her husband added his praise towards his wife, ‘She was naturally talented in these things. She just knew it. These things you could not even learn externally. She went to the market and just knew what vegetables were fresher than others, nobody told her, she just knew it.’

Rong did not disagree with her husband when he complimented her. She then gave another example of her colleague who claimed to feed her daughter scientifically: she never let her daughter eat too much and always fed her daughter according to a schedule. Rong said it was not right and the outcome was that this colleague’s daughter had bad health even now whereas her daughter hardly had any illness when she was little and still enjoyed very good health now.

Rong’s story of breastfeeding and weaning practices highlighted her agency and legitimized her mothering knowledge regardless of the neighbour’s question or against her colleague’s more scientific approach, Rong said clearly that it was her decision to follow her ‘instinct’. Such a level of trust in herself was rare in her other stories. I propose that such a tellable confidence in her story may come from the support of the wider discourse on childrearing: only mothers could do the job right as this was programmed into women’s nature. Such a fundamental claim about childrearing practices provided an important foundation for a gendered view about childrearing which also, as reflected by her husband’s comments, extended to household management. Agreeing with such a mother’s instinct is also supporting the dominant ideology of womanhood/motherhood: a virtuous wife and a good mother. Therefore, Rong could tell such a positive story in the interview. Does this
mean she totally agreed with such an ideology? Her final evaluation of her life seems to disclose a more complicated attitude:

e. A flat and light life

At the end of her interview, Rong gave a evaluation of her life,

‘(My life) was flat and light, nothing to be told. I had no big life transition points, big, big rise or fall, not, …, I was not sent to the countryside, had not experienced…, for my time, some would do some temporary jobs or ‘jump to the sea’, all of which I had no experience of. [Laugh]. Very flat and light.’

Such a passive tone echoed Rong’s initial refusal to tell her story. Interestingly, when she tried to summarise her life story, she talked solely of her life trajectories relating to work, nothing about her experiences as a mother or wife. This demonstrates even though she was praised as a ‘virtuous wife and good mother’, her own lack of progression in her work still left a deep mark on her overall feeling about her life. Differing from Ping’s new ‘start of her life’ phase (trying her best to help her daughter in business), Rong said in a bored manner:

‘I am going to be retired soon, only two more years, so I will not put more effort (to achieve anything more).… Only two more years, it seems that all my life will be in this school.[Laugh]’

These comments, plus her laughs in places that were not funny, may demonstrate her uncomfortable feelings towards her own evaluation of her life and the ‘ending points’ of her jobs.

C. Synthesis of Lived Life and Told Stories

According to Rong’s lived life, she seems to focus most of her efforts on her family and cared little about her own career advancement. Rong’s acceptance of such a ‘flat and light’ life can also be a reflection of her originally low SIES status. Her parents being labelled as ‘Stinking Old Ninth’ and sent to the countryside seemed to connect with Rong’s mother’s low expectations for her and ‘persuaded’ Rong to accept such an uneventful life. On the other hand, this is a type of motherhood which was
praised in her time and matched the image of ‘virtuous wife and good mother’. Therefore, her own low expectation of herself impacted by her mother’s experiences and the result – focusing on the family instead - was ‘legitimised’ by the particular ideology of women at her time. In fact, her husband used this description to compliment his wife during the interview. If Rong totally agrees with such an image for women and mothers, she should be happy about her achievement. However as we have seen, she decided to tell a passive story of her life, one which in her view achieved little, experienced little and was ‘flat and light’. Although she did tell a positive story about her instinct in breastfeeding practices, as this early period of childcare was devalued (see discussion earlier), the confidence she presented in this story faded away quickly among her other passive life stories. Furthermore, Rong could not say much about the most valued aspect of the childrearing – her daughter’s education, another factor leading her towards a passive self-evaluation about her life. However, her passive story also contains a particular subjectivity that she tried to express: even though she fits the image of motherhood promoted by the dominant ideology, and even though her husband praised her, she wanted to evaluate her life in her own way. This did not include her domestic roles but focused on her lack of experiences outside the home. Maybe this is Rong’s way to fight against being defined by the dominant ideology of the time. Overall, my summary of Rong’s story of mothering is ‘Maybe I was/am a virtuous wife and a good mother, but I have lived a flat and light life.’

5.3.3 Summary

The lived life of GM Jiang Ping and GM Chen Rong demonstrate two very different engagements with the dominant ideology of women and mothers in their time. Ping resigned from her ‘iron bowl’ job and started her own business which caused a certain ‘neglect’ in the daily monitoring and management of her daughter’s life at a crucial phase (as a teenager and in secondary school) whereas Rong focused most of her life in looking after her daughter and managing a household alongside a ‘relaxing’ job that she was not particularly enthusiastic about. However, when listening to their life stories and accounts about mothering in the past, we see a different picture. Ping told a regretful story about motherhood and expressed self-doubt about her past decisions, while Rong refused to be defined by the dominant
ideology of the time and told a passive life story. Such contrasts help us to see how, on the one hand, the dominant ideology has shaped both women’s life experiences and on the other hand, how they resisted, in their own ways, being defined or determined by this ideology. Their growing-up experiences in families with different SIES seemed also to impact on their decisions in motherhood. Ping seemed to identify highly with her father who not only had a high position job and was very capable, but also loved and cared for her. Such a bonded relationship with a close identification with her father probably encouraged Ping to start her own business when made redundant. Rong, on the other hand, seemed to be influenced by her mother’s negative work experiences and low expectations. Her choice of focusing mainly on the family and giving up a better career can also be explained by the low expectations associated with her family’s originally low political status. Maybe that is why, in terms of the future, Ping’s story demonstrates a much more powerful and positive attitude. Her story also provides motivation for her not to give up yet: and she will still try her best to help her daughter. In contrast, we hear a more passive evaluation in Rong’s story and the expression of a certain boredom with her life overall.

5.4 The Mothers’ Generation

In Chapter 4 we saw how this ‘only-child’ or ‘Eighties’ generation enjoyed a much more materially rich environment and greatly improved equal education opportunities. However, they also experienced more loneliness, heated educational completion and harsh discipline. One particular difficulty this generation faced was a competitive job market which discriminated against young female graduates (Zhang, Hannum, & Wang, 2008). In contrast to their mothers, a college diploma or even a university degree could not be assumed to guarantee a good job due to inflation in overall education levels (see Chapter 1). Five of the twelve mothers talked about their difficulties in finding a suitable job once they graduated.

79 Although some of the grandmothers faced redundancy in middle age, initially they never found it hard to find a job and also the majority of jobs had similar salaries and status. This was totally different when the youngest generation started to work, which probably contributed to some of their ‘lack of interest and enthusiasm in work.
A second important challenge was the withdrawal of institutional support for childcare which put mothers in a particularly disadvantaged position. Different from their mothers’ time, there was no institutional support for any kind of childcare before the children reached kindergarten age (about three years old). Even worse than that, these young women heard and observed the difficulties and challenges in finding a suitable kindergarten, primary school and secondary school to support their children in an ever more severely competitive situation (Jin & Yang, 2015; Kuan, 2015). Therefore, creating a long-term career plan to fit the needs of being a mother became another important element in deciding their choice of career or even place of residence. In this study, all ten mothers lived in Bengbu (their hometown) and were heavily dependent on their parents’ (or parents-in-laws’) support with childcare. The two who moved to larger cities were the least supported and had to rely on nannies whom they did not trust. Care for the children was not the only reason to pull some ambitious women back to, or make them to stay in, their home town. Their duty as daughters to their parents was another important reason. Nearly all the study mothers experienced a dilemma between pursuing a better job/career in a large and developed city and staying in the home town to be near their parents as their parents requested. After some struggles and fights, half of them ended up going back to or staying in Bengbu, the hometown, and gave up a job in which they were more interested or that promised a better future (see Chapter 4 Shen Meng’s story and the story of three generations of women in family Shen in Chapter 6).

Third, the meaning and value of employment were such that only a high salary, high stability and/or flexibility were meaningful criteria of a good job for young women. For the oldest generation, working outside home meant liberation for some women and a change in their status, while it meant family survival for others. Although the value placed on liberation faded among the grandmother generation, the strong political ideology of education and the experiences of the Cultural Revolution still made many of them identify strongly with their paid work. This ideology and belief in work became ‘old-fashioned’ when these young women grew up. An image of the liberated ‘iron girl’ was laughed at as unnatural on the one hand, and as a repression of women’s innate femininity associated with Mao’s period (Rofel, 1999) on the other. Instead, this generation regards women’s capacity for emotional communication in intimate relationships as a sign of femininity (Evans, 2010). They
desire an emotionally bonded relationship within their marriage and mother-children relationship and assume a gendered role in maintaining such emotional intimacy (ibid.).

Recently such a mother-child relationship has been under close scrutiny within a ‘baby-fever’ culture (Bruer, 1999; Lee et al., 2014; Macvarish, 2014), along with many other aspects of mothering practices, including diet and clothing during pregnancy (Lin, 2011), different methods of childbirth, to daily practicalities such as feeding, sleeping arrangements and toilet training (Breengaard, 2015; Zhu, 2010). Such public scrutiny also echoes the general suspicion about food safety (see the Sick toll in baby milk scandal in Chapter 1) and suspicion about strangers (Lee, 2014) demonstrated by many negative stories of nannies in China 80. The individualising trends happening at the same time (Yan, 2009) meant the new generation of mothers (or their helpers) shouldered the responsibilities of raising ‘high quality children’ (Anagnost, 1997, 2008b) on their own: a mission impossible and a Chinese version of the global trend of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996). In this way, the ‘hot mother’ (Shen, 2014) or ‘full-time mother’ became the new icon, replacing the ideology of ‘iron girls’.

For both older generations, the concept of ‘housewife’ carried negative meanings which they wanted to distance themselves from 81. For this new generation, a woman who can stay at home and ‘whole-heartedly’ look after her child was awarded a new name – full-time mother - which implied new glory and high social status: only privileged women could afford such a ‘luxury’ position. In this study, being a full-time mother could only be achieved by two of the richest mothers: one (M Li Wei) has already become a full-time mother, and the other (M Zhao Jia) planned to do so. A full-time mother became an impossible dream for others who had to work and struggle to balance their roles in employment and work as a mother. For some women, as this dream was so far away from their reality, they adopted another extreme position (eg., M Wang Cheng): a mother with little involvement in caring...


81 Rong's story demonstrated that even the GMs who were praised as virtuous wives and good mothers still found it difficult to accept a positive image of themselves.
for her child. The majority of young women fall in between. We should not forget that this generation of young women were also educated well and carried the high expectations of their parents during their growing up (Fong, 2004). In fact, nearly all of the mothers in this research talked about their parents’ high expectations for them (or their regret about failing to meet such expectations) as an important part of their life story. Therefore, it is not surprising that some women aspired to upward mobility via a good career, not only for themselves but for their whole family. These women experienced the most tension between their own career ambitions and their efforts to become a ‘good mother’. Therefore, this distinction between women’s choices concerning work outside home and work as mothering are shaped by both social class and their particular life trajectories/family cultures.

In the following cases, I chose two mothers with extremes of identification with mothering and paid work: one totally focused on her child and whole-heartedly following the practices of intensive mothering; and the other seeming to demonstrate little care and involvement in her role as mother. They also differed significantly in their social-economic positions, which were influenced more by their origins (family’s status) than their own current job positions (see details below). However, they also shared many similarities, regardless of their family background. Both of them acquired the lowest education level compared to the other mothers of their generation in the study; they also married and had their first child early and both are boys. The two cases present interesting comparisons within the mother generation supplemented by some other cases.

5.4.1 Mother Li Wei: a Chinese Version of Intensive Mothering

A. The Lived Life

The following table 9 shows the lived life of the M Li Wei with my summary of her case structure at the end.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glocal Context</th>
<th>Year (Age)</th>
<th>Major Life Transitions/Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Child Policy (1979)</td>
<td>1982 (0)</td>
<td>Li Wei was born in Shanghai whereas her mother and father worked in a BCO in Bengbu. Her mother brought her back to Bengbu when she was about four months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Period</td>
<td>Event/Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>Her maternal grandma took her back to Shanghai and Wei started her long separation (about 15 years) from her parents, who stayed in Bengbu.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3-15)</td>
<td>Wei had three years of kindergarten, six years primary and three years of JMS. She changed her kindergarten and schools twice: two kindergartens, two primary schools and two JMSs. Her academic interest and results declined significantly after primary school and, consequently, she went to a Secondary Vocational School (SVS) instead of pursuing an SMS after she graduated. Her parents moved back to Shanghai.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15-19)</td>
<td>She studied finance in the SVS for four years. Her mother started the family business, a company selling steel, when Wei was 16 years old.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(19-23)</td>
<td>She started to work in a local bank at 19 years old. She left the job four years later due to its low pay and long distance from home.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(24-26)</td>
<td>She worked for her family business.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(25-27)</td>
<td>She got married and two years later she had her son. Wei seemed to work much less after she got married and stopped totally after she became pregnant. At this time she also moved from her own flat to live with her parent. After the birth of her son, she used two nannies as well as enjoying her parents’ and grandmother’s help.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 (33)</td>
<td>Her son reached six years old and started primary school, Wei began to work again after stopping for more than seven years. This job, as a finance product consultant, gave her great flexibility with little responsibility, which met her needs for looking after her son. She was still living with her parents and her husband sometimes lived there, but at other times he was living on his own in their flat in another district of Shanghai.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure of lived life</td>
<td>Wei demonstrated little interest/motivation in her education or jobs. The major transition happens when she married and had her son. After the birth of her son, he became the most important focus of her life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9 The lived life of M Li

B. Told Stories

a. Initial Response

When asked about her life story, Wei initially gave a two minute report of her life (school, work, marriage and child). When I asked about the most important experiences in her life, she said, ‘the largest transition of my life was meeting my husband. After we married, two years later, my son came. The priority of my life shifted to focus on him.’ Such highlighting of her husband and her son as the most important ‘transitions’ of her life, interestingly, did not match her long follow-up narrative in which she spent most of the time talking about her unfortunate education experiences ‘destroyed’ by ‘terrible teachers’. She spent about 40 minutes telling a long life story during which she lost control of her emotions twice (crying) and both related to her schooling.

There are several ways to interpret this response: first, she felt very sad about her educational experiences which caused her low educational qualifications. Second, she felt ashamed about this, particularly in front of the researcher, and hence decided to justify her bad results – it was the fault of those ‘terrible teachers’. Third, as the grandmothers’ stories demonstrated, the parents (particularly mothers) played an important role in ‘choosing’ the right schools for their children and therefore, the long narration about her sad experiences of changing schools can be read another way as indirectly blaming her parents. This in turn provides a good reason for her following stories of intensive mothering – Wei wants to avoid repeating her parents’ mistakes.

b. Intensive mothering

When mentioning childrearing, Wei said very clearly from the beginning, ‘basically, it was mainly me who looked after my son since he was born.’ This was unexpected as Wei moved to live with her parents after she got pregnant and stayed there. Wei explained her deep involvement in childcare with strong argumentations:
‘I always think that the child should be reared by his parents; the older generation could give you a hand, but they should not be the main carer. … So, from my heart, I really want to, even though it means sacrifices, this arrangement (she was the main carer) was a choice of myself.’

Such a strong identification with her mothering role went hand in hand with her distrust of alternative carers: in her interview, she talked about how she could not trust the nanny to wash her son’s bottle properly, her disapproval of her mother’s impatience and dominant style of communication with her son and her father spoiling her son by buying too many toys. Above all, her complaints mostly focused on her husband: he let their son watch the iPad as long as the boy wanted; he bought carbonated drinks for him; he pushed him to study too long and told the boy off when he could not correctly answer some academic questions. As nobody could be trusted, or could take care of her son as well as she could, her becoming the main carer was the only solution.

Here, Wei’s perception of looking after a child included a new set of practices which were unheard of for the two older generations. All the great-grandmothers and grandmothers felt blessed if in the early days they could get any help from the older generation or other family members. However, from Wei’s complaints we can see her understanding of good childcare includes taking care of every detail of her child’s life, including a high standard of hygiene and healthy food; encouraging learning but at the same time avoiding too much pushing that might ‘damage’ her son’s interest in study; and having unlimited patience with her son at the same time as administering some discipline. It seems only a full-time mother with a new ‘scientific method’ can fulfil such a role.

c. The scientific approach to childrearing

A ‘scientific’ way of childrearing was mentioned by many of the mothers and was demonstrated with regard to early feeding (breastfeeding or bottle feeding), washing/bathing a child, healthy or unhealthy diet for toddlers, nappy changes or toilet training and how to deal with an ill child. These areas are dominated by experts’ opinions and make the older generation who lack relevant formal training or education (including nannies) appear incompetent. Due to limitations of space, I use
the case of bathing to demonstrate how this new scientific way of childrearing
devalues the older generation’s knowledge and at the same time undermines
mothers’ confidence and competency. In the interview, Wei mentioned the first
month of her motherhood when they did not have a nanny because her mother
wanted to help.

‘After my son was born, we were totally hurry-scurry
(*shoumangjiaoluan*), we did not even know how to bath the baby. In
China, there was no systematic training during the pre-natal period, not
at all! The little soft thing came back home, how to wash him?! In the
end, my aunt who had worked as a mid-wife came to save us. She taught
us for two days after finishing her work.’

It was possible that Wei felt nervous about washing her baby, but her mother had
looked after her when she was a baby on her own for a year! How could her mother
not know? It is more likely that a) her mother tried but her way of washing did not
meet Wei’s standard of the most scientific way of bathing a baby (eg., what to use;
the water temperature; and the specific method used in washing a baby); or b) her
mother had already heard about these ‘new’ ‘scientific’ ways of raising a modern
baby which made her feel unable to do the job. From this example we can see this
new intensive mothering project not only needed the mothers’ whole energy,
attention and patience, it also needed an approach that matched the ideology of new
modernity praising a scientific approach and way of thinking.

d. The omissions in her story

The child-centred and scientific approach in Wei’s and many other mothers’ stories
echoed a similar trend globally (Lee et al., 2014). However, there is a particular
Chinese element to this practice. Wei was not really doing all of this on her own:
during the first month, she had her mother sleep with her son for about 20 days, and
then had a very expensive nanny to help her until her son was 100 days old[^82]. Then,
from one year to two and a half years old, she had another nanny helping her from
9:00 to 16:00 every day and they would even take the nanny with them when they
were travelling. The fact she was living with her parents and grandma and next door

[^82]: The first 100 days was regarded as most fragile and vulnerable period for a baby and the
hardest time for parents. There is a celebration in Chinese families when a baby survives the
first 100 days.
to her uncle’s family meant she never needed to worry about cooking or washing or most of the housework. Also, she could easily go out to do something without worrying about lacking adults to temporarily take care of her son. Needless to say, the financial security and free living place provided by her parents supported the material side of her mothering practices significantly. This support from the older generation and others provided an important basis for intensive mothering practices which Wei did not mention at all in her story. How to understand such an omission?

I regard this omission in Wei’s story as a way of separating herself from her mother and her counterparts who have lower social-economic status. First, this omission demonstrates her eagerness to establish a particular image of herself as a good mother: a mother who is capable of taking the main responsibility for rearing her child on her own ‘whole-heartedly’ (quanxinquanyi 全心全意, a word that has been emphasised by Wei and other mothers many times in their interviews). However the ‘whole-heartedly’ caring mother is defined by a particular intensive mothering that can only be achieved by having enough material and practical support. Therefore, mothers having low social-economic status are materially restricted in engaging such a way of childrearing. If we remember her particular failure in education and in obtaining a prestigious job, such a strong identity with mothering to such a high standard sets her apart. Therefore, Wei’s particular involvement with today’s intensive mothering practices can also be a way of expressing her success in being a modern woman who holds upper-middle-class status.

Furthermore, this image sets her apart from her own mother. Throughout the interview, she hardly mentioned her father and only talked about her mother a few times, apart from telling negative stories about her, for example her lack of educational support, telling her off for having a boyfriend and her mother’s impatience with looking after her son (the grandson). Wei’s distanced relationship and dissatisfaction with her mothers’ mothering was clearly demonstrated. Therefore, such whole-hearted childcare can also make her differ from her own mother.

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83 All of these aspects were observed during the three days that I stayed with this family.
e. The dilemma between the role of a mother and a wife

The most emotional moments in Wei’s interview happened when she talked about her deteriorating relationship with her husband. Wei criticised her husband a lot about his ‘wrong’ way of parenting. When she talked about their relationship, she could not stop crying. She told me that her husband had refused to live with her in her parents’ house since their son was born and left her alone there for a year.

‘That was the hardest period of my life. As a mother, you can understand, how that feels when you were left alone with a new born baby…When we find a time with nobody around, I will tell you more about my experiences of that particular period.’

Wei refused to go into detail probably because she found it too painful to recall such experiences. She might also feel shameful to talk about her deteriorating relationship with her husband as a successful intimate marital relationship is regarded as one of the key elements of being a ‘modern woman’ in today’s China (Rofel, 1999 and Evan, 2010). What kept Wei at her parents’ place? Wei said she needed support from her parents but she also wanted to be company to her grandma, particularly after her grandpa died six years ago. This extended family living environment provided crucial support to Wei’s intensive mothering and she also wanted to support other family members. However, as the childrearing responsibility still mainly fell on her, Wei’s husband failed to see (or agree with) the importance of such a reciprocal relationship and felt uncomfortable living with all of her family members. This is not surprising if we consider that most men still prefer the traditional patriarchal family arrangement where the wife lives with her husband’s family (Shen, 2011).

Would it be better if they moved back to their own flat, I asked her. She said yes but was not sure when this would happen. Then, she added, they were planning to emigrate to America. This decision was mainly to do with her son. She and her family (except for her husband) agreed that education and life overall was better in America than in China. However, it was decided that only Wei and her son would go there as her husband was not willing to live in a foreign country.
For grandmother’s generation, being a good mother is equally important as being a virtuous wife. However, for Wei’s generation, a full-time mother is someone focusing solely on her child, which can create tension between marriage and motherhood. This tension impacted on Wei greatly and she could not see a way out of such tension in the near future, unless she compromised by less focusing on intensive mothering. However, as discussed earlier, the fact that the new scientific, child-centred intensive mothering set her apart from her counterparts and her own mother, made it very hard for her to give up such practices.

C. Synthesis of the Lived Life and Told Stories

Wei’s lived life and told stories demonstrate two central tensions. One is to do with her efforts to maintain an image of a mother who takes the main responsibility for rearing her son, but in reality has to depend greatly on others’ support, including the person she really wants to be different from – her mother. The other tension lies between her strong wish to practice intensive mothering and her desire to have a better relationship with her husband. These tensions are never fully articulated by Wei but disclosed through her strong argumentations for intensive mothering, and omission and criticism of others’ help and her emotional story about her husband’s lack of understanding. However, relating these stories to her life trajectory in today’s China, I also interpret such a strong desire to practice intensive mothering regardless of the tensions it causes as a way for her to express her separation from both her mother (due to her own growing-up experiences) and her counterparts (only the well-resourced minority can afford full-time intensive mothering). Therefore, although struggling, she is determined to choose intensive mothering practices. I summarise her story as: ‘My mother failed to provide a good childhood and educational support for me and now I want to be different from her. Being a full-time mother who can practice intensive mothering is a way to differentiate myself from other mothers with lower SIES background, even though I am paying a painful price – my relationship with my husband.’
5.4.2 Mother Wang Cheng: A Modern ‘Careless’ Mother

A. Lived Life

The following table 10 shows the lived life of the M Wang Cheng with my summary of her case structure at the end.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glocal Context</th>
<th>Year (Age)</th>
<th>Major Life Transitions/Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Child Policy Started in 1979</td>
<td>1989 (0)</td>
<td>Wang Cheng’s parents came from poor rural families. Her father came to the city as a young adult and her mother came to the city as a child. Cheng was born in the city BB when her parents working in a SCO (Small Collective-Owned Organisation) as front-line workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform started in 1978, but started its impact since late 1980 and 1990s. Female workers faced redundancy in late 1990s</td>
<td>(6-15)</td>
<td>Cheng finished her nine years compulsory education (from primary to junior middle school). Her mother was laid off by the factory when she was around 10.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1999 (10)</td>
<td>Cheng was told she had a brother. This brother lived with her relatives for a year due to his illegal status (against the One Child Policy). She only dared to tell her friends that her younger brother is her real brother, instead of her cousin, after graduating from junior middle school. Around 1998, her father started his own factory and their family’s living standards improved greatly due to his success. On the other hand, around this time her mother was laid off from the SCO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(15 - 18)</td>
<td>Cheng showed no interest in academic work, so she went to a middle vocational school, studying accountancy. She studied for about 2 years and the last year was an internship where she worked for her father’s factory first, then decided to leave and find her own jobs, including selling computer consumables, and finally selling sports clothes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(19 – 26)</td>
<td>Cheng went back to work for her father and became the chief accountant for his factory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(24)</td>
<td>Cheng got married. Her husband was her classmate at junior middle school, someone she had known for about twelve years before they got married. Two months later, Cheng became pregnant with her son. She only worked part time during her pregnancy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Child Policy</td>
<td>(25-26)</td>
<td>Cheng gave birth to her son. For the first two months, her mother and her husband’s aunt took</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
stopped in 2015 turns to look after her son. After he was 2-months old, her mother became the main carer for her son. Cheng had little involvement in providing daily care of her son and carried on living her life as she had before the birth, such as going out late with friends.

| Structure of the Lived Life | Cheng’s lack of academic achievement gave her little choice of career and she had tried to get away from her father’s factory, but eventually had to go back. She seems to struggle in finding a job that she was really interested in. However, getting married and having children early did not make her want to be a housewife or stay-at-home mother. Instead, she is little involved in childcare and heavily dependent on her mother’s help. Neither work nor mothering became central to her life. She seems to be more interested in the busy social life she had been enjoying before becoming a mother. |

Table 10 Lived life of M Wang Cheng

B. Told Stories

a. Initial response

Cheng’s determination to tell a happy story of her life is demonstrated in her initial response to the first research question.

‘I think there is nothing (to say). Because we are the Eighty’s Generation. We had no bitter life when we were little and parents provided good care. We had no … I think we are a happy generation.’

The ‘happy’ tone Cheng adopted then became bleak when she moved on to talk about how her ‘bad tempered’ paternal grandma who beat her. Then, her fluent narration suddenly became a bit ‘messy’ when she talked about the arrival of a younger brother.

‘When I was ten, my mum had my younger brother, sometime, …[tut], sometime people said the parents should treat both children equally, but sometime, at the bottom of the heart, there were difference… Now, I understand that my dad achieved a lot, so, I never asked for anything, if he gave me something I accepted but I never fight for anything, I think it is meaningless. … I do not care. … So, I feel everything is good.’
This broken narrative at the beginning of her life story is meaningful. The mention of her younger brother and the unequal treatment implied in the story seems to suggest that Cheng was bothered by these facts. On the other hand, she did not want to project a negative image about her life in the interview. Therefore, she tried to produce a ‘coherent’ picture of a good life as she said in the beginning. However, she also suggested that such a good life can only be achieved by the compromises she made: she ‘never fight for anything’ and she ‘does not care’. This produces a familiar image of a ‘good girl’ in a family in which boys are the priority. She knows that to have a relatively good life, she had to understand her own position at home: lower status than her younger brother. This reminds us of GM Mei’s story of her knowing the importance of her younger brother without being taught (see Chapter 4). The difference is that Cheng did not want to tell (or admit) a bitter life story as GM Mei did. Therefore, Cheng’s narration is filled with conflicting information.

However, interestingly, she also mentioned her father’s achievement in the middle of this story of her younger brother. This suggests that the discrimination she received at home could be mainly from her father. In addition, the later story she talked about her dependency on her father and her arguments about her father’s love towards her can help us understand the significance of the mention of father’s achievement in her initial response.

b. Free-range style

In terms of childcare, Cheng expressed her particular view in the early phase of the interview, ‘He (her son who was about five months old) has already been very free. I said he has a free soul (ziyoupai 自由做主), just leaving him free; in the future, I will rear him freely (geitasanyang 给他散养).’ In fact, this free-range style of mothering is not a project for the future, rather a description of her son’s current arrangements as she said ‘he has already been very free.’

‘I did very little with my son. If I have nothing else to do, I will hold him for a while. But at night, it has always been my mum (who takes care of him). In the evening, I will go out with my friends to play and come back home late.’
This lack of involvement is not only in huge contrast to Wei’s story, but does not comply with the image of good mothering as projected by Chinese media today. It is likely that Cheng has observed or been told about these new models of good modern mothering. Indeed, her particular way of telling her stories in a contrived manner with lots of unnatural laughter may suggest her worries about being judged by me as a middle-class person who embodies the canonical model of modern motherhood. In fact, Cheng demonstrated her awareness of public opinion and defended herself against it when I asked if there were any conflicts between her and her mother in rearing her son.

I am happy with whatever the results of my son by her rearing. (你给我带成什么样就是什么样.) If you interfere, she would be unhappy. You see, she already feels tired by taking care of a child, if you say something, she would be even unhappier. So, I never say anything. I am happy with whatever results. So, no matter what food you give to him, I do not oppose. Others said that the child should not eat anything with salt in it before 1 year old. I will say, (if you want to correct her), you take care of him for me. Who can look after my son, who (can decide). I will not interfere. You see, a small child with more teeth, you do not give him any salt, he also has a stomach, you refuse to give him salt, he has a stomach, too. You even do not eat it yourself, let alone a child! So, whatever way he is growing up, I do not care, as long as he is not ill, whatever you do. So, I never have different opinions. My mum said to me that other people made this or that for their children. I said, you can do as well. If you make it for him, he eats, that’s fine. If he does not eat it is also ok and that tells you that do not make it again next time. [Laugh] I have no opinion about these things as long as you can take care of my child.

This story contains strong feelings as Cheng changed her form of narration into an argument, as demonstrated by her use of ‘you’. Her decision to focus on feeding practice was no surprise as all twelve mothers in the youngest generation talk about this as a problematic area of childrearing. Here, Cheng mentioned issues to do with healthy diets for children which has been promoted as a different, scientific and modern way of feeding a child. Every parent today is under pressure to match up to Western dietary standards for their children with an emphasis on less salt, oil and

84 In particular, I embodied many differences from her: someone had two master degrees and studying a Ph.D abroad, someone who raised her child on her own with little support from her parents and someone whose father used to be her father’s boss. In other words, I embodied higher social and cultural capital than she possessed.
fried food\textsuperscript{85}. However this type of diet is very different from how children have been raised in China for thousands of years. In many families (ten out of twelve mothers), this different way of feeding children became the area that caused most conflict between mothers and the grandparents who helped with childcare.

In Cheng’s case, she did not want to cause trouble with her mother as she was totally dependent on her help. Therefore, she felt there was a need to argue for her own opinion that went against the popular modern way of feeding children: she supports salty food in children’s diet and used the most natural evidence to prove she was correct: even a small child has a stomach. What she implied was that if we were all raised in a traditional way and ended up OK, why she should need to change it and make it hard for everyone. Doubts about the traditional way of childrearing symbolize a modern and ‘better’ way of childrearing which implies much ‘guidance’ is needed to correct grandparents’ practices. Therefore, agreeing to a traditional way of childrearing means deviating from the project of being a good modern mother, which was associated with a lower social-economic status as these mothers could not be ‘full-time mothers’ and/or lacked awareness of the most advanced knowledge about childrearing (Breengaard, 2015). Interestingly, Cheng’s family has already become middle-class. Cheng does not need to earn much money and her family’s economic situation probably can support Cheng to practice ‘intensive mothering’. However, Cheng might still feel ‘inadequate’ due to her family’s origins – her parents come from rural areas and this often equates to less awareness of the most advanced knowledge of modern mothering. Therefore, the transgression makes Cheng feel a need to argue strongly for herself.

In fact, as her long argument about feeding the baby with salty food demonstrates, she knows what has been promoted as modern ‘good mothering’. The rural background or the assumptions of a lack of acknowledgement of modern mothering doesn’t explain Cheng’s lack of interest in intensive mothering or mothering at all\textsuperscript{86}. This relates to her particular silence on her mother’s help and her strong defence of her father’s love that I am turning to now.

\textsuperscript{85} Such discussions can be seen often in parenting TV programme and the popular parenting magazines such as ‘Parenting Science’.

\textsuperscript{86} In fact, Cheng is the only mother from the 12 M generation mothers who demonstrated little interest in intensive mothering across SIESs.
c. Defending her father and silence on her mother

Cheng spent a lot of time talking about her father in her life story but mentioned little about her mother. After saying how violent and autocratic her father was, she spent a long time arguing how much her father loved her: he never worried about buying the best food for her and he looked after her when she became seriously ill after childbirth. She repeated several times, ‘My father, actually, loves me very much.’ This strong defending and argumentation tell us that Cheng really wants to love her father. In a way, Cheng’s appreciation of her father’s love is similar to what we discussed in Chapter 4 - how this generation of women understand that strict and violent discipline does not negate the care and love their parents have for them. On the other hand, different from Yan’s stories about her mother’s care and love in both Chapter 4 and 6, Cheng chose to be silent on her mother in her life story even though her mother was the main carer of her son. Relating back to her experiences of feeling discriminated against as a girl, compared to her younger brother, I interpret her silence on her mother and strong argument about her father’s love as demonstrating her complex emotion towards gender: she learnt that boys are better than girls and men are more powerful than women. Men (her father) could achieve much more than women (her mother) even though men (her father) are violent sometimes. She is a girl and a woman, but she wants to be closer to a boy/man’s world. Therefore, she wants to love her father and distance herself from her mother by talking little about her mother in her life story and by not involving herself with what her mother has been doing in her life – childrearing.

C. Synthesis of the Lived Life and Told Stores

From her lived life, I summarised that Cheng demonstrated little interest in either working in her father’s factory or mothering. Instead, she carries on with a busy social life like a young girl. This is not uncommon among this generation of mothers and they were often criticized as ‘not growing up’ by their parents. However, Cheng’s stories about her life and her mothering experiences help us to see another reason for such behavior: Cheng’s transgress of today’s dominant ideology of motherhood relates to her experiences of a gendered world where girls and women are powerless or less important compared to boys and men. She wants to be more
powerful or to inject some importance to her own life by distancing herself from a woman’s world that is symbolised by her mother and mothering. However, she also felt uneasy about being part of a man’s world which was symbolized by a successful career (that she says her father had achieved). Her current success in finding paid work was due to help from her father - who told her off nearly every day. Such dependence on her father and conflict with him made her feel less powerful and this is probably why Cheng did not talk about her jobs with enthusiasm. Cheng’s overall story of mothering can be summarised as: ‘I was discriminated against as a girl and I saw the power and achievement of my father and the lack of them in my mother’s life. Therefore, I want to be different from her, not a stay-at-home mother and housewife and refused the normative mothering style. However, I am still searching for a way to be more independent in this men’s world.’

5.4.3 Summary

Wei and Cheng present two extremes in terms of their attitudes about modern mothering practices. However, neither of them found it easy to tell a happy life or motherhood story. Wei’s whole-hearted involvement in today’s intensive mothering goes hand in hand with a problematic relationship with her husband who is much less interested in her modern mothering project as well as being more influenced by traditional patriarchal society. For Cheng, although she wanted to have less involvement with both childcare and the gendered world in which these specific practices are embodied, she did not find it easy to become really strong in the workplace, a place still dominated by (aggressive) men. Therefore, although both Wei and Cheng mentioned little about wider society, we can see how their practices were influenced and constrained by the structure and culture that was beyond their individual control: the global influence of intensive mothering, the gendered practice in childrearing, the gender discrimination at the workplace and the residue of patriarchal family relationships. On the other hand, both Cheng and Wei also tried their best to leave their own mark in a very much constrained environment: Wei is using ‘intensive mothering’ to distance and distinguish herself from her mother and her counterparts whereas Cheng is using ‘free-range style’ to differ herself from her mother and the women’s world it embodied. However, as Cheng’s choice of rearing style is often associated with a lack of modern mothering knowledge due to her
parents’ rural background, Cheng felt obliged to argue strongly in the interview whereas Wei found it very ‘natural’ to talk about her mothering practices.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the distinct social, economic, political and cultural conditions in which each generation of mothers lived and the ways in which they shaped mothering experiences and how they tell their mothering stories in the interviews. Looking across generations, we can see that the first generation of mothers (the great-grandmothers) who lived through the hardest times, demonstrated the least regret/guilt about their mothering practices, even though the two great-grandmothers presented were of very different social status (one among those at the top, the other near the bottom of society) and experienced very different life trajectories. As mentioned earlier, the strong emphasis on women’s participation in work outside the home, supported by the ‘liberated woman’ ideology, provided significant support. Although not all woman could be really liberated, such an ideology opened up the women’s worlds by encouraging them to participate in either employed work or volunteer activities organised by the government. Even recounting their past from the present-time, when a totally different ideology of mothering dominates public opinion, they still disagreed with ‘unjustified’ blame and argue (GG Zhu Yu) or explain (GG Zhao Xue) how the historical context shaped their mothering practices.

The grandmothers’ generation was much less convinced that they had done a good job as mothers. Instead, some of them (GM Jiang Ping) express very strong guilt of not being good enough even though, compared to her own mother, she provided so much more care and resources for her daughter. Others, like the GM Chen Rong, even though praised by her husband as a virtuous wife and good mother, still felt unsure about her own roles and contributions as a mother apart from the early period of childcare that depended on women’s (under-valued) essential instincts.

The ‘time distance’ from childrearing practices also can explain some of the guilt or dissatisfaction of this grandmother’s generation when recounting their motherhood from the present-time. At the time of the interviews, all of the grandmothers were
involved in providing childcare to their grandchildren, which was different from the
great-grandmothers. This means that grandmothers are much closer to the
differences of mothering practices between their time and currently, which can also
explain this generation’s doubts and guilt about their own practices.

For the M’s generation, their parents became ‘a problem’ and this set them apart
from the other two generations. The two mothers discussed wanted to be different
from their own mothers. This dis-identification became one of their strong drivers to
identify with and perform specific mothering practices, even though their choices
were opposite to one another (intensive vs. free-range style with little involvement).
This is the only generation in which being a ‘full-time mother’ is a meaningful and
attractive project on its own, as Mother Li Wei’s stories demonstrated. The ‘baby
fever’ culture and the individualist society that throw the whole responsibility of
raising a healthy, happy and clever child on to the parents (mostly mothers)
contributes to a new phenomenon – the desire to be a full-time mother who can
practice intensive mothering. On the other hand, Cheng’s motherhood story
demonstrates the still existing belief in gendered practices of childrearing (which she
rejected) and unequal power between men and women in today’s China.

This comparison highlights the differences across generations, and how historical
context and changing dominant ideologies shapes these mothers’ experiences. On
the other hand, the analysis of two cases from each generation highlights the
importance of biography that contributes to differences between mothers’
experiences within the same generation (see section 5.2.3, 5.3.3 and 5.4.3). No
matter how much they followed or distanced themselves from a particular social
construction of motherhood, we can trace these women’s particular
subjectivity/agency by connecting their stories with their life trajectories. This
particular biographical time includes not only how they were reared but also their
families’ or their own SIESs which defined the resources (Brannen & Moss, 1991, p.
9) they could use or apply. These six women’s stories demonstrate how a particular
social, economic, political or cultural position, or their origins, impact on their
decisions and choices in childrearing and the way they give accounts of their
practices.
Chapter 6  Intergenerational Transmissions across Three Generations of Women

6.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters focused on women’s accounts of their growing up and mothering experiences. This chapter analyses the intergenerational transmission processes in each family and across the family chains. There is limited data from and about other family members. None the less the impact of other family members on interviewees is narrated in some life stories. As Bertaux put it beautifully,

‘Five life stories of individuals not connected to each other constitute five separated pieces, perhaps five gems but with no cumulative power unless they are taken from the same social world. But the life stories of five persons connected by close kinship ties … bring more information than five separated life stories: they illuminate and reflect upon each other like the gems of a necklace. The reason is not only methodological: such linked lives, deal with one and the same cluster of persons and lives; one can see them unfold in parallel, and witness for instance how a given development in one impinges upon the other ones; how the elder generations attempt to shape the life courses of the younger one; or how relations of competition and complementarity between siblings contribute to orient their life paths’. (Bertaux & Delcroix, 2000a, p. 74)

This chapter treats intergenerational transmission as an essential part of mothering and embedded in mothers’ daily childrearing activities. As Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody (2001) commented, the most crucial and transculturally similar feature of mothering is women’s efforts in passing on something valuable and useful to their children. This chapter explores the intergenerational processes, the reported actions/interactions between mothers and daughters (as well as between other family members) and the consequences of transmission. Concepts relating to intergenerational transmission are discussed first, supported by empirical examples from the twelve families. Then two family cases, including six women’s stories, are analysed in detail to demonstrate the complex transmission processes and the result in terms of what have been accepted, altered or refused by the receiver and how this affected their social mobility.
6.2 Transmission Processes

6.2.1 Tangible and Intangible Things

Intergenerational transmission is about the older generations (mother and father or grandmother and grandfather, as well as other older family members) passing on something or some ‘things’ to the next generation. The ‘thing’ is, in some instances, tangible, such as assets and wealth or may be less tangible, such as ‘taste’. The transmission of different kinds of resources were famously studied by Bourdieu (1986). Depending on the field in which it functions, capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: economic, social and cultural capital (ibid). According to Bourdieu (1986), economic capital ‘which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights’ whereas ‘social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’ (ibid, 248). In social capital, the focus is on the capital that accumulated via the interpersonal relationship. However, his most important contribution in theories of different forms of capitals is the concept of ‘cultural capital’ as an extension of concrete economic and social capital to the symbolic realm. In defining ‘cultural capital’, Bourdieu refers to the collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, posture, clothing, mannerisms, credentials, etc. that one acquires through being part of a particular social class. Although the cultural capital described by Bourdieu can be either embodied (such as skills, and tastes) or institutional (such as educational qualifications), Bertaux and Delcroix (2000b) point out that, since Bourdieu’s analysis focused mainly on things that are shared among specific social groups/classes, they are not invisible but are to some degree ‘objective’. The authors argue that another type of less visible, more ‘subjective’, resource is also important in transgenerational transmission: the individual qualities of the older generations that are passed on to the younger ones, for example, being strong, independent or holding high aspirations. These ‘definitely subjective resources may be used by parents, especially those deprived of any capitals, to build into their children self-confidence and other personality features, which may in turn prove very useful later on in their struggle for occupational achievement and status attainment.’ (Bertaux and Delcroix, 2000b, p.81) These
subjective and personal qualities can also be individual and beyond an individual, such as a particular pattern of a relationship or a desire to keep a warm relationship between family members or the opposite, a distanced one (Thompson, 2007).

How many tangible and intangible ‘things’ are transmitted to the next generation is not only decided by the transmission process within the family (i.e., the interactions and practices between the older and younger generations) but also by the historical context. Historical context plays a significant role when comparing three generations. For the great-grandmothers’ generation, the constant wars during their childhood made most of the families experience a decline in the family’s material resources, with the result that they had little economic capital to pass on. Some families relied strongly on social capital usually relatives and neighbours. However, as daughters ‘married out’ into their husband’s family, a large part of this social capital was lost. Therefore, if anything was transmitted to the great-grandmothers, it was more likely to be cultural capital or some personal qualities.

However, when the great-grandmothers became wives and mothers, a new socialist country (the P.R.C. was established in 1949) was established with a particular emphasis on economic equality from the early 1950s to the early 1980s (Li, 2011). This meant hardly any grandmothers could inherit significant wealth from their parents, instead, it was social networks or personal qualities that were transmissible. For the great-grandmothers’ generation, although everyone lived in a pretty much equal economic situation, social status was far from equal. The women or their husbands who worked for the government or as a head in the military/BCO (Big Collective-Owned Organisation) possessed much higher social status and therefore wielded political power. Such power and status can make a difference to the younger generation’s life mainly through their social connections. Here, social capital also contains political power and was much more valuable than the great-grandmothers’ parents’ social capital. This type of capital can be valuable and can be transmitted. The detailed case analysis of family Zhao will demonstrate this point.

During the late 1980 and early 1990s, China’s society shifted significantly again: the introduction of marketization mechanisms by Deng Xiaoping’s (the new leader) Reform and Open Door Policy started to have an influence on normal people’s lives.
It is from this point that some ambitious, risk-taking and very capable grandmothers took the opportunities offered and started to accumulate personal and family assets. By the time they were approaching retirement age, some of the grandmothers could transmit large enough amounts of economic capital to their daughters to determine their daughters’ SIES. This can be demonstrated clearly by M Li Wei’s story (see Chapter 5). Li Wei, although having lower education qualifications than her counterparts and working at low level jobs, was one of the highest SIES mothers within the twelve families due to the large amount of money/property she inherited from her parents. In fact, she seemed not to worry about work or salary and focused totally on motherhood.

However, families like Li’s are not in the majority. Most grandmothers were better off compared to their own mothers but could not be described as ‘rich’. The majority were able to pass on some economic capital – buying or contributing to the purchase of a flat for their daughter before or after she is married. This is a common practice in a city like Bengbu and all the Ms received such help from their parents.

The above brief description demonstrates how historical context constrains what mothers and families can transmit to the younger generation in terms of different forms of ‘things’/capital. However, intangible, subjective and personal qualities can still be transmitted within such constraints and play a crucial role in shaping the younger generation’s life trajectories.

6.2.2 Conscious and Unconscious Transmission

Transmission is not only conscious or articulated. Transmission is a mixture of both parents’ conscious efforts in passing something valuable to their children and the parent’s unconscious daily behaviours that produce intergenerational influence. Both tangible and intangible things can be what parents make clear efforts to pass on. It is easy to understand the conscious process of passing on something like property or assets or particular social relationships, but it can also be personal qualities. For example, several of the mothers from the mothers’ generation said their mothers purposely raised them in a way that would encourage independence. The mother Hang Ting said that ‘my mum was always imposing the idea of being independent
and that women cannot depend on men.’ Her mother GM Hang Xu also stated that she deliberately raised her daughter to be independent,

‘I asked her to wash her little socks and underwear since she could walk! Clearly, she could not wash them very well. Then, I would re-wash again behind her. But it is important to let her learn to do her own thing from early on!’

GM Han Xu’s demand that her daughter wash her own clothes is a deliberate way to encourage this particular personal quality in her daughter. Her efforts also included setting up a specific model for her daughter, the identity reference marker (Kellerhals, Ferreira, & Perrenoud, 2002). Han Xu told a story of how her older sister was ‘full of guts’ (youpoli), that she started her own business and then went bankrupt. She didn’t tell any family members about her failure in business. Instead, she sold little things by the street to gain income and gradually started her business again, successfully. At the end this story, GM Han Xu said, ‘I told my daughter, ‘after we helped you to set up your life, you should not depend on the family, not depend on the family. You should learn from your aunt, being independent!’’

Much intergenerational transmission is also achieved through parents’ unconscious efforts – the way they live their lives, deal with both family and non-family people, and their particular family relationships and patterns. In other words, children learn from observation, imitation and then innovations based on what they have observed and imitated. Bourdieu (1977) used the term ‘habitus’ to describe this kind of ‘reasonable or common sense behaviour’, ‘structured dispositions’ that entail ‘spontaneity without consciousness’ (Brannen et al., 2004, p. 180). In the following, I will discuss an example of personal quality that gets transmitted through such unconscious and unarticulated processes.

In Chapter 5 I discussed GG Zhu Yu’s story. Zhu Yu She came to Bengbu on her own to live with relatives at the age of 16. She demonstrated particularly strong social skills which won her a good reputation amongst her relatives as well as her new urban neighbours. This reputation helped her to find a husband with a full-time proper job in a SOE, and then, later, the same skills gained her close friends and the opportunity to start a business selling noodles with another girl on the street, a
source of income and food for her poor family, particularly her children. In the end, she and the other seven women in the same community cooperated to make clothes and this was so successful that their little business merged with a local government factory and eventually this changed her status – she became a full-time female worker for a SCO (Small Collective-Owned Organisation) at age of 40! Her daughter, GM Zhu Lin, was also a very sociable person. This was very evident when she was talking about how she ‘enjoyed’ her early motherhood. Zhu Lin lived with her parents-in-law from the time she married. Regardless of the notorious relationship between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law in China (Li, 2010b), GM Zhu Lin could not praise her parents-in-law more in her life story. She was grateful for their full support with childrearing when her daughter was small and said ‘I was so lucky that I could even go out to play Mah-jong (a type of traditional, but still commonly played, tile-based game in China) after having my daughter.’ She did not say a critical word about her parents-in-law in the interview even though she talked indirectly about the different ways of rearing children between her generation and her parents-in-law’s generation. However, such differences never ended in a quarrel. This is very similar to her mother GG Zhu Yu, who said proudly in her interview that ‘I never get red face (meaning get angry) with any of my relatives once’! GM Zhu Lin said the same, ‘we never quarrelled on anything.’ Zhu Lin was not only being really skillful in maintaining good relationships with family members, she was also well known for her friendly personality amongst her colleagues and she still enjoys good relationships with some of these old colleagues today. This fact was mentioned by both Zhu Lin herself and another grandmother (Jiang Ping) who worked in the same factory as her. Concerning the youngest generation (M Zhu Kun) such social skills seem to have been transmitted successfully again. Compared to other mothers in the mothers’ generation, Zhu Kun was one of the most hospitable interviewees: she waited for me at the gate of the community and had prepared a great variety of fruit. She even peeled some fruit for me when she saw I did not touch them during the interview. She always smiled before talking and made me feel easy and relaxed when talking to her. The day of our interview was really chilly. Half way through the interview, I felt uncomfortably cold. Without me saying anything, Zhu Kun realised the drop in the room temperature and offered me one of her warm coats to put on for the rest of the interview. These small gestures made me
feel very welcome and even close to her, regardless of the fact we hardly knew each other. Then, in Zhu Kun’s life story, she mentioned how she started to enjoy sharing whatever she had with her peers at a very early age. She often received nice food or toys from her father who travelled a lot in his job and she quickly shared everything with her playmates in the same neighbourhood. As an adult she also put great emphasis on her social life. She said the reason she enjoyed her work in the factory was because she was given the responsibility for monitoring the production process from an early stage. ‘This is a job to deal with people and I love this type of work!’ Then, she said the reason that she stayed with the same factory (a small private factory making electronic appliance components) for nine years and still would not consider leaving was because she enjoyed a particularly good relationship with her boss and her colleagues, even though this work does not generate a high income. Then, she talked how she regularly organised her cousins and colleagues to come to her home for social gatherings.

‘Even after I had my son, I still loved to play with them. Very often, I would call them to my home to cook together. We can enjoy cooking and enjoy the connections with each other emotionally at the same time. Even between the colleagues, the same principle works. If you do not connect with them, after a while, you would become distanced. I like to get them together. This is (my) personality.’

All these three generations of women in family Zhu demonstrated strong social skills and a desire to maintain good relationships with family, friends, neighbours and/or colleagues. Interestingly, none of them regarded this as something transmitted from the older generation and neither of the older generations considered they had particularly cultivated this particular personal quality in their daughters (compared with the previous example of the purposive transmission of independence). Instead they considered this as their daughter’s individual personality. Only when we put all three women’s narratives of lived life and told stories together, can we see a clear thread running through all three generations. This is an example of how something (a personal quality in this case) can be transmitted without being articulated: an unconscious but effective transmission.
6.2.3 Receiver’s Resistance and Relationality

I have mentioned the importance of the younger generation changing what had been transmitted to them. In the example of family Zhu, the unconscious but effective transmission also demonstrates that not claiming transmission has occurred can be an advantage. As Bertaux insightfully put it, ‘Because transmission of the sameness reifies the heir (treats him as an object), it seems to carry the kiss of death. To become the subject of the heritage, the heir must act on it by leaving his or her mark on it.’ (Bertaux & Bertaux-Wiame, 2007, p. 93) Sometimes the younger generations express negative feelings towards a particular personality trait or personal quality of their parents that they do not want to inherit, or specific practice that their parents have been using, or a particular pattern of family relationships. These negative feelings can make these younger generations dis-identify themselves with this parent (mother)/practices (mothering)/relationships (mother-daughter relationship). In this situation, resistance to being similar to their mother is demonstrated more evidently.

Such strong resistance to what was passed on to them is sometimes caused by a distant relationship between mother and daughter, but sometimes it is not. For instance, the GM Chu Mei felt strongly about the fact that her parents refused to support her staying in school when she was little, as well as clearly discriminating against her and her sisters compared to her younger brother. ‘We knew from little that the best food or best anything is always saved for my brother.’ She could not stop crying when she mentioned how much she wanted to carry on with her secondary school education when she was a top student in her class but her father had forced her to drop out. So, she said, ‘I always treated my daughter the same as my son. ... I always support my daughter to have better education. In fact, my daughter has a better education than my son!’ Here, GM Chu Mei disagreed with both her mother's and her father’s practices in childrearing which demonstrated clear gender discrimination. Therefore, she purposefully fostered a different set of practices: a more ‘fair’ treatment towards both her boy and girl and encouragement of girl’s academic achievement. However, even though GM Chu Mei cried several times when talking about her own discriminated girlhood, she expressed no negative or distant feeling towards her parents, but talked about lack of understanding at that time,
'I didn’t understand at that time. Why girls cannot be the same? Now I understand, it is that (historical) time! Everyone like that! What you can ask them to do? And we are too poor, just too poor! They really need our girls to work.’

Furthermore, Chu Mei particularly talked about her understanding of her mother’s ‘strange’ behaviour when she was small,

‘I never forget this… I always wondered why my mum always said she was busy when we at meal time…[Crying]… Every time, my dad would scold her when she said that. I hated the fact that she caused these arguments and I just did not understand why she had to do housework at meal time! [Crying] Only later, I understand that she worried about us having enough food to eat so she wanted to save for us [Crying]. Those years, you cannot talk about that, those years…’

Although the same great-grandmother had treated the boy better than the girls, and did little to help her daughters stay in secondary schooling, GM Chu Mei now demonstrated no negative feelings towards her mother, just pity and understanding. She said, ‘So now, I treated them (parents) very well. Time is different now and we have had a much better life.’ This is an extraordinary example of how the younger generation tried to resist a particular value and practice of their parents but at a later date, came to a deeper understanding of the older generations.

However, there are situations where the daughters dis-identified with their mothers so much that they formed a distant mother-daughter relationship. Such a relationship pattern can also have transgenerational impact. Family Zhao is a case in point. In this family, a distant relationship between mother and daughter is suggested by all three generations of women. All three mothers practice different ways of childrearing, or claimed they had different personal qualities, for example that they more were like their fathers than their mothers (see later case analysis).

6.2.4  Mother’s and Other Family Members’ Influence in Transmission

In his study of 100 British families’ social mobility Thompson makes a very clear connection between childrearing (mothering), social mobility and transmission:
‘The role of women, instead of being largely ignored, becomes central both as child-rearers and as transmitters of both family influence and their own independent occupational culture. Equally important, with the much deeper and subtler material provided by life-story transcripts, motivations, relationships, and emotions also become accessible. We see our task as to identify, through the close analysis of this rich and varied data, the process of intergenerational transmission.’ (ibid, 42)

However, focusing on mothers and mother-daughter relationships does not necessarily mean exclusion or neglect of fathers’ or other family member’s roles. The following example of M Wu Juan’s story demonstrates the importance of siblings, for example, in intergenerational transmission.

The GG Wu Fang was married to a poor family. Although her husband was a full-time worker for a COE, Wu Fang never stopped finding extra work to earn more money for the family or to engage with the community actively by working for the Resident’s Committee, unpaid. That’s why in the interview, the GM Wu Min said ‘My mum was an out-going personality and she was hardly at home. I got more love and care from my father.’ Interestingly, Wu Min said later of her own marriage that she copied the same pattern. ‘In fact, I am really like my mother. I have been always the busy one and tried everything I could to earn extra money whereas my husband was more like a stay at home father. [Laugh]’ This busy life outside home, for both generations of women, demonstrated their high aspiration for a better life and they did not want to give up. Such ambition created little economic change for the GG Wu Fang due to the poor economic situation in general in her time. However, by the time GM Wu Min started work, the marketization reforms had started and her aspirations benefitted from a better political and social foundation. She started selling anything she could make or find on the street and in the end took the risk of running a dental surgery with full responsibility for its survival, a choice many women would not have made in the early 1990s. This decision changed her and her family’s SIES significantly. She moved from a low SIES to a middle SIES by the late 1990s. This made her one of the richest in her generation in the study and she was proud of her achievement. Wu Fang transmitted this strong aspiration, and her strong work ethic even after being married or becoming a mother, to her younger daughter, but not to her older daughter, the M Wu Juan who I interviewed.
Wu Juan’s life trajectory was hugely influenced by the fact that her younger sister was regarded as more like a boy in personality and so got more care and attention from every family member (not only parents, but also her grandparents) than she did (see Chapter 4). This bitter experience pushed Wu Juan to want to dis-identify with the whole family. Therefore, instead of choosing to learn the skills of a dentist by working with her mother and getting a medical qualification as her younger sister chose to do, Wu Juan chose to learn driving and then studied electrical engineering, which ‘wasted’ (her words) many years because it did not create any prospect of a good job. Finally, after trying different routes and failing, Wu Juan went back to the same route that her mother and younger sister chose – learning the skills to become a dentist by working for her mother. However, by this point, getting a medical qualification became much more difficult and she still could not secure one by the mid-2000s. In the end, she had to work in a local clinic with a low salary and low social status, a kind of downward social mobility compared to her mother.

In this case it is M’s lower status at home compared to her sister that seems to have been most consequential: it pushed her further away from her family into making some risky choices which, unfortunately, turned out to be unsuccessful. In a way, her failure was inevitable. Even though her mother moved up to a middle SIES position successfully, their family generally possessed little social capital to support M Wu Juan when choosing a different career route. Interestingly, even though M Wu Juan has now accepted her fate of being a dentist and working with her mother and younger sister, she still demonstrated her difference from them by investing much more time and energy in rearing her daughter. In her family, M Wu Juan evidently was the main childcare provider whereas her husband, even though he lacked ‘proper jobs’ (only worked for his father part-time and did not get paid properly), did little to help. However, M Wu Juan was very lucky in terms of the support she received from her mother-in-law and therefore, in the interview, she talked about her mother-in-law in a much warmer way than her own mother. Here, she broke the ‘busy mother and warm father’ pattern in her family and moreover

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87 Wu Juan started to study electric engineering and this lasted three years. However, when she graduated, the anticipated good jobs in heavy industry were not there. Therefore, those factories found all kinds of ‘excuses’ to not have these graduates. She became jobless in terms of having no income but worked for her mother from then on. In the same year, she started to go to evening school to study medicine.
made a close association with her mother-in-law instead of her own mother or sisters - both practically and emotionally.

6.2.5 Intergenerational Transmission and Social Mobility

Bertaux and Thompson (2007b) demonstrate how intergenerational transmission practices play a crucial role in shaping an individual’s social mobility. They argue it is the family, rather than the individual, that should be treated as the unit of analysis when studying social mobility. In this sense, social mobility is one of the key outcomes of intergenerational transmissions. However, in addition, social mobility is one of the key motivations for intergenerational transmission in the Chinese families I studied. Older generations’ efforts are about passing on what is viewed as valuable to the next generation for them to have a ‘better life’. This ‘better life’ can be about maintaining the privileged status of the parents or a determination to rise out of poverty that the older generations experienced: movement up the social ladder. Such strong intentions and efforts by parents are a significant part of childrearing. This was demonstrated in Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody’s (2001) study of British middle-class mothers who pushed their daughters academically and Kuan’s (2015) study of Chinese mothers’ ‘irrational’ but ‘ethical’ push towards higher academic achievement.

These well-intentioned childrearing and transmission practices, of course, do not guarantee positive results. Whatever is regarded as valuable has to be accepted by the younger generation first, but also, has to fit into the current historical context for the younger generation. These historical contexts are beyond any individual family’s control and sometimes can determine an individual’s fate in an extraordinary and unexpected way. The most clear impact of historical context is witnessed when societies experience sudden transitions. Bertaux (2007) studied families who reversed their class (from top to bottom) as a result of sudden social change. In this situation, some valued family capital can become ‘handicaps’ for the younger generation. As Bertaux put it in relation to his study, such sudden change

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88 As discussed in Appendix V, social mobility here does not only mean an occupational mobility. Different generations of women experienced different criteria when judging someone’s social-economic status.
brought to light some of the ‘taken for granted’ privileges… families who experienced family capitals are capitals or ‘trumps’ in the games of generalised social competition only insofar as the rules of such games are biased in favour of members of the ruling class; … as long as the same class is in power, such rules do not change; they become so much taken for granted, so much part and parcel of a fixed background, that they disappear from the perception of ordinary people and sociologists alike; it takes their brutal suppression to make them visible, in retrospect. (ibid, p.80)”

I found a similar situation in family Shen’s case and this will be discussed later.

Whilst most of families do not experience such an extraordinary change of social-economic status^89, structural constraints in a particular historical time still clearly shape the result of intergenerational transmission and individual social mobility. For example, in education, no matter how the great-grandmothers’ generation felt about the appropriateness of girls staying in education, the grandmothers’ generation fared equally badly in their educational levels due to the sudden political movement whereby thousands of students were sent to the countryside (‘Down to the Countryside’) between 1968 and 1980; however, for the youngest generation, education became the most important thing for children, which shifted mothers’ childrearing practices and efforts in passing on educational ambition.

Before moving to the detailed cases, I first present the general pattern of the twelve families in relation to social mobility. Social stratification in China is a changing concept that reflects the historical transitions, meaning that how I stratify these families is difficult (as I explain in Appendix V). For example, in early socialist China (between the 1950s and 1970s) the result of being ‘working-class’ meant high social status rather than low. As explained previously (see Chapter 3), I use the term ‘social-economic status’ (SIES) instead of ‘social class’ or socioeconomic status to differ from the commonly simplified ways of categorizing women’s status.

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^89 Social-economic status has a different meaning for each generation. Appendix V has presented my detailed analysis of each generation of women’s social-economic status in her particular historical time. For the great-grandmothers’ generation, it is more about social and political status whereas for the next two generations, economic status started to become important.
Within the twelve families, there are only eight families in which I interviewed three generations of women in one family line (all daughter-mother relationships across three generations). The other four families have one generation which includes a daughter-in-law or mother-in-law. The majority of the grandmothers’ and mothers’ social-economic status stays at a similar level to their great-grandmothers (Table 11, 7/12). There are four families who managed upward mobility (4/12) (from a lower SIES to a higher one) and only one family fell down the social-economic scale\(^90\) (1/12). Such upward mobility reflects the larger picture of changes in Chinese society: the whole country has experienced rapid development since the late 1980s and the majority of families enjoy a better life. Although this does not necessarily mean that all families move up to a higher social-economic status when compared to their counterparts, this does make ‘falling’ less likely. All three families that achieved upward mobility had low SIES at the great-grandmothers’ generation. In family Shen, the lower SIES of the great grandmother was due to sudden political change and therefore, when the society became more open for everyone to compete regardless of their political background, some personal qualities that were transmitted to the younger generation became useful and valuable again, and this helped them to move up.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number and Surname of Family</th>
<th>Great-Grandmother</th>
<th>Grandmother</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Trend of Social Mobility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01 Zhao</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Unchanged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02 Qian</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Decline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 Sun</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Unchanged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 Wu</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Moved up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 Li</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Unchanged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06 Wang</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Moved up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07 Chen</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Unchanged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08 Chu</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Unchanged*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09 Zhu</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Moved up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Jiang</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Unchanged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Shen</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Moved up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Han</td>
<td>Middle?**</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Unchanged?**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{90}\) The reason I left a question mark on this family’s intergenerational social mobility is to do with the fact that the youngest generation hasn’t graduated yet and there is more uncertainty about her social-economic status compared to the others.
Table 11 Changes of social-economic status of women from twelve families

Note:

* I have only interviewed the daughter-in-law of the GM Chu as her daughter is not yet married. According to her daughter-in-law, she is still of relatively low SIES and holds a rural hukou. If judging the family trend by the grandmothers’ daughter, it may be a case of moving up as her daughter is working in an interior design company in the city (Bengbu). From rural to urban can be considered as a significant improvement for most rural families.

** The great-grandmother I interviewed in Family Han is the mother-in-law of the grandmother. This mother-in-law is probably above the middle whereas grandmother’s own mother, although she had a husband in a very high position, has been a housewife her whole life. Therefore, the middle level assigned to grandmother’s own mother takes into consideration both her husband’s high position and the benefits she therefore enjoyed and also her own status as ‘housewife’, a relative low status position for her generation.

**** The family Wang and family Chen are the other two families where I could not interview all three generations of women from the same line. For both families, the great-grandmothers are the mothers-in-law of grandmothers.

6.3 Case Analysis

From the eight families that are complete chains of mothers/daughters, I have selected family Zhao (high SIES throughout) and family Shen (low to high SIES rising) as two cases to discuss in detail. The choice of these two cases is based on social mobility patterns in the 12 families. I examine what made these three generations of women successfully transmit some ‘things’ that facilitated social mobility (either maintaining their position or raising their status). I examine the historical events that affected mothers’ efforts in passing on resources to their children and enabled daughters to act on them or not. I consider how mother and daughter relationships shape, and are shaped by, such transmission efforts.

6.3.1 Intergenerational Transmission in Family Zhao

In the following analysis, the three Zhao women’s lived lives are presented first. Then, I discuss how a particular occupational route is transmitted which helped to maintain a relatively high SIES across the chain of three generations. However, the further analysis demonstrates that such occupational transmission happened in a complex way which involving a transmission of a family relational pattern
(distanced mother-daughter relationship) and of personal qualities (strong and hard worker). How these transmissions impact on women’s decisions in adopting particular childrearing practices is discussed.

A. Three Zhao women’s lived life

I have analysed Zhao Xue’s lived life and told story in Chapter 5 (the great-grandmother of family Zhao). She is a ‘liberated woman’ and focused most of her life on governmental work in a senior position. She was born in 1931 and lived only with her mother since she was about ten years old. She went to secondary school but did not graduate – she was persuaded by the CCP to work for the government before finishing her secondary education at 17 years old. Since then she worked for about 40 years until retiring at 57 years old. She held senior positions in several different governmental bureaus and was ‘honourably retired’\(^\text{91}\). GM Zhao Dong was her oldest daughter and was born in 1954. GM Dong’s education was interrupted by the CR and she only finished primary school and 2 years of secondary school. But she ‘cleverly’ escaped the fate of ‘Down to the Countryside’ by changing her year of schooling. GM Dong worked as a head of a division in a SOE before she was fired due to conflict with one of her staff. However, three days after being laid off, she started her own business which became very successful and lifted her whole family’s social-economic status. It was only in 2012, at the age of 58, that she gradually stopped being involved in this business. But at the time of the interview she was still actively involved in different types of investment activities. M Zhao Jia was born in 1977 and had an older brother. They are one of the few families in her generation who had more than one child. This was mainly due to GM Dong’s early marriage (at 21 years old, compared with the average of 27 of her counterparts, see Appendix XV) as she did not go ‘Down to the Countryside’. Jia has the highest educational level when compared to her mother and grandmother, a bachelor degree. However, her bachelor degree was achieved in an indirect way (from college to university, adding about three more years to the normal route from senior middle school to

\(^{91}\) ‘Honourably retired’ is different from normal retirement. This is a special protection mechanism the Chinese government arranged for people who started to work for the CCP before the establishment of PRC (before October of 1949) to respect their big contribution the new country. People who are honourably retired had 100% medical care after retirement, better pensions and were provided a free special carer if they were needed.
university) due to her unexpected failing the entrance examination. After that, Jia’s father found her a good job in Shanghai and she started to work when she was 23 years old and was still working at this company at the time of the interview. Like her mother, Jia has two children, a daughter and a son, because she married a foreigner – a Singaporean- which meant she was not constrained by the Only Child Policy. She is the only one who has two children among the twelve mothers interviewed (Appendix XV).

Interestingly, GG Zhao is the only great-grandmother in this study who managed to transmit her particular occupational resources to the next generations (Figure 3). Furthermore, all three generations of women achieved relatively high SIES, another unusual achievement when compared with the other families (one of the two families, refer to the Table 11).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Great-grandmother</th>
<th>Stratum</th>
<th>Grandmother</th>
<th>Stratum</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Stratum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Bureau for Security and Police, for Tax and Finance; and for Military Preparation</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Business owner in later life</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Senior Manager of a foreign company</td>
<td>Upper Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband’s Occupation</td>
<td>Bureau for Security and Police</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Senior official</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Owner of a middle sized business</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HuKou</td>
<td>Urban (middle city)</td>
<td>Urban (middle city)</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Big City</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadre Status</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Childcare</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>From College Diploma to Bachelor Degree in a first tier university</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>One large and expensive commercial flat, and one smaller</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stratum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>commercial flat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12 Three generations of women’s SIES in family Zhao
Figure 2 An occupation lineage of four generations
**B. Transmission of Occupational Routes**

Figure 3 illustrates an occupational connection across three, possibly four, generations. On the one hand, we can see the impact of gender in terms of paid work: GG Xue’s son followed in her footsteps in the Combat Preparedness Bureau whilst the daughters were excluded from her career route due to their gender. However, Xue still tried her best to make sure her daughters also benefitted indirectly from her occupation. For example, GG Zhao Xue chose her son-in-law who worked in a medicine manufacturing factory as middle level manager at that time. Xue said in her interview that,

‘I was working for the Bureau of Chemistry Industry, managing and monitoring the factories. Jun (her son-in-law) was the Sectary for the Youth League General Branch in the Number One Medicine Manufacture Factory. I was there for a meeting and needed to know the situation (of the factory) … I found him a very honest young man. I asked people around and then introduced him to my daughter.’

Her judgement seems to have been a wise one as this son-in-law was successful in his work and later became a senior officer in the Medicine Management and Supervision Bureau, and also seemed to be loyal to her daughter even though they did not enjoy a good relationship (see later comments from M Jia). Then, based on his resources and social network, Jun found a good job for their daughter (M Jia). M Jia ended up working in Shanghai, in a foreign company which produces medicines. During early 2000 when Jia started her job, this would be regarded as one of the best jobs someone could find: a high salary with high social status. She met her future husband in the same company and he started his own, similar, company, bringing their family up another level. The impact on the next generation is significant. In M Jia’s interview, she said that she and her husband would push their son (not their daughter) to study medicine and become either a doctor or researcher in medicine, the dream job her husband wanted but failed to achieve. M Jia did not want her daughter to study medicine as she thought ‘it is such hard work’ and ‘I do not want my daughter to work too hard.’ We have no way of knowing whether these
aspirations will be realised as both Jia’s son and daughter are still young (one is 5 and the other 8). Nevertheless, we can see the possibility of the occupational route of the fourth generation that was shaped by GG Zhao.

Such linear transmission of occupations seems to be easily explained by structural elements: The initial high position of one family member, the great-grandmother, provided valuable resources which were enhanced and maintained across generations. However, the deeper reading of three generations of women’s life stories suggest the complex and even contradictory emotions and efforts each generation of woman went through and that linear transmission may be more accidental than a result of a strategy or rational plan.

C. The Transmission of Relational Pattern: the Distanced Mother-Daughter Relationship

Interestingly, all three generations of women from family Zhao talked about their dis-identification from their mothers which impacted on their particular way of childrearing. Such dis-identification is least direct in the great-grandmothers’ case. GG Xue was brought up by her mother alone. However, in her life story she hardly mentioned her mother apart from her being open-minded so she could go to school. This is a positive comment about her mother but her life trajectory demonstrates a great departure from her mother’s. When I asked about her mother, GG Xue said ‘she was a good cook’ and ‘she was a really capable woman who can do all kinds of housework, making clothes and shoes and everything. I cannot do these things. I can only work.’ Here is a very interesting comparison between the GG Xue and her mother. On the one hand, she was still very positive about her mother, on the other hand, she made her differences clear as well: her mother is a great house-manager whereas GG Xue did little at home but was really good at her job. Similarly, when talking about childrearing, GG Xue never emphasised her capacity for managing a house, but highlighted her expectation that children should work hard like their parents. However, this more subtle and indirect way of expressing differences from her mother became more direct for the next two generations.
In GM Dong’s life story, she made it very clear that she had a much closer relationship with her father than with her mother. When asked about her childhood, she talked about her father straight away but hardly mentioned her mother. ‘I, as I, my family is relatively special. My father was a big landlord in Fuyang. The whole city, half of it belonged to us.’ She went on to talk about her father’s education – a law major from one of the most prestigious universities. In the 1940s, such a degree was really rare. Her narration was full of admiration towards her father and she said directly that ‘I have always been close to my father.’ When she talked about her own childhood, as the oldest daughter who ‘could eat much bitterness’, she compared herself to her mother, and said,

‘I would get up by (early in the morning) myself and cook for my siblings. My mother would not do it. She was just a Miss bourgeoisie, just like the Miss from a big landlord. She was the only child! My grandma only had her. She prepared everything ready for her as my mother could not do anything.’

Clearly she made herself different from her mother. It is interesting that she called her mother ‘Miss bourgeoisie’ which would be something her mother rejected as it was used as a contrasting image of ‘liberated woman’ in the early period of socialist China (early 1950s to late 1970s). GM Dong tried to rear her children to be more like herself, instead of her mother, in terms of being capable when doing housework.

‘See how I brought up my children? In my son’s family, he does housework; at my daughter’s house, she does the housework. All influenced by me. When they were young, as soon as they arrived home, when I was too busy, they would help me with housework. Therefore, my daughter-in-law does not know how to do housework, neither does my son-in-law. [Laugh]’

Then when we come to the third generation – M Jia, we find even more negative comments towards her mother and a strong wish to be different from her. The first thing she said about her childhood was the fact that her parents fought with each other very often. ‘I was very timid as my mother was too fierce. They quarrelled with each other very often, therefore, producing enormous pressure for the kids. Right?’
She seemed to blame her mother particularly for these fights. She said her mother had a bad temper whereas her father was much better. ‘Sometime I wonder how my father could tolerate my mother for so many years! [Laugh]’ She blamed her parents, particularly her mother’s ‘fierce’ personality for her own ‘timid’ personality. Then, later when she talked about her own childrearing, she talked about her particular emphasis on ‘good personality’. When talking about her expectations for her daughter, Jia said,

‘I realised that, for a girl, … how to say… To have a pretty face is very good. But my daughter is not close to that as she looks like her father and a little bit fat. Then, the personality is very important. I think this is the most important thing.’

She explained later what she meant by ‘good personality’: ‘get along with other people easily’, ‘broad-minded’, ‘not be bothered by small issues or other people’ and ‘being gentle’, all of which seems to describe her father’s personality and be the opposite of her mother, at least according to her own descriptions.

Interestingly, M Jia was not only negative towards her mother, but also described her maternal grandmother as ‘selfish’. ‘She was so selfish. … Even before her own mother died, she would not look after her.’ Jia didn’t use the same word to describe her mother, however, it could be that she felt it was inappropriate to use such word to describe one’s own parents. Instead, Jia told stories of her disappointment with her mother, ‘I don’t understand, what kind of mother she is? Whose mother will not help you when you just have had a baby. … She hardly stayed here when I gave birth to my two children.’ This lack of ‘care work’ for one’s family seems to be similar to Jia’s complaint about her grandmother. When she described her childrearing, Jia made it very clear that she wanted to be different and she devoted the majority of her time and energy to look after her children.

These stories told by daughters about their mothers demonstrate their distance from or negative feelings towards them. It is not surprising that during the interview, GM Dong and M Jia’s overall tone about their mothers was negative and that they
wanted to be different. Even for GG Xue, although she talked about her mother positively, she expressed little emotional bonding towards her, using a distant and even cold tone. Interestingly, there is a similar pattern passed on between the two generations in Zhao’s family: negative feelings towards their own mothers but warm feelings towards their fathers. However, in the following, I will discuss how these three women, who complained or distanced themselves from their mothers, inherited something across generations which contributed to their success in maintaining a high social-economic status.

**D. Transmission of Personal Qualities: A Family of Strong and Independent Women**

In GG Xue’s story of childrearing, we have already seen that she claimed to have little to do with her children and her main way of ‘educating’ her children was to ask to follow their parents’ example: they (the parents) both ‘worked very hard, obeyed the laws and regulations and were reliable and responsible at work.’ Xue was satisfied with her childrearing, saying with a big smile that ‘I did not help any of my children to find a work in the Bureau of Tax or Finance, ..., but they all became some kind of leaders in their own area.’ Does the GM Dong agrees with her mother in terms of what have been transmitted to her and what contribute to her career success?

We have seen that GM Dong emphasised her difference from her mother. However, she talked about one aspect that they share the similarities: She said her mother was someone with a ‘very strong personality.’ ‘Nobody dared to offend (惹) her. ... My personality is similar to my mum and I dare to offend (惹) anyone.’ She regarded herself as very similar to her mother in being strong and tough, whereas she said her father was ‘too intellectual’ and ‘too honest’. These comments contrast with her negative remarks above about her mother and her positive about her father. We can see signs of GG Xue’s strong will in her story about choosing her husband. Xue chose a husband with a ‘bad political background’ – he was the son of a landlord.
‘When we got married, the Political Sector\(^{92}\) disagreed. They talked to me. … But the Marriage Law issued…. They disagree with me, if not the Marriage Law, there was no way that I could marry him. We had the law, but they still wanted to interfere.’

In Xue’s time, if your workplace disagreed with your choice you could lose your job or marriage. She did not explain how she managed to marry this man and at the same time keep the job apart from mentioning how she waited for the right moment – the implementation of the Marriage Law which gave the freedom for individuals to decide about their own marriage. However, as she said herself, it was still not an easy process. This example of Xue’s demonstrates the ‘strong and strategic’ side of Xue as a woman. Clearly, the grandmother ‘saw’ such examples of her mother in the daily interactions in work or with other people.

Interestingly, GM Dong sees what has been transmitted to her differently from her mother (eg., being responsible, obeying regulations and working hard) and emphasised different thing – a strong personality. However, from GM Dong’s career trajectory we can see that such a strong personality does contribute to or lead to a successful career where she has been responsible at work and had worked hard: from a head of division in SOE to establishing a business 3 days later after being fired from a SOE. GM Dong also told stories of her fights with her colleagues and arguing with her boss to prove that she ‘dare to offend anyone’. Such different ways of viewing what has been transmitted is not uncommon as different generations tend to see things differently (Brannen et al., 2004). These different views also help GM Dong to accept what has been transmitted while she has a distanced relationship with her mother.

This strong personality and work hard at the work place goes hand in hand in both GM Dong’s and GG Xue’s life: they are extremely committed to their paid work. We saw GG Xue’s hard work for the government in Chapter 4. When GM Dong became a mother, society was promoting the ideology of a ‘virtuous wife and good

\(^{92}\)The Political Sector is an important department/division in the government. It is in charge of monitoring people’s ‘political attitudes’ and therefore, in particular historical times, was quite powerful.
mother’. This clearly did not impact on Dong very much. Instead, she carried out her own business and her husband had to play more of a role in managing the household. This was probably another reason why she and her husband ended up in a bad and violent relationship – Dong clearly was not a good wife nor good mother judging by society’s standards at that time.

What about M Jia, Dong’s daughter? Compared to her paternal grandmother, Xue, and her mother, Dong, Jia clearly focused on her family much more than her work once she identified mainly as a wife and mother. The transmission between Dong and Jia involves many conflicts, partly due to Jia’s negative feeling towards her mother and her wanting to be different. Conflict arose because of the family culture that she married into and the particular historical context when she became a mother.

Jia’s strong personality can be traced from her educational trajectory. In the interview with GM Dong, she told a story of Jia defending the importance of her school/classmates, even though she had not studied in the best primary and secondary school. She said, ‘Don’t look down our No.3 primary school. All of my classmates went on to secondary schools being a leader!’ Jia’s story of taking an indirect route to university also demonstrates her strong personality. Her examination result for gaokao was not high enough for her to go to the first tier of universities as she wished. Instead of accepting to go to a second or third tier, Jia chose to study a lower level degree (a college diploma instead of bachelor) in one of the key universities and then work her way up indirectly to graduate from a first tier university. Both stories about Jia’s education were told by Jia’s mother, Dong, rather than herself. Therefore, there is the possibility that her mother emphasised the side of Jia that is more like herself in the interview. Nevertheless, the lived life information is accurate and Jia’s indirect way of going to the university she really wanted evidently demonstrates her strong personality.

We know Jia’s father found a good job for her in Shanghai. However, Jia had to be a very hard worker to be promoted within six years to the position as a PA to the director of a foreign company, the highest level for a non-technical position.
However, Jia’s hard work and ambitions at her job shifted after her marriage and particularly becoming a mother. She mentioned thinking about moving to a higher position in another company or starting a new business, but the responsibility of looking after her husband and children stopped her. ‘Then, considering my two children and my husband’s new job, I cannot do it. You know? I have discussed potential jobs several times. In the end, I gave up.’

Referring back to Jia’s complaints about her mother’s lack of care and support during her childhood and her wish to differ from her, this shift of life focus can be understood. However, there is an also important structural factor that contribute to Jia’s decision to focus on her children: living in an era when ‘intensive mothering’ was praised, Jia tried her best to practice such an ideology of ‘good mother’ in a changed context – there is no institutional support for early childcare and in her particular case, she received little support from her mother, and her mother-in-law was living in another country. But, this does not stop her from being a ‘better mother’. ‘As far as I can remember, my parents never accompanied me when I was doing homework. Now, I accompany my daughter every day. Every day!’ Not just with homework, she also enrolled her daughter (eight years old) into swimming, maths, dancing and English lessons outside of school, which fills up the whole weekend. However, she argued that ‘she (her daughter) is very happy as all these extra-curricula I chose for her are easy ones. ... Nevertheless, it is the adults who have the hard work – I have to take her to the different lessons and wait for her.’

In her stories we can see clearly Jia tried to practice different ways of rearing her children from her mother. However, this distinction is also supported by the mainstream ideology of today’s mothering in China. But, as practicing this intensive mothering is difficult in Jia’s situation and is ‘much more tiring’ than her job, we can still see Jia’s strong personality in trying her best in difficulties.

In addition, her responsibility for looking after the family is far beyond looking after her children – her husband ‘even does not know where the bowls and plates are at
home.’ This is a man who literally cannot or will not make a bowl of rice for himself. Jia said she had to take care of everything at home, including some typical men’s responsibilities such as designing the indoor decorations, replacing broken equipment, and driving the family around. In fact, she had to drive her husband to work as she ‘does not trust his capacity in driving and he would just get annoyed too easily.’ She recalled her experience of the first pregnancy where her husband hardly accompanied her for any check-ups. Then soon after she gave birth to her son, during the first week, she had to rush to a shop to buy a swimming suit for her daughter as her husband did not know how to do it.

Given the lack of support for childcare from her mother or any other family members as well as the need to look after her husband, Jia had to be strong and worked extremely hard at home. We can also see from her narrations that it is always her that decides what to do or not to do: it was her that stops her husband from driving and it was her that wants to enroll her daughter in many extra-curriculums. Such decisions make her life more difficult but Jia clearly is the one who wanted and actually did all of these difficult tasks. Her narrative style involves emphasizing herself as the main subject for all the decisions demonstrating her strong personality.

In Jia’s case we can see how both her growing-up experiences and the particular ideology of mothering in her time shapes her new decisions and practices in mothering and paid work— one focuses on children and family much more than work outside home, comparing to her mother and her grandmother. However, this does not stop the personal qualities, being strong and a hard worker, transmitted successfully across three generations, even though these personal qualities are expressed in different domains (at work or at home). This demonstrates how the younger generation received and alter what has been passed on according to the new structural constraints and resources during her particular historical time.

Can such personal qualities also be transmitted to the next generation – Jia’s children? As Jia’s children were still young and I didn’t interview them, I could not
say much from the receivers. However, what Jia said about the importance of her daughter having a good personality is interesting. We have seen that Jia regarded a good personality as something differing from her mother but more similar to her father. However, Jia also said that she would tell her daughter not to worry about being criticised by her teacher or being hurt by other children. She said she could not bear to have a daughter with a ‘glass heart’ (meaning easily broken). Not having a ‘glass heart’ that easy to be broken is another way to express a desire of cultivating a strong personality in her daughter again! This comment of Jia’s makes us see how she encourages her daughter to be similar to her mother and grandmother who are strong and not easy to be beaten by others, even though Jia did not see such similarities herself.

As I have suggested above, Zhao Xue’s personal qualities as strong and hard worker were transmitted down the generations. However, very often, the younger generations did not recognise what they successfully inherited. All these women regarded themselves as significantly different from their own mothers, which is probably why this ‘character’ can be transmitted. They felt they had made a mark on their own lives which can be demonstrated by their assertion of difference from their mothers and in their practices of a different type of childrearing. Furthermore, these changes in each generation’s conscious behaviours not only help the younger generation to leave their own mark, they also make what has been passed on a better fit in their new historical context. For GM Dong it was the context where the marketization process provided opportunities for both brave and risk-taking women and men to change their lives. Therefore, her emphasis on being strong and ‘dare offend anyone’ instead of what her mother said about ‘following rules and be responsible’ reflects this particular period of reform. For M Jia, intensive mothering makes her different from her mother but also fits in well with contemporary society’s demands on women: she is not selfish and she cares about her family. However, M Jia also selected which parts of intensive mothering she wanted to follow: she did not become a full-time mother even thought she could have in terms of her family’s financial situation. This also reflects the influence of her mother and maternal grandmother whose (women’s) jobs were treated as an important part of
mothers’ life experiences. This demonstrates the complex influence on transmission and mothering practices from these women’s biographical experiences and the historical time they lived in. It is the contention that the strong and hard-worker personalities of these women help the family keep a relatively high social-economic position across the generations.

6.3.2 Intergenerational Transmission of Family Shen

The three women’s lived lives are presented first with the highlight of their political trauma experiences happening in the first two generations. Then against such a sharp changing social, economic and political environment for family Shen, the transmission of family cultural capital, family trauma and family relationship (close mother-daughter relationship) are discussed. How such a complex transmission process contributed to an upward social mobility of this family is discussed.

A. The Three Shen Women’s Lived Lives

Table 13 presents an upward mobility journey of social-economic status across three generations of women in Shen’s family. However, there is another important side of this upward mobility journey – a sharp decline that happened during GG Shen Ai’s time when the Cultural Revolution happened. Therefore, this is not a linear story of moving up, rather a story of how a relatively well-resourced family was nearly destroyed by political movements and then recovered and moved up again.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Great-grandmother</th>
<th>Stratum</th>
<th>Grandmother</th>
<th>Stratum</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Stratum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Part-time labour</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Manual worker at SCO and then laid off</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Primary school English teacher</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to jobless and to full-time frontline worker for a SCO factory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Husband’s Occupation</td>
<td>Head of different Military Hospitals</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>A manual worker in SCO</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Primary school PE teacher</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HuKou</td>
<td>Urban (middle City) – Rural-Urban</td>
<td>Low to Medium</td>
<td>Rural to Medium City</td>
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<td>Urban (middle city)</td>
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<td>Cadre</td>
<td>No and BFG</td>
<td>Low</td>
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Table 13 Three generations of women’s SIES in family Shen

Shen Ai was born in December 1938 in Guilin, Guangxi Province. This was the period of the Japanese-Chinese War and that was why the whole family moved to Guilin, a small town in the southwest, when Ai was born. Both her parents came from rich families. Her father was born in 1913 and graduated from Whampoa (Huangpu) Military Academy, becoming a senior officer working for the GMD. Her mother was born in 1918 and graduated from Jinlin Women’s University. Very soon after Ai was born, the whole family moved back to Nanjing, the capital city of China at that time. Her family owned a mansion in one of the best areas in Nanjing. Ai had one older brother and a younger brother and sister. However, the two brothers died at an early age. She mentioned that she loved singing and dancing when she was little, partly because she belonged to an ethnic group for whom singing and dancing were daily activities, and partly because her father played the piano well and her mother loved singing. Ai did not have much education as she was too spoiled to be made to go to school when she was younger and when she finally

93 Whampoa Military Academy was first established in 1924 in Guangzhou by the GMD and was supported by the CCP and the Soviet Union. At that time, under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen, the GMD had a cooperation agreement with the CCP and the Soviet Union and many graduates from this academy became elite soldiers and officials in both parties and therefore had great influence on the whole country. Whampoa Military Academy moved to Taiwan in 1949 when the GMD retreated from the mainland.

94 Jinlin Women University was the first university for women, established in 1913.

95 Ai could not remember which ethnic group she belonged to as ethnic issues were regarded as sensitive from the late 1950s, and particularly during the Cultural Revolution period. Overall, the Four Clearances, Cultural Revolution and the later impact of these political movements forced Ai to mention or remember her past as little as possible.
started primary school around eight years old it only lasted two years, at which time both her happy childhood and her education ended abruptly.

In 1948, when she was ten years old, the CCP won the battle against the GMD and ‘liberated’ Nanjing. Consequently her father, who used to work in a senior position in the GMD, was arrested by the CCP and disappeared for the next 30 years. Ai lived with her mother and sister for five years and they survived by selling all their valuable assets and her mother taught in a school and made clothes to sell. In 1953, when Ai was 15 years old, her mother decided to get married again, to a senior Police Officer from the CCP. In the same year, Ai’s mother found her a future husband (a young engineer) and Ai was quickly engaged to this young man whom she was really fond of. Two years later, at the age of 17, Ai married and moved to Bengbu to live, due to the location of her husband’s work. To subsidise their income, although Ai had never learnt many work skills, she tried her best to find different temporary jobs and became a childminder. She also worked for the Residents’ Committee, a voluntary type of work with no income, and really enjoyed feeling that she could make some contribution to the community. This was happy period of her life and she soon had her first daughter (GM Shen Hong) in 1956, at the age of 18. Two years later, her second child, her oldest son, was born.

However, in 1960 the Great Famine started. Ai’s husband nearly died and Ai lost an unborn child in 1960 due to malnutrition. When life started to become better materially, an unanticipated political storm arrived. In 1964 the ‘Four Clearances’ movement started to affect Bengbu and Ai became a target who was asked about and criticised repeatedly for her family’s history, particularly in relation to her father. From that time, Ai started to experience discrimination and she was ‘cleared’ out from her position in the Residents’ Committee and her childminding job. Then, the Cultural Revolution started in 1966 and Ai was unable to find any temporary jobs. Even worse, in 1968/9, Ai was forced to go “Down to the Countryside” with her four children while her husband had to stay in Bengbu as he was regarded as ‘useful’. The young couple had to do what the government ordered them to. Ai took the four children with her. She stayed in the countryside for about ten years and her
last three children (all girls) were born there. These ten years made Ai and her children fall to the bottom of Chinese society. Nevertheless she did survive and so did all her children. Just after she had accepted that they would stay there forever, another unanticipated change occurred.

In 1978, Ai’s father was released from prison and his case was re-addressed, alongside many others, after Deng Xiaoping took control of the CCP. He started to search for his family members which made the government accept that his daughter – Ai – had been unfairly sent to the ‘Countryside’ and was still there. Therefore, in 1978, several government officials, her father and her husband came to the place where Ai and her seven children lived to take them back home. The government apologised to her and she and all her adult children were given jobs in Bengbu and her younger, school-aged, children went back to school. This was a turning point in her life. Ai was 40 years old. She was sent to a small factory run specifically for ‘workers attached to family members’ (jiashugong). Ai was valued by the head of this factory and was promoted to work as the head of workshops (chejianzhuren), responsible for the quality control of four workshops. She retired from this factory in 1988, at the age of 50. Alongside this paid job, soon after coming back to Bengbu, the Residents’ Committee (RC) asked Ai to work for them again. Since then, Ai has worked there on a voluntary basis.

Ai’s life trajectory is full of sharp turns: from a little spoiled girl from a rich family in the capital city to a young mother learning to manage a household in a much smaller town, and then dropping to the bottom of the society to live in one of the poorest rural areas in China as a ‘single mother’ with seven children. Although she

96 ‘Worker attached to her/his family member’ is a form of temporary employment started around the 1960s and 70s and which disappeared in the 1980s. This special form of employment was a result of Chairman Mao’s speech made in 1957 (famously called the ‘5.7 Speech’). In this speech, Mao advocated every individual to participate in work as early as possible in order to build a strong and rich country. Therefore many family members – mostly wives, mothers, grandmothers and teenagers – ‘came out’ of their home to work in the factories. These people were not formally employed by the factories, were paid lower salaries, and were entitled to no social benefits or insurance. They worked in the factory where their husbands, fathers and mothers, or older brothers and sisters were formally employed, and were, therefore, called ‘worker attached to family member’. There were more women than men working in this type of employment.
came back to the city eventually, she still only worked in a small collective factory, the lowest status among SOEs. Nevertheless, this low status work in the city made Ai very happy. She was reunited with her husband and her children were given jobs or could go to school. Even though her social-economic status was still low after returning to the city, Ai herself felt happy after the very hard ten years. That probably is why she agreed to be interviewed and that she not only recounted sad stories but also happy ones.

In contrast to her positive mother, GM Shen Hong seemed to have been more affected by the traumatic experiences of the past. As Ai said,

‘At least I had a very happy childhood before ten years old and I had a lovely period with my loving husband. But for Hong, she had nothing. When she was small, it was the Great Famine and then she witnessed other strangers coming to the home to pull mother away and was pushed hard to hit the floor; when she was school age, she was interrupted by going to the rural area with me and had to look after the siblings and managing the home. I treated her badly as I really needed her to grow up to help me. Poor kid! After we went back to the city, she got married but what happened? The ‘Only Child’ policy! Then, she was laid off … Her life is much more bitter than mine!’

Ai’s comparison with her daughter reflects what GM Hong said; she is the only interviewee that after ‘agreeing’ to the idea of interview then changed her mind (see Chapter 3). I had to give up interviewing her. Her mother felt embarrassed but on the other hand, expressed her real sympathy towards her daughter, ‘She still hasn’t come out from the traumas. She still cares a lot. She said “I could not talk without crying”.’ Instead, I collected her life trajectory and focus in this analysis on the stories her mother told about Hong.

Because of Hong’s low level of education, even after they went back to Bengbu, she could only find the lowest level job: she was assigned as a warehouse keeper for a factory producing agricultural machines and tools. This factory was remote from the city centre and Hong had to cross a river four times a day to go to work. This low social position defined mainly by her job shaped her life in two important ways:
first, she met and married her husband who was also a worker (a driver working at the long-distance bus station); and second, Hong was among the group of women who were impacted by the national policy of laying workers off in the early 1990s (due to the bankruptcy of many SOEs as explained in Chapter 5). As Hong’s family was not particularly well-off, after being laid-off Hong did temporary jobs to support the family. Her hard work made her health worse and in the late 1990s, Hong was diagnosed as suffering from myocarditis. As her family was strongly against her working any more, Hong eventually retired at 50 years old, from a job in a local supermarket. Looking at Hong’s life trajectory, Hong’s life was worse than Ai’s in some ways even though she was not arrested during the CR, and even though she did not need to rear seven children on her own. For most of her life, Hong’s social-economic status was close to the bottom of society. Compared to her younger siblings, Hong’s life trajectory was worse as her siblings enjoyed education and had much better jobs in later life.

However, Hong’s only daughter, M Shen Meng, has a much better life and eventually managed to climb the social ladder. We see in Chapter 4 that Shen Meng never felt a lack of material benefits as a child. Meng went through primary and secondary education, went to college and eventually obtained a bachelor degree from a second tier university in the same province. Her family were really proud of this achievement. Meng proved that she was a really capable young woman indeed. Although her university was not the first tier, after graduating she managed to find a job as an English teacher/tutor in one of the largest private English Training Companies. However, about 3-4 months later, her parents forced her back home by lying to her that her mother was seriously ill. Even though Meng found out about their lie after she returned home, she decided to stay in the hometown and to live near her parents.

Then Meng’s father found a teaching job for her after she returned to Bengbu – teaching English in a private primary school, but in the countryside. To go to work, Meng needed to cross a river everyday (just like her mother did when she started work). The job was really tough: she started the day at 5:00 am and did not finish
until 10:30pm due to having the extra responsibility of caring for the boarding students. She had a rest every two weeks which was the only time that she could leave the school and go home. She stayed in this job for five years until she became pregnant in 2011, at the age of 29. Worrying that the tough working conditions might negatively impact on her unborn baby, Meng decided to quit her job soon after she found out about her pregnancy. After quitting, Meng prepared for and passed the examination for the teacher’s certificate and found a job teaching English in a public school. She started her new job when her daughter was about 5 months old. Although English was one of the most demanding subjects, she took on two more responsibilities: first, working as the teacher in charge of a class (banzhuren班主任)\(^{97}\) and second, providing private after-school tutoring at weekends. Being an English teacher and a banzhuren in a public school was regarded as a typical middle-class occupation (similar to the Western criteria, see Li 2011). Furthermore, by providing after-school tutoring at weekends, Meng also improved her family’s income significantly. Meng’s husband was a PE teacher in the same public school.

From the sudden political turbulence that threw this family (particularly the women of this family) to the bottom of society, gradually, by the third generation, the women of Shen’s family managed to climb the social ladder. What was transmitted across these women in such a dramatically changing environment to bring about this change?

**B. Transmission of Cultural Capital: a Curse and a Blessing**

GG Ai’s parents used to possess rich economic, social and cultural capital. However, the sudden change in their political environment took away all the economic capital the family had and their social capital – their wide family connections with people in Taiwan and America or senior officers in GMD – became a handicap. Therefore,

\(^{97}\) In China, the teacher in charge of a class (banzhuren) plays a role greater than teaching. This teacher usually teaches a major subject (Chinese, Maths or English) and at the same time, she manages and provides care to her class. Students stay in the same class for the whole 6 years and therefore, a class is like a small organisation and the teacher in charge is the leader of this organisation.
GG Ai cut off all these connections for many years until she retired. In this case, the only family capital that could be transmitted was cultural and personal. However, even for cultural capital, shifts in the social and political environment also altered its value and meaning and, in the end, impacted on its transmission across generations.

In Ai’s interview, she particularly talked about how her capacity for writing, reading, singing and dancing and her outgoing personality won her respect in her community and made her useful to the Residents’ Committee, where she really enjoyed a positive social life. ‘People always said, that “that young girl is really capable of talking!”’ However, when the political environment changed, all this ‘cultural capital’ suddenly became ‘evidence’ of her ‘crime’ – her family background. Her rich family was attacked as ‘high bourgeoisie’ and her father as ‘reactionary’. As the change in political atmosphere was so fast, Ai knew nothing about her dangerous position. Instead, her self-confidence and ‘ability to talk’ publically made her argue with the people attacking her, which caused even worse consequences. She was regarded as ‘not committing to someone’s crime stubbornly’ and arrested for a short period and soon after that was made to go ‘Down to the Countryside’ with all her children. This transformed her and her children’s, particularly her oldest daughter’s, life trajectories. In this case, we can see clearly how the family capital became a serious handicap when the greater social context suddenly shifted. Nevertheless, the story did not stop there.

In the hardest ten years in the rural area, Ai’s outgoing personality and confidence won her friendship and respect among the villagers, which helped her and her children survive. Later on, when she finally moved back to Bengbu, she was taken on by the Residents’ Committee (RC) immediately, precisely because of these personal qualities. After retiring from work and with the support from the head of RC, she established the “Golden Autumn Art Troupe” in 1996, at the age of 58, to organise many retired or laid-off women in singing, dancing and modeling. Ai herself was certificated as a dancing tutor at provincial level. In 2000, encouraged by the head of RC who really appreciated Ai’s work, Ai finally became a Communist Party member, at the age of 62. Ai regarded this as one of the most important turning
points in her life: she changed totally from someone under suspicion by the CCP to one of its loyal members! She kept teaching the other members as well as performing herself in different competitions until 2009 when she broke her legs. Since then Ai has been working as the director of this Art Troupe, managing and supporting their activities. This second part of her life demonstrated that the family capital she received from her parents, even though it caused her trouble, still eventually brought her benefits. Therefore, this capital can be dormant and reactivated. Ai’s later change of life is important and in the interview, although she still cried when telling sad stories, most of the time she talked in a really positive way with strong hopes for her and her children’s and grandchildren’s future.

How much of this family capital was transmitted to her daughter? Clearly, Ai’s daughter Hong did not enjoy childhood as much as Ai. However, from what Hong’s daughter said, we can see how some aspects of embodied cultural capital were, amazingly, transmitted even to Hong. Hong's daughter said about her mother ‘she was a very talented woman. In fact, she passed the entrance examination but her name was changed by the head of Production Brigade \(^9\) to his own son’s. ... I still remembered that she would use letters to communicate with me when there were some problems.’ Hong’s daughter mentioned two things here: Hong’s ability to learn, even though she had to drop out from primary school and second, a kind of special and unique way of communicating with her daughters. Writing to one’s children to communicate on sensitive topics was really rare at that time and was then regarded as behaviour only belonging to people of ‘high culture’.

There is no way of knowing how Hong inherited these qualities and cultural capital from her parents. For the learning capacity, it was probably during the early period of her life when she enjoyed her mother and father’s care and education. Or, even though she did not finish primary school, she still benefited from her parents’ high expectations for her academic achievement. Ai told stories of how she pushed her

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\(^9\) Production Brigade (shengchandadui) is the basic administration organisation for both everyday life and production in rural areas, set up by Mao after the establishment of the PRC. Its head usually possesses the highest power within the village. This system was abandoned after Deng Xiaoping's Reform in the early 1980s.
daughter ‘too much’ in education by punishing her when she made careless mistakes in homework. Here Hong’s father has also played a crucial role. In Ai’s interview, she mentioned more than once how much Hong loved her father and also how much her father cared about her. From what Ai said it seems that Hong’s father always chose a much more gentle way of communicating with her than her mother. He was a gentle man with a good temper, someone well respected by the whole community. In a way, Ai’s tough discipline towards Hong probably pushed her daughter to become attached to her soft and loving father and thereby inherit aspects of his personality - even though there was a period when she only saw him once or twice a year. As Ai commented, Hong has always been a very quiet person, ‘just like her father’.

Hong’s daughter, Meng, regarded her mother highly. In Chapter 4 I talked about Meng’s childhood experience which featured her strong dislike/hate towards her ‘autocratic’ father and respect and love towards her more caring mother. The above stories told by Meng also demonstrates what is important to Meng - she does not want to accept that her mother is a ‘low culture’ person judged by her education level and social-economic status. Rather, she wanted to be proud of being reared by her mother to whom she referred as a role model, at least in some areas. Very early in her interview, Meng started to tell the story of being a school ‘broadcaster’. Although Meng went to an ordinary primary school (as they lived in a relatively poor area), she was excellent in reading aloud stories/texts with emotion (langsong). Because of that, she was her school’s ‘little broadcaster’, a role which boosted her confidence significantly. Meng had been a student leader throughout her primary education and she also set an ambitious goal of passing the examination to the best secondary school. Unfortunately, when she finished her primary school at the age of 13, the local admission policy for secondary schools changed from selecting students by a standard examination to everyone going straight to a junior middle school within the catchment of its primary school. Meng ended up getting into a school of poor quality and following that, her time at senior middle school did not produce

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99 However it does not mean Hong has a distanced relationship with her mother like the women in family Zhao. Later we will see the close bonded relationship among family Shen’s women.

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very good exam results. However, as we have seen in Meng’s life trajectory, she did not stop there. Instead, similar to M Zhao Jia, M Meng took an indirect route into higher education: moving up from a college to a university. Although taking longer than normal, Meng became a bachelor degree holder at the age of 24.

Here, Meng’s particular qualities - confidence, the capacity to talk publically and her ambition to be better - makes her very similar to GG Ai. Her loud confident voice (in the interview) was a sharp contrast to her own mother’s, who only wanted to run away and hide but reflects similarities with her maternal grandmother. Meng talked about growing up in her maternal grandmother’s family, surrounded by many aunts and cousins. She also sees herself in a family lineage from her maternal side instead of her paternal side. At the beginning of her interview, Meng said ‘I was the oldest grandchild at my grandma’s house. Well, I do have an older male cousin but he hardly here, so, in reality, I am the oldest and I have always been the leader and very independent.’ Here, she emphasised her position as the oldest granddaughter and how such a position positively impacted on her own personality.

As the interview with GM Hong was abruptly curtailed, I cannot comment on her subjective experiences. However, we should not assume that Hong was not a confident girl when she was little. Perhaps caused by her traumatic life, it seems she did not show ambition or confidence in front of others. Yet, her warm, caring and persistent support for her daughter’s education demonstrates her ambition for her daughter’s future. High expectations towards one’s children in some ways cannot be totally separated from being ambitious for oneself – the part of self they want to project into their children. Furthermore, Hong’s mother mentioned a story of how ‘stubborn’ her daughter was, referring to how Hong was introduced to her future-husband and fell in love with him, while Ai was strongly against the match due to the man’s low social-economic status (a porter). Hong chose to use her refusal to eat to fight with her mother and won the battle in the end. This ‘stubbornness’ also demonstrates the inner power of Hong when she really wanted to achieve something important to her!
The initial cultural capital that GG Ai inherited from her parents made her life both constrained and blessed. Her cultural capital, with her husband’s particular personality, was transmitted to Hong. This was not simply the reproduction of both parents’ embodied cultural capital, but a very different and unique one for herself (Hong): a quiet but capable woman and mother who has great expectations for her daughter. Then, the confidence and out-going GG Ai seemed to re-appear by the third generation in M Meng, who not only inherits Ai’s capacity for talking, but also her ambition and confidence. These qualities are important for the family to move up the social ladder.

C. (Unconsciously) Transmitting Family Trauma and (Consciously) Transmitting a Close Relationship among Women

The Shen women experienced unusually turbulent lives compared to most ordinary families at the time. GG Ai’s traumatic life impacted on GM Hong who missed out on educational opportunities and the chance of a good job. Hong also experience Ai’s (her mother’s) harsh discipline. Whenever Ai talked about this, she could not help but cry, much more than when she recounted other harsh life stories. Looking back Ai expressed deep guilt, but as she said herself, she could not see how she could have done differently at that time: Ai was only 18 when she had her first child (GM Hong) and then she had to depend on this little girl from very early on to support the whole family. When Ai was attacked as ‘the daughter of high bourgeoisie and ‘reactionaries’ and lost work opportunities and social connections, it is not surprising that she did not show much patience to her children, particularly her oldest daughter on whom she relied heavily. That is why she beat her if she cooked the wrong meal, if she failed to care for her younger siblings properly or if she refused to do anything that Ai needed her to do. These stories, listened to in the present day, would probably be labelled as maltreatment of children. On the other hand, as Ai said, nearly every time after beating her daughter, she would hold her daughter and cry for a long time. This deep sadness and helplessness expressed by both the violence and love would have impacted on Hong.
No matter how harsh GG Ai’s discipline, Ai also strongly expressed her love and care for all of her children. Even during the hardest years in the rural area, Ai recalled warm experiences when every evening after she washed all the children and made their beds, she would cuddle each of them and put them to sleep. This love towards her children also carried over to her grandchildren. At the time of the interview aged 76 she was still looking after the youngest grandchildren from her youngest daughter. She said that her husband once complained, ‘why you never had enough of children!’ She also talked about how she found out about her husband’s secret plan to give away her youngest daughter when she was born and how she beat him madly. ‘No matter how hard the life is, I will not give away any of my children, even they are daughters!’

That Ai also has a particularly deep emotional bond with her oldest daughter is demonstrated clearly in the story of the night after GM Hong got married.

‘That night, after all of my children went to bed, I started to count their feet to check if everyone [was] there, just as I have done for years. Then, I suddenly realised there was one missing and it was my dearest Hong! At that moment, I could not control my sadness, I cried and cried loudly which woke up many of my neighbours. When they found out the reason for my crying, they could not understand, “she just got married, not left forever!” But I felt totally differently!’

What kind of relationship was there between Ai and Hong that could make her upset to this extreme degree just because her daughter got married? Interestingly, Hong felt similarly about not wanting to leave home. After being engaged to her husband, Hong delayed her marriage for two more years because (Hong) ‘worried that I still had so many children needing to look after so she did not want to leave me.’ (Ai’s comment) Even after she married, Hong visited her family nearly every day. As M Meng, Hong’s daughter, commented in her interview, ‘She felt if there was anything bad happen to her siblings, it would be her fault.’ Putting these stories together, I started to understand this special mother-daughter bonding which had been created partly by the women themselves, and partly by the harsh life they shared. In a way, both Ai and Hong are mothers for this family. The family has always been run by
these two women working together and separating was experienced as killing the other ‘mother’.

In the Shen family, the bonds between women are similarly generated: their particularly traumatic experiences created a life-death interdependent relationship between mother and daughter which made it harder for either side to accept separation. A traumatic life experience shapes this particular relationship with deep psychological burdens as well as nurturing power and agency. M Shen Meng clearly experienced much less trauma in her life. However, when she started to talk about her life, she started with the ‘traumatic events’. First, she talked about her experience of nearly dying after giving birth and ‘it was my maternal grandma put me in her clothes to warm me up for three days and nights that saved my life!’ Then, she talked about when she was about two years old, when her mother was crossing a river to go to work, both of them had fallen into the cold river. ‘After us being saved by other people, she held me tight sitting on the bank crying for ages.’ None of these experiences Meng can really ‘remember’. However, they are ‘family stories’ passed on by others, maybe her mother or her grandmother. No matter what, these stories clearly have been part of Meng’s life and she chose to start her life story with them. Maybe she consciously or unconsciously wanted to present a continuation of the traumatic life experiences generations of women have experienced in her family. Also, as we have seen, the lives of women in family Shen have been affected by trauma much more directly than men’s lives (i.e., it was only women went down to the countryside in this family). Examining the relationship between GM Hong’s life and M Meng’s story, Meng told a similar story about getting married. ‘After I got married, I went back home to visit my parents on the third day, as soon as I entered the room, my parents held me closely and were crying.’ Meng was said she was surprised that her father was holding her tightly and crying. What about Meng’s attitude towards her mother? Meng recounted emotional stories about her worries about her mother. Meng initiated this story and burst into tears about ten minutes after she started talking in the interview,
‘When my mum was around 30, she started heart disease. At that time, it was very severe. She could not get worried (ji), … If she gets worried, she would pass out immediately. It was very often, I remembered clearly, when my mum had a heart attack, she needed to take pills immediately. When she could talk again, the first thing she said was always, ‘The only thing I cannot leave behind is you…’ [tears] ‘That was around my junior middle school period, she was seriously ill. This meant a lot to me. From that period, I grew up quickly. I started to cook and wash clothes myself and to look after my mum.’

This story demonstrates not only Meng’s close bond with her mother, but also the way she changed due to her mother’s illness. Facing a life where she needed to look after her mother was not easy. As Meng was relating another detailed story of how she spent a whole night sitting beside her mother when she had her heart attack, when nobody else was at home, she said, ‘at that time, in fact [tut], I was scared, [tut], I felt horrified, thinking it would be much better if I had some siblings to share [tut] and [crying]. This, for an only child, I felt really deeply alone.’ This feeling of loneliness is not uncommon among her generation, but Meng’s experience of being scared of being alone was very different. She was probably sharing a psychological trauma similar to that which her mother had experienced in the past. Nevertheless, being scared is not merely a negative emotion which can be disempowering, it also made Meng understand her mother better. This is probably why Meng chose to stay with her parents even after she was cheated into going back to Bengbu from a ‘better city’ (in terms of its development) and a better job. She wanted to make sure her mother was okay. Her mother’s health and happiness connects and shapes hers, too. When recalling the happiest time in her life, Meng said it was after she got pregnant and quit her job,

‘I and my mum spend time together every day. We chatted endlessly, we strolled on the river bank eating little snacks. You know what, my mum never ate any snacks before that! That was definitely my happiest time in my life and also my mother’s!’

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100 Snacking can symbolise a type of freedom from order and constraints. Having regular meals without snacking has been one of the important disciplines for children in China. However the
This strong sharing of happiness in a way cannot be separated from the strong sadness of separation between her mother and her grandmother, and her mother and herself, like two sides of the same coin. In both situations, these mother-daughters formed a strong union where they care, feel and live with each other.

This strong union of dependency and care prevented Meng pursuing a better job in a larger city, but her strong family, particularly her mother’s support, also provided her with motivation to move up the ladder by working hard and searching for better opportunities. Also, this interdependence did not affect the women’s capabilities. They are all extremely capable in helping, supporting, and taking care of other family members as well as being ambitious and capable at work\(^{101}\). This is probably why M Meng differs from some other mothers who struggle for personal freedom. ‘Personal freedom’ was not mentioned by Meng in her interview. The close bonds between the women and in Meng’s case the interdependence between them is associated with her positive approach to family responsibility rather than viewing it as a ‘constraint’ of her freedom.

Such strong identification and bonding among these three generations of women also shape their childrearing experiences. We have seen GG Shen Ai’s harsh discipline and GM Shen Hong’s particularly ‘strict guan’, which also included physical punishment. In Shen Meng’s case, although a much more child-centred approach is advocated in her time, she still practices similar ‘strict’ and ‘harsh’ discipline, including ‘beating’ her daughter. She commented, ‘Everyone said my daughter is just like another version of me! She looks exactly likes me. My mum has been extremely strict in managing me and now I am beating her as well.’ Shen Meng also differs from many counterparts in the way she made few complaints about her mother and strongly appreciated the fact that her mother has been the main carer for her daughter since she was born. The difference is Shen Meng expressed strong self-

\(^{101}\) Ambition at work is difficult to tell for GM Hong due to the missed interview. However, her low and boring job position and her daughter's comment's about her 'devoting herself to look after me and my father' probably indirectly demonstrate Hong's lack of opportunities to be ambitious at work!
doubt about her harsh disciplining as she knows the new mainstream discourses on childrearing today. She talked about her efforts in changing herself by a story: her daughter had seen a ‘rainbow’ but she could not see it and thought her daughter was being ridiculous until she bent down and looked from her daughter’s eye-level and noticed a ‘rainbow’ formed through the glass in the window. Shen Meng said this story taught her that she should look through her daughter’s eyes more. Therefore, in the interview, Shen Meng said that she still needed to ‘grow’ into a ‘good mother’ alongside her daughter’s growing-up process.

Shen Meng, talking in the interview about today’s child-centred way of parenting and her efforts to change herself, demonstrates that she has been influenced by this new ideology. However, although a child-centred approach is part of intensive mothering, Shen Meng did not talk about other aspects of intensive mothering such as the mother having to be there and the ‘scientific’ method of childrearing. She only focused on her impatience towards her daughter and wanting to be a more child-centred and patient mother. Such a selection of what she wanted to follow from the mainstream ideology can also reflect her strong identification with her mother who not only executed harsh discipline but also communicated with her warmly (e.g., the example of writing a letter to her). Therefore, the different aspects of the new ideology of mothering today have been selected by Shen Meng according to her own growing-up experiences and her relationship with her mother.

Interestingly, such harsh discipline did not produce a distant relationship between the mothers and daughters in family Shen. Instead, all the daughters understand their mothers’ harsh lives and expressed strong responsibilities towards their mothers.

The traumatic experiences clearly generate a psychological burden for these women (the great-grandmothers’ extremely guilt towards her daughter, the grandmothers’ lack of capacity to face the past and Meng’s feeling scared of being alone, as well as all of their fears of being separated). On the other hand, these traumatic experiences nurture strong mother-daughter relationships which also give them power, ambition
and hope for the future, reinforcing a family culture that facilitates this family of women rising up the ladder of social-economic status.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated transmission processes across three generations of women. This is a way of investigating how changes of mothering practices take place and embedding mothering practices within intergenerational relationships and family practices. It examined the resources transmitted, both tangible and intangible ‘things’. It examined conscious and unconscious efforts at transmission, resistance from those in receipt of transmission and the impact of transmission on individual and family social mobility. Whilst the focus was on mothers, the importance of other family members in processes of transmission was noted.

The chapter draws on data from different families to demonstrate features of the transmission process. However, the full complexity of intergenerational transmission can be seen in how these different features/elements work together in particular families. I focused on two detailed cases: three generations of women in family Zhao and family Shen, selected partly because they represent two distinctive social mobility trends across generations, and partly because they demonstrate different types and characteristics of intergenerational transmission processes. For family Zhao, the great-grandmothers’ high SIES provided the potential for her to transmit key occupational resources to the next few generations whereas the great-grandmother of family Shen experienced a sudden drop from the top to the bottom of society due to political turbulence. Therefore, there were few family resources (economic and social capital) available to be transmitted.

In terms of relational patterning and transmission, the Zhao women demonstrate strong dis-identification with their mothers and also distant mother-daughter relationships whereas the Shen women are closely bonded. The distanced relationship shapes the daughters in family Zhao, who engaged different childrearing practices from their mothers, whereas daughters in family Shen exercised similar
style of discipline to their mothers. Interestingly, considering these differences, both families transmitted important personal qualities that made these women (all three generation in family Zhao, the youngest generation of family Shen) successful, judging by their SIES. However, this transmission of personal qualities was less articulated in family Zhao than in family Shen. In family Zhao, the similarities between women were sometimes concealed by the adaptations made by the younger generations due to their dis-identification with their mothers. In family Shen, the women identify more closely with the positive side of their mother/grandmother’s personalities. This chapter takes the transmission of these personal qualities as an important part of mothering practice even though such a transmission process is less readily observed and articulated by mothers and their daughters themselves.

The chapter also showed how the historical context impacted on what was transmitted to and adapted by the younger generation. In family Zhao ‘strength and working hard’ take different shapes and meanings in different generations of women. In family Shen, political trauma had a huge influence and curtailed the exercise of the middle generation’s strong personality. However, when the political environment changed again, some cultural capital that was transmitted across generations still contributed to the younger generation’s success in moving up the social and economic ladder. Similarly, the different ideology’s variations over time also contribute to the younger generation’s mothering practices, no matter whether they want to be similar to or different from their own mothers. Zhao Jia’s emphasis on intensive mothering and Shen’s own self-doubt in practicing a less ‘child-centred’ approach are a case in point.

The other family members’ influence on the transmission process was also evident in the family Zhao and Shen. When mother-daughter relationships are distant, daughters form a warmer relationship with their fathers and this can be transmitted as in family Zhao. In addition, fathers can also impact on mothers’ practices more directly. For example, M Zhao Jia consciously fostered her daughter’s personality to be more similar to her father. In family Shen, GM Shen Hong seems to be able to express warmer care when communicating with her daughter (M Shen Meng) just
like her father, rather than her harsh mother (GG Shen Ai). However, in both cases, it is also important to notice that these daughters inherited personality and practices from both parents (e.g., M Zhao Jia emphasised the importance of not having a ‘glass heart’ and M Shen Hong’s strict discipline involving physical punishment). Such a mixed inheritance from different family members is also a way for the younger generation to leave their own mark on what has been passed on.

Not just fathers can influence the transmission process. In family Shen, we also see the important and positive influence from the maternal grandmother in M Shen Meng’s story. This demonstrates that intergenerational transmission does not only go from one generation to the next, but can jump a generation. This is particularly evident in Chinese families’ co-residency culture where grandparents, particularly grandmothers, take the main care of the grandchildren. These families and women’s stories suggest that both family experiences and the larger historical context are important and there are no simple explanations concerning women’s practices in rearing their own children.
Chapter 7  Discussion and Conclusion

7.1  Introduction

This thesis has aimed to explore and compare three generations of women’s lived experiences as mothers in China. A feminist position has been adopted which emphasises that gender is not immutable and that motherhood is not isolated from other social domains. Methodologically this has entailed understanding mothering experiences as a) a part of everyday life that connects women’s different roles and practices, b) embedded within their whole life trajectories, c) constitutive of and constituted by the generational transmission process and d) situated within a specific historical time. The three analytical chapters focus on answering three research questions which reflect this complex way of investigating and comparing mothers’ experiences, including women’s growing-up experiences, mothering experiences in combination with women’s other roles and practices (eg., daughter-in-law, wife or female worker), and intergenerational transmission. In this chapter, I briefly summarise the findings from these three chapters before reflecting on my application of some western concepts in analysing Chinese mothers’ experiences. Following this some methodological issues will be addressed. Then my personal evolution of being a mother alongside this Ph.D work will be reflected upon. Finally, the main contributions of the thesis will be summarised.

7.2  Findings from the Three Analysis Chapters

7.2.1  Growing-up as Girls across Three Generations

Chapter 4 addresses the research question: how do current mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers recount their growing-up experiences? The women’s recollections of their childhoods reveal significant changes in their experiences across the three generations. The great-grandmothers’ accounts contain bitter stories due to the particularly tough historical context in early to middle 20th century China: the wars, the absences of a father, the decline of family living standards and prevalent poverty; and the evident gender inequalities in patriarchal families. In a
different historical period (the second half of the 20th century) when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established a socialist country, the grandmothers’ generation grew up in a much less discriminatory environment: women’s participation in work was encouraged and the majority of girls’ basic needs, such as food and clothing, were met and women enjoyed better access to education compared to their mothers. Compared to the other two generations (older and younger), this generation told the happiest stories about their childhood. This is also the generation who had the most positive memories about their fathers’ care. In contrast, the youngest generation of women grew up in a modern China where market reform had started and capitalism began to change the ‘pure’ socialist society. None of these women told stories of a lack of food, but remembered being ‘spoiled’ materially. As the ‘Only Child’ (most of those interviewed), girls were treasured as much as boys. However, these women’s accounts were full of negative experiences which reflected another side of the historical context, including a highly competitive education system, increasing parental monitoring and discipline, and fewer interactions with extended families when both parents worked full-time.

These experiences from the daughters’ perspectives also demonstrate how ‘childhood’ was understood differently across generations. Both the great-grandmothers’ and the grandmothers’ experiences demonstrate children were expected to ‘self-manage’ their lives in most situations, so the divisions between children and adults were much less clear than in today’s China. In addition, many family members, not just parents, were regarded as capable of disciplining the children when needed. For the mothers’ generation, not only ‘childhood’ but also ‘adolescence’ is regarded as a separate stage of life, needing much more parental monitoring and protection. ‘Teenage rebellion’ was expected as the norm, according to the accounts of this generation of women.

However, there are also continuities in the experiences of being mothered across three generations: all the girls were reared differently from boys and the discrimination against girls never really disappears. The oldest generation of girls were clearly seen as being eventually ‘married out’ (see Chapter 4) and hence
received the least care from patriarchal families compared to the other two
generations. The middle generation, although receiving much more care from their
parents, more equal opportunities at primary and secondary school and some even
being treated better in some ways than their brothers (e.g., GM Sun Xian), was also
the target of gender discrimination, particularly in the rural areas (e.g., GM Chu
Mei’s story in chapter 4). Finally, the youngest generation of girls enjoys the most
equal care and treatment comparing to their male counterparts, as the ‘Only Child’
generation. However, when there was the possibility of having more than one child,
the girls recall being discriminated against by family members (mostly from
grandparents or aunts/uncles). Furthermore, even for the ‘Only Child’, we can see
parents’ clear gendered principle in the way they discipline children; gendered
‘codes of conduct’ were applied – for example, girls were not allowed to be lazy or
greedy (e.g., M Shen Meng’s story chapter 4).

On the other hand, this chapter also paid particular attention to the differences within
each generation which demonstrate how a particular biographical trajectory and
family situation shape a woman’s experiences of being mothered. That is why for
the same great-grandmother’s generation, there were ‘caring’ and ‘capable mothers’
as well as ‘biased’ and ‘useless’ mothers. For the grandmother generation, there
were warm fathers, as well as fathers who discriminated against girls regarding their
basic needs when compared to the boys. For the mothers’ generation, there are
stories of complaining too much about parents’ educational ‘pushing’ as well as
complaints of not enough support from parents.

7.2.2 Mothering Experiences

Chapter 5 examined the research question: how do current mothers, grandmothers
and great grandmothers recount their child-rearing practices? Similar to their
growing-up experiences, women’s accounts of mothering demonstrate how distinct
social, economic, political and cultural conditions shape their experiences. Looking
across generations, we can see that the first generation of mothers (the great-
grandmothers), although living through the hardest historical times, demonstrated
the least regret/guilt about their past mothering practices. The strong emphasis on women’s participation in work outside the home, supported by the ‘liberated woman’ ideology of the PRC, is interpreted as a major reason for stories that lack guilt across women of differing social-economic status. The feeling of guilt started with the next generation (grandmother generation) where several women recounted stories of not being good enough mothers to their children, whether or not their practices were consistent with the dominant ideology at that time (the virtuous wife and good mother). The sharp changes in society from the time they grew up (in a socialist China) and after they became mothers (a socialist market economy) can partly explain this generation’s difficulties – their ambitions raised early as a girl were denied later as a mother. Some had lost their jobs in their middle age, which made their lives hard. The M’s generation, confronted with the ‘baby fever’ culture and an individualist society that casts exclusive responsibility for raising a healthy, happy and clever child on to the parents (mostly mothers), contributes to a new phenomenon – the desire to be a full-time mother who can practice an intensive form of mothering. Some crucial institutional support (e.g., free-childcare centres) are replaced by market driven businesses (expensive early childcare services) which makes the family’s social-economic background play a much more important role in shaping mothers’ experiences. This is also the first generation that started to complain about grandparents’ support, compared to the older two generations who regarded any support from grandparents as ‘mothers’ saviours’. A new scientific discourse in childrearing for this youngest generation partly explains why grandparents’ practices are devalued as ‘too traditional’.

Once more, the continuities across these three generations need to be highlighted. Gender division in childrearing is evident across all three generations. Even though the great-grandmothers were encouraged to work outside the home and to contribute to the building of a new nation (a very publicly praised value at the time), the gendered division of work at home was hardly challenged. Then the grandmothers’ generation faced a ‘backwards’ situation in terms of gender equity (see Chapter 5) where a ‘virtuous wife and good mother’ was praised. There was little improvement in terms of a gender division in early childcare among the youngest generation even
though there is also increasing interest in ‘modern fathers’ (Xu, 2017). Nevertheless, similar to what Brannen (2015) observes in her study of fatherhood, this new discourse still reinforces the traditional gendered role in different tasks of childrearing (e.g., fathers play with children or provide educational support) and children continue to be regarded as best looked after by mothers, reflected by new ideologies like ‘intensive mothering’. Although this generation experiences an increasing recognition of the importance of early childhood, this largely derives from scientific discourses which value (male) experts’ knowledge and practices much higher than women’s. Women, be they mothers or grandmothers, are regarded as possessing ‘traditional’ or ‘incorrect’ ideas and practices which have to be changed or refined by experts. Therefore, all three generations of women face a devaluation of their childcare work compared to either paid employment or professional knowledge and practices. Such devalued work, throughout the three generations of women, was done mainly by women, whether by nannies, mothers or grandmothers.

Women’s accounts of mothering are situated within their whole life stories. Six women’s (two from each generation) ‘lived lives’ and ‘told stories’ were presented in detail to capture a whole picture of each individual’s life and how she made sense of it. Such an approach illustrates the ways in which, in recounting their lives and experiences, women do not separate but rather connect their mothering practices with their practices at work and their roles as wives, daughters/daughters-in-law or even siblings. All the important childcare decisions that women talked about involved wider practices beyond mother-child dyadic relationships and interactions, for example mothers’ relationships with mothers-in-law, sister-in-law and husbands or mothers’ practices at work with or without institutional support. This reflects the approach of many feminist and family researchers (refer to Chapter 2) who seek to understand mothering within the broader contexts of their lives and as ‘family practices’ (Morgan, 2011).

102 Except for the GM’s generation, some of them talked about ‘warm fathers’. 251
Furthermore, by comparing two mothers within each generation who act differently in relation to dominant ideologies of mothers/women at their time, the chapter showed how women made specific childcare decisions according to their particular life situations. Therefore, all six women told unique stories of motherhood which connected their biographical time with history.

Finally, this chapter looked at women of different social-economic status and demonstrated the complex elements that shape their status as well as their mothering experiences. The case study approach applied in this chapter is helpful in understanding how mothers were constrained or supported by their social-economic status in making decisions, choices and negotiations in their daily childrearing practices as well as recounting these experiences in the interviews.

### 7.2.3 Intergenerational Transmission

Chapter 6 examined the research question: how do mothers transmit mothering practices, family culture, and personal qualities across generations within the family? Thus it sought to understand how changes and continuities in mothering practices take place. Supported by examples from different families, the Chapter showed that the transmission process includes both tangible and intangible transmissible ‘things’; the older generation’s conscious and unconscious efforts at transmission; resistance from the younger receivers; and the impact of transmission on individual social mobility. It also reflected on the roles of other family members in transmission processes. However, given that the mothers’ role has often been neglected in research on intergenerational transmission and social mobility, the thesis focuses on women and at the same time embeds them in wider family relationships.

A detailed cases analysis was conducted to compare the transmission process across three generations of women within two families. One family kept a high SIES across all three generations and the other achieved upward mobility in the youngest generation. In these families, we have seen how mother-daughter relationships (one
distant and one close) are negotiated; the influence of particular family’s experiences and economic/political/social resources (one well-resourced and the other poorly resourced); the way women negotiate their identity in work; and the importance of personal qualities to the transmission process. On the other hand, no matter whether the women identify strongly or dis-identify with their mothers, adaptations are made to that which is passed on to them according to their particular historical context and life situations. These complex processes help us to see how growing-up experiences shape later development, particularly relating to how women rear their own children. These women’s stories suggest that both family experiences and the larger historical context are important and there are no simple explanations concerning women’s practices in rearing their own children.

7.3 Reflection of Concepts

The findings summarised above elucidate the complex relationship between agency and structure that permeates mothers’ everyday decisions, negotiations, and practices. Mothers, no matter from which generation, live in their particular historical time with its dominant ideologies, but they are also from particular families. As I noted in Chapter 2, some feminist and sociological concepts are relevant in studying Chinese mothers’ lived experiences in a complex and broad way. In this section, I will reflect on the usefulness of some concepts, including historical time, practices, and intensive mothering.

7.3.1 Biographical Time and Historical Time

Mills’ advocacy of connecting two types of historical time in understanding any specific social phenomenon - ‘biographical time’ and the ‘historical time’ that the individual lives/lived in - has been useful in understanding mothering experiences in China. In a way, the whole design of this research is inspired by such a connection of two types of time: the life story of each individual woman is the foundation of the empirical material and the historical contexts were thoroughly researched to assist my understanding of these women’s different lived times. The ‘sociological imagination’ (Mills, 2000) that brings the two types of time together has also been
fruitful. When recounting their experiences, these studied women usually found it easier to connect their mothering practices with their biographical time rather than connecting them to the structural contexts. For example, M Zhao Jia’s account of her rearing practices (see Chapter 6), such as accompanying her daughter in doing all of the homework and enrolling her in varied extra-curricular activities, can be seen as efforts to be different from her own mother (GM Zhao Dong). However, most of what she has been doing fits well with what the current ideology promotes – intensive mothering. Instead of recognizing her efforts as part of this mainstream ideology, she talked about herself as differing from the mainstream. It needs the researcher to draw on the structural element in this historical time – the particular ideology – to help us understand M Zhao Jia’s advantageous position: she talked easily about her intensive care for her daughter in the interview exactly because she is in the mainstream. This is in a sharp contrast with M Wang Cheng (see Chapter 5) who felt an obligation to argue for her particular non-mainstream practices in the interview – not getting involved much in childrearing or not following a particularly modern style of childrearing symbolized by the story of the (un)healthy diet for her son.

Furthermore, this thesis finds it necessary to use the researcher’s imagination to connect different parts of these women’s biographical time. Taking M Zhao Jia’s case as an example again, we have mentioned how she found it easy to connect her rearing practices with her dis-identification with her mother. However, as Chapter 6 demonstrates, she also unconsciously reproduces some of her mother’s personality (being strong and hard worker) and unconsciously fosters her daughter to be similar to her mother (not having a ‘glass-heart’). These similarities across generations could only be discovered when the chains of women’s lived lives and told stories were compared. Therefore, M Zhao Jia’s rearing practices are shaped by her conscious efforts to differ from her mother, her unconsciously inherited mother’s personal qualities, and the particular ideology of her historical time, a much more complex and deepened understanding of her mothering experiences. This demonstrates that an intergenerational design in general and the study of intergenerational transmission across chains of mothers from a family specifically
contributes to extend the researcher’s imagination to not only connect two types of
time, but also to connect conscious and unconscious aspects of biographical time. In
this sense, Mills’ ‘sociological imagination’ can also extend to include both
sociological and psychological imaginations with psychology contributing to
understanding unconscious biographical time.

7.3.2 Practices

In this thesis, women’s mothering experiences are studied as part of their everyday
life with a focus on ‘doing’. Whilst there is no single theory of social practice (such
as Bourdieu, 1977; Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 1996; Shove, 2012; Warde, 2005),
Morgan’s concept of ‘family practices’ was applied due to its two relevant features:
first, mothering is rooted in family relationships and practices which contain a
significant moral element – ‘some kind of emotional dimension, some sense of
personal or moral significance’ (Morgan 1996, p.192) - that is appropriately
emphasised in Morgan’s practice theory. Second, Morgan also insightfully points
out in his theory of ‘family practices’ that these everyday doings very often
transcend boundaries of different social domains – he uses ‘a sense of fluidity or
fuzziness’ to describe such a feature. This provides a way of studying mothering
experiences that is beyond the traditional domestic domain and beyond the specific
dyadic relationships (mother-child). These two features are not the focus of most
social practices theories but were found useful in exploring these Chinese mothers’
experiences from a particular feminist perspective.

For example, women’s accounts of their mothering experiences were full of
emotions: guilt, proud, satisfaction or sad. Their distant or bounded relationship with
their children comprised an important part of their everyday practices which also
impacted on their emotions. The moral significance can be either moral pressure that
many women experienced (such as the guilt in the grandmothers’ generation) or a
moral responsibility towards others, not just one’s own children. GG Zhu Yu’s
account of prioritising her nephew instead of her own daughter demonstrates her
caring for another family member – her sister-in-law- who was in a harder living
situation than herself (see Chapter 5). M Li Wei’s staying with her grandmother after having her son also demonstrates her particular care and concern for her grandmother after her grandfather passed away, even though this had caused conflicts with her husband\(^{103}\) (see Chapter 5).

The moral dilemma between different family members and roles that mothers experienced direct us to the ‘fluidity or fuzziness’ of mothering practices. In these examples, mothering is not just about mothers’ concerns about her children, but simultaneously consideration for others. In everyday life, it is not difficult to understand that a woman does not stop being a wife, daughter, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law and so on when she becomes a mother. However, our theories and research about mothers very often neglects this (see Chapter 2’s literature review). I also propose, based on these women’s experiences, that mothering not only happens at home with the clear task of daily care for a child (e.g., feeding, nappy-changing, or putting to sleep), but also happens at other places, particularly at work, without being directly linked with childcare (e.g., going to work is not generally considered as part of childcare by the public or mothers themselves in both today’s China or the West). When Morgan (2011) explains the fluidity of family practices, he proposes that talking about someone’s family members at work can also be regarded as part of family practices. Here, I extend this further to the fact that for many interviewed women, going to work itself is a way of mothering. This is demonstrated by the great-grandmothers in this study who either worked to win institutional support for their children (e.g., GG Zhao Xue), or worked to provide better care for their children (e.g., GG Zhu Yu). These women also connected these two parts of practices together in their accounts. For example, GG Zhu Yu described her childrearing as ‘put children on my back and walked miles to find work’. GG Zhao Xue’s claim that ‘it all depends on women, not men!’ These women’s experiences demonstrate that the conflicting relationship between work and care are socially constructed. The guilt about working too much and so impacting on the children

\(^{103}\) Although staying with her grandmother was not the only reason for M Li Wei living with her parents and grandma, this particular care towards her grandma should not be neglected. This demonstrates the complex factors that shape mothers’ decisions.
negatively did not become a ‘mainstream’ feeling until the grandmothers became mothers. The guilt grew for those in the youngest generation where ‘full-time mother’ is a requirement of the intensive mothering project. Therefore, following some earlier feminist work (e.g., Brannen & Moss, 1991; Stacey, 1981), Morgan’s concept of family practices is helpful in deconstructing the assumption about ‘separate spheres’ between work and care. Furthermore, as Chodorow (1999) argues, the particular over-invested mothering practices connects with the capitalist industrial society which induce particular ‘psychological processes’ (p.7). On the other hand, ‘In a society where women do meaningful productive work, have ongoing adult companionship while they are parenting, and have satisfying emotional relationships with other adults, they are less likely to over-invest in children. (Chodorow, 1978, p.212)’ The ideology of great-grandmother’s generation - the ‘liberated woman’ - and institutional arrangements for childcare provides a great example where women can utilize such ideological and institutional resources to be a working mother. This generation of women, although they did not have an easy life, felt the least guilty about their child rearing.

Therefore, Morgan’s practice theory that emphasises the fluidity of women’s lives is fruitful in understanding mothers’ experiences, such as these great-grandmothers, but it also opens up the possibility of transcending ‘work and care’ categories that are socially constructed as a tension in women’s life. Such a deconstruction can help us, as both individual and collective agents, to focus on creating a better social structure that supports more fluid mothering/caring and working practices in today’s Chinese society.

7.3.3 Intensive Mothering

Intensive mothering is a concept derived in the West (Hays, 1996) that is increasingly applied globally (Faircloth et al., 2013). This thesis also uses this term to describe the main ideology of today’s motherhood in China. The mothers’ generation of women’s ‘new’ ways of childrearing, compared with their parents, often fit into such a western concept, such as mothers’ intensive involvement in
daily care, scientific logics of childrearing, children-centred approaches, an emphasis on extra curricular activities and so on. A scientific logic in childrearing is promulgated within a society that celebrates individualism and capitalism and provides little institutional support for mothers and children. Because western knowledge and practices are regarded as being more ‘advanced’ than those in China they are therefore pursued by many Chinese young families as being symbolic of a better social-economic status. However, as this thesis demonstrates, the mothers who practice intensive mothering in China are different from their counterparts in the west in a number of ways. First, it is not just intensive mothering, but intensive mothering and grandmothering/grandparenting. The intensive mothering in China is happening within a culture where grandparents’, particularly grandmothers’, intensive involvement in providing childcare is regarded as the norm. That’s why many mothers of the mothers’ generation take their mothers’ help for granted (such as M Li Wei) or complain about lack of support when the grandmother is not involved as much as the mother expected (such as M Zhao Jia). In many cases, grandparents provided significant material support to help the mother exercise intensive mothering by providing accommodation, paying fees for nannies, or paying for some daily consumables for young couples and grandchildren. Grandmothers, in addition, very often took the major responsibility of childcare, particularly when the child was young (before 6 years old). The intensive involvement from grandma or nannies in supporting the daily care of the child does not reduce these young mothers’ anxiety about childrearing because these women regard themselves as possessing more advanced knowledge (e.g., a scientific way or children-centred way of rearing) than the other carers, so that they need to make all the important decisions about their children as well as monitoring and correcting the other carers (see Li Wei’s case in Chapter 5). Therefore, intensive mothering in China can be less busy than is practised in the west, but can still be stressful and demanding. In addition, monitoring and correcting other people, particularly one’s mother or mother-in-law, can produce tensions in intergenerational relationships in these families. This means intensive mothering involves a significant amount of time for mothers to deal with the intergenerational conflicts on a daily basis in China, as
most of the studied mothers described. This is also well reflected by the literature about grandparenting in China (see Chapter 2).

Second, intensive mothering ideologies fulfil a particular psychological need of the mothers’ generation: to be different from their mothers, something that has not been discussed in regard to intensive mothering in the West. In Chapter 4, we have seen that mothers’ generation complained about how they had been mothered much more than the other two generations. Many of them wanted to be different from their mothers in childrearing and therefore, intensive mothering provides a good reason to be different. I have pointed to the historical contexts that shape this generation of women’s growing-up experiences, one that was managed in a much more strict (although caring) way, facing fierce educational competition and pressure from parents, and living with their parents as the only child and so on. In a way this generation of studied mothers are all free from material deprivation, which might also enable them to pay attention to their psychological well-being. These ‘negative’ experiences are well-remembered and articulated in their interviews. Furthermore, this mother’s generation also live in a time where working women are much less praised and celebrated than in the older generations. Instead, being a nurturing mother demonstrates an important femininity for a modern woman. Therefore, intensive mothering, associated with modern ideas such as the children-centred approach and scientisation of childrearing, fulfills the needs of these women to be different from their mothers, who had practiced strict discipline or adult-centred logic as well as their own project of modern womanhood. In the example of M Li Wei and M Zhao Jia, who practised intensive mothering most extensively within the twelve studied mothers, this ideology provides them with the legitimacy to talk about their different types of childrearing easily and naturally. As I mentioned earlier, this ideology provides important resources (Brannen and Moss, 1991) that puts these mothers in a position of authority (Xiao, 2014) in childrearing, compared to other carers, particularly the grandmothers.

This thesis also looks at how mothers actually deal with the conflicts caused by such intergenerational differences. In contrast to Zhu’s (2010) conclusion that two
generations compromised in practice, I found that the mother-daughter’s relationship is crucial in terms of the degree to which these mothers compromise or not. For example, in family Zhao and family Li where mother-daughter has a distant relationship and daughters dis-identify with their mothers, M Zhao Jia and M Li Wei compromised little with their mothers’ way of childrearing. In families such as Shen and Han where mothers and daughters are much closer and daughters do identify with their mothers, M Shen Meng and M Han Ting, although having different ideas in childrearing, chose to listen to their mothers on most occasions. Therefore, how much the younger generation (the mothers’ generation) follows the intensive mothering and differs from their mothers relates not only to the intergenerational differences but also their relationship with their mothers.

Finally, intensive mothering is associated with a certain level of social-economic status. In my study, only the most well-resourced (upper-middle level) women (and their families) could afford to practice this ideology. Most of the others could not, but expressed strong interest and pressure to follow such an ideology. However, as M Wang Cheng’s case shows there are also mothers that wanted to be involved as little as possible in early childrearing. These women found themselves ‘vulnerable’ in the context of the dominant ideology and therefore had to make a strong argumentation. These women were also from a lower social-economic status (in Cheng’s case relating to her parents’ rural origin). Intensive mothering in this case produces strong pressure for this group. Such pressure on more vulnerable groups is also revealed in some Western literature (e.g. S. Elliott, Powell, & Brenton, 2015). However, this study demonstrates that the Chinese tradition of women’s work and grandparents’ help also provides these women with some resources to practice their particular way of mothering.

In summary, I found ‘intensive mothering’ to be a relevant concept to describe today’s dominant Chinese mothering ideology. However, in China, this ideology is also embedded in family traditions where grandparents’ help is part of daily childrearing. In addition, such an ideology fits the young generation’s need to differ from their mothers based on their particular growing-up experiences in a specific
historical time. This makes intensive mothering more problematic as it causes much intergenerational tension which is well documented in today’s grandparenting literature. How such tension is dealt with, and how much compromise Chinese mothers make, depends partly on their relationship with their own mothers (or mothers-in-law). Furthermore, this ideology also provides the better resourced women with legitimacy for their particular childrearing practices whereas it produces pressure on lower social-economic status mothers. Nevertheless, Chinese culture that still prioritises grandparents’ involvement and mothers’ work continues to offer some legitimacy to mothers who do not want to mother their children intensively.

7.4 Methodological Issues and Contributions

Focused on women’s experiences, an interview method was employed that provided maximum autonomy to the women to recount their lives in their own ways. Asked about their experiences of growing up and of childrearing, women’s stories were not limited to the private sphere or her own practices but included the world of work and involvement of other family members. The researcher’s role has been to imaginatively interpret the women’s accounts in relation to the times to which they refer (current and past) and to seek to understand their lived lives and told stories in relation to their different historical contexts and biographical trajectories. However, such interview and analytical approaches come with their own limitations which I will discuss in this section.

7.4.1 Artificial Setting for the Big Story

As Bamberg (2006) questioned in his critique of the ‘big story’ approach, the life story situation is ‘artificial’ (p.72) – ordinary people do not give accounts of their lives in everyday life and therefore it ‘requires someone to elicit them’ (p.73). Is such an artificial setting problematic to research aims studying everyday life? Based on my experiences in this study, the answer is yes and no. First of all, all interview settings are artificial except for some participatory ethnographic methods where the researcher/interviewer become part of the lived life of narrators. This type of method
has its own limitations (Bernard, 2002) and it is simply not possible in researching all three generations of women to use such participatory methods. I also need to point out that no matter what methods are applied, studying everyday life raises methodological problems as social practices are ‘often unacknowledged, hidden or assumed.’ (Brannen & Phoenix, 2014, p. 11) Therefore, the artificial setting of the ‘big story’ on its own is not a problem for studying everyday life. Instead, the fact that the ‘minutiae of everyday lives are not readily recalled and observed by others’ (ibid., p.11), means some extra ‘intervention’ is needed to bring it to the surface, make it tellable, or accessible for interpretations. This is exactly the principle underlining interviewing in clinical psychology, with which the BNIM interview method shares many similarities (Wengraf, 2001).

However, I agree with Bamberg that a life story is a large departure from everyday life conversations/communications and therefore building trust between the interviewer and the interviewee is essential for producing good biographical data. Unless feeling trusted, and trusting the audience, the interviewee will easily produce some unimportant or easy-to-tell events of her/his life instead of being really engaged in telling their life story (Bamberg, 2006). This is what I found in practice. I have mentioned that participant recruitment was much more successful with people that either I or my parents and family members knew. This meant those who were interviewed trusted me more than a stranger. Nevertheless, being a three generational design, even if one generation of family members knew me or my family, the others were still strangers, which caused problems in trust building. For example, I totally failed in interviewing GM Shen Hong even though her mother was very enthusiastic about being part of my project. M Shen Meng’s attitude towards the interview only changed after she met me and started to talk to me. She said at the end of the interview that she was going to deal with me quickly and finish everything within half an hour. However, after she saw me and listened to me, particularly after she felt that her story was genuinely cared about, she started to tell more and more. In fact, within 10 minutes of her interview, she burst into tears when story-telling. The whole interview lasted 2 hours.
Overall, I felt all 35 interviewed women trusted me, more than I expected. There were still challenges, such as those discussed in Chapter 3, about some great-grandmothers who could not be interviewed on their own, which created problems when eliciting life stories. On the other hand, as I mentioned earlier, there are strategies to deal with these environments and with the assistance of semi-structured interviews, much ‘lived life’ data were still available, which is also important biographical data for this research. Based on these experiences, I argue that the semi-structured interview is an important component of the BNIM interview method and the special attention that is given to the ‘lived life’ data can be really beneficial in situations where eliciting narrative life stories is hard.

7.4.2 Reflection on the Dated Situated Subjectivity

However, there is an epistemological tension between BNIM’s belief of the speaker’s constant construction of self during their story-telling on the one hand, but on the other an emphasis on searching for a ‘dated situated subjectivity’ (section 3.4) that can be independent of the influence of the ‘present self’, by pushing for details of some past events/experiences in the interviews. After trying this method with Chinese women, my understanding of this epistemological tension is as follows. On the one hand, I believe every mother/individual has a ‘past self’ that is independent of her current self and it is possible to access this by creating an environment where women felt trusting and trusted and by using specific strategies to encourage women to feel closer to the past. However, this approach, often used in psychotherapy, can never be the same in a sociological study where the researcher, such as myself, did not train as a psychotherapist. Therefore, significant efforts made in ‘pushing’ (maybe more than 10 times!) for certain details in the BNIM interview method may not prove fruitful or the most effective way of interviewing. As I presented in this research, the focus is on how the present time may influence the way the narrator tells her past stories. Hence I have had to accept that the data I obtained is always a partial story. For example, when I compared three generations of women’s growing-up experiences, I compared the differences of some lived lives and historical contexts; but I also compared their subjective feelings associated with, and meanings
these women gave to, these experiences in the present and with a projection for the future. This is particularly evident when I concluded how these women, no matter whether telling happy or sad memories, expressed their understanding of their parents. Such ‘understanding’ was achieved with their present experiences as mothers, not their ‘dated-situated-subjectivities’ (instead of understanding parents, in the past, these girls had difficult relationships with their parents, see Chapter 4)

7.4.3 Partial but Valid Interpretation

Treating the stories that these women gave and my interpretations as partial is not only important but also ethical (Butler, 2005). Bamberg warns us that the assumption of one big life story is more important than small discursive stories and the constant pursuing of ‘pure’ narrative stories in the BNIM interview can lead us to believe that there is a fixed self behind this story. Therefore this can lead to a situation where “‘peoples’ lives” are running danger to get prematurely ‘fixed’ and potentially reified or essentialized’ (Bamberg, 2006, p.75). I agree that there is such a tendency in this method and therefore recognise the partial stories presented in the analysis are important. However, I also think that a mixed method approach in data analysis and an intergenerational design are also helpful to ‘unfix’ our understanding/interpretations of interviewees’ stories, as this research demonstrates. Chapter 5 followed a more typical BNIM analysis approach in which I summarised each women’s way of making sense of motherhood in one or two sentences. However, in chapter 4 I used thematic analysis in making sense of women’s growing-up experiences and in chapter 6 I carried out an intergenerational comparison across chains of women that enriched my understanding of the mothers. The women’s decisions, choices and practices in childrearing need to be explained from all three angles: the growing-up process in a particular historical time, the mothering experiences in a certain historical context and the family intergenerational transmission process. For example, had I not studied what was passed on across three generations of women in family Zhao, M Zhao Jia’s mothering practices might only have been interpreted from the current ideology she employed to make sense of her way of childrearing that differed from her mother's. But as Chapter 6
demonstrates, her efforts at being different from her mother hid some other aspects that she had inherited and that in turn influenced her own mothering practices (e.g., foster a strong personality in her daughter). These different analyses made my analysis of motherhood more complex and therefore served to make more fluid particular interpretations of mothers’ subjectivities.

However, accepting the fact that interpretations are always partial is not the same as accepting any interpretations of these women’s stories as equally valid. I agree with what Polkinghorne (1988) suggests namely that researchers still need to achieve a ‘scholarly consensus’ (p.176). Such consensus, as he emphasises, should be based on the coherence and persuasiveness of an interpretation that a narrative approach makes of particular human/social phenomena. Coherence means that the researcher can create a new narrative out of all the conflicting information provided by the narrator. Persuasiveness means that the researcher can exclude other alternative explanations of the same experiences/phenomena. Therefore, as a researcher, I have tried to achieve such coherence by connecting women’s lived lives with their told stories, by searching for explanations for ‘contradictory’ or missing information from these women’s accounts, by making intergenerational comparisons and by situating women’s accounts within the immediate interview encounter as well as biographical and historical time.

### 7.4.4 The Contribution of an Intergenerational Design: Reflection on Women’s Agency

One important aspect of my feminist approach to this research has been to study the complex relationship between women’s agency and contextual constraints and opportunities. The findings based on my empirical data have hopefully demonstrated how each generation of women acted within particular ideologies and institutional constraints and supports in their mothering practices. However, my conclusion does not stop at the claim that each woman demonstrates her capacities in ‘making room to move’ (Parker & Dales, 2014, p. 165) in a concrete historical situation. Such a claim seems to suggest that women/mothers always find ways to negotiate with dominant power no matter what the dominant ideology is. Instead, I argue that some
ideologies (and the associated institutional arrangements) provide more resources for women/mothers to make choices while others constrain them more.

In this thesis (see Chapter 2), I have employed the concept of ideology in the sense of ‘ideas and beliefs (whether true or false) [which] symbolize the conditions and life-experiences of a specific, socially significant group or class’ (Eagleton, 1991, p.29) in a particular era. In this definition, ideologies of motherhood/womanhood always prioritise the interests of the most socially significant groups and therefore they benefit less, or exclude, less powerful groups. In a way, this understanding of ideology supports the kinds of stories the women tell especially within a generation. However, comparing women across generations helps us to see how ideologies change and how they impact on women’s lives differently including across different social-economic groups. The ideology of the 'liberated woman' impacted on GG Zhao Xue (high SIES) and GG Zhao Yu (low SIES) differently. However both these women, and the other ten great-grandmothers, told a much less ‘guilty’ story about mothering compared to the other two generations. The contrast between the great-grandmothers’ generation and the other two generations seems to suggest that even though the ‘iron girl’ and ‘liberated woman’ discourses do not provide an easy life for women (these women not only lived in a harsh material environment but also worked extremely hard at work or/and at home), and did not break the gendered role of care (see section 7.2), it did provide resources and support for women to be part of public life. In some respects these working mothers' lives were much less problematic than those who lived under the ideologies and eras of the ‘virtuous wife and good mother’ and ‘intensive mothering’.

Such insights gained from intergenerational comparison is crucial in terms of their implications for practices and policies. By recognising these Chinese mothers’ agency and by identifying how they acted regarding resources and constraints in a concrete historical situation is important. This helps us to avoid perceiving mothers/women as weak and passive receivers and therefore underplaying women’s belief in and capacity to change. However, this is to make a relativist or cynical
argument that all the policies and institutional arrangements are the same (and bad) because they always help the most powerful groups. The different impacts of different ideologies on women across the social-economic spectrum demonstrated in this thesis show that there are better ways to construct institutional structures and that some ideologies can act more as a resource than as a constraint. In terms of the need to support mothers, an ideology that expresses the benefit of women’s (paid and unpaid) work, not only for herself and her children, but also for the public good, provides mothers with power. In addition, institutional support to help mothers care for their children, such as the ‘free-childcare centres’ that were built in the early 1950s to 1980s in China, ‘normalise’ non-maternal childcare and can be effective in reducing women’s anxiety and guilt in not 'being there' for the children.

On the other hand, looking across three generations, issues such as the gendering of care work and women's inequality in paid work (e.g., women had to work much harder than men such as GG Zhao Xue had done, China's laying-off policies targeted women of the grandmother generation, the new gender discrimination of the mothers’ generation) should also be at the forefront of the government’s agenda to improve the lot of mothers and fully ‘liberate’ the human resources of the country.

7.5 The Evolution of My Biography

In Chapter 1, I connected my thesis with my particular experiences as a mother. I talked about my own struggle when deciding on different types of practice, the involvement of my own mother and how to deal with my own relational problem with my mother, which seemed to be highlighted by being a mother myself. Now I am at the end of the journey of this research where I also seek to solve my personal confusions. Have I achieved this personal goal?

On the one hand, yes. Listening to and analysing these three generations of women’s life stories helped me to understand how much I didn’t appreciate the difficulties, struggles and amazing power that all the mothers have had when trying their best to be good mothers. I am pretty sure now if I was in any of these women’s shoes, I dare
not say I could do better! Therefore, even though I disagree with my mum on some
cildrearing issues, I have a better understanding of why she and I think differently.
This also applies to my older feminist friends, with whom I now agree in their
dismissal of my question about breastfeeding – I cannot see that there is any room or
chance for these women who fought for women’s rights in survival, education and
participation in the public sphere to worry about breastfeeding!

It is also ‘yes’ in terms of the confidence I gained in my own mothering. I totally
dropped the idea that I had to breastfeed my child until he decided to stop. I am also
much less worried about little decisions in daily childcare, such as providing a
healthy diet all the time, where he sleeps at night or being concerned if I have to
disappear for a period for work or travel, all of which seemed to be such big issues
before. I have no worry about so called ‘mother-baby’ bonding or ‘father-baby’
bonding and I believe that the majority of children have their own way of attachment
to whoever they wish at the time. This makes me so much more relaxed as a mother
and brings much better family relationships, no matter with my son or with my
husband. In particular, as I was writing this thesis, my second child was born. I
decided to bottle-feed her whenever I felt exhausted and give opportunities to other
people to help from the first day she was born. However, such a decision also came
with pressure as, ironically, the culture of promoting breastfeeding is dominant in
the UK and all the experts (midwives and health visitors) offer help to mothers to
‘help you breastfeed’ while no one says ‘we are here to help you to bottle feed your
child’! Even though I had reflections and experiences with my first child, my son, I
admitted feeling under censure when I was using bottles. This demonstrates to me
how powerful mainstream discourses can be and how they can create stress for
mothers!

On the other hand, there is also disappointment at the end of this PhD journey,
particularly to do with my relationship with my mother. I am still very reluctant to
let her be involved as much as she wants due to our very different ideas about, and
practices of, rearing a child. This helps me to realise that no matter how much
knowledge and understanding you can gain from research, the emotional side with
family members is hardest to solve. The reason I strongly disagree with some of her ways lies deep in my negative experiences with her when I was little. Yes, I probably now have better understanding of what she did or what she didn’t do. However, emotionally, I still do not want my children to have similar experiences, no matter whether it is rational or not.

Nevertheless, in this particular situation, I have not given up. I accept my own problem with my mother and I have tried my best to avoid my own mother-daughter issues impacting on the grandma-grandson time and experiences between them. Furthermore, I carry on with my feminist fight alongside this PhD journey: I have been working for one of the largest parenting companies in Beijing, who accepted my ‘strange’ or ‘unpopular’ ideas of childrearing, since starting my PhD journey. With their access to thousands of parents (and some grandparents), I tried to let my particular view be heard. I challenged the popular attachment style and theories and addressed the problems of so-called scientific discourse and, most importantly, I kept reminding people about our own tradition of having the older generation’s involvement in childcare as well as other family members, instead of putting all the responsibilities on the mothers’ shoulders. Earlier this year, I gave an on-line lecture to more than 20,000 parents and the title was ‘How to convert the pain of grandparenting into a blessed grandparenting’. I received many touching messages from both mothers and grandmothers. I also led a small seminar in UCL where many young women came to listen to my research story. At the end, several of them came up to me and expressed their appreciation. One girl said, ‘Thank you so much for this valuable research and I start to understand my mother now’. Here, I feel I have found my original feminist self again, which I hope I can keep in order to try to make positive changes to Chinese families and women.

7.6 Summary of My Contributions

This thesis:
1. Contributes to the international field that is interested in intergenerational transmission and social mobility as the first study seeking to understand mothering in China in historical context through an intergenerational design.

2. Contributes to feminist debates that in the West have often focused on social class in cross sectional studies – through an intergenerational design that interrogates mothering in the context of changing social status as influenced by major historical upheaval.

3. Contributes to creating dialogue between older socialist feminists and modern feminists in China by a) highlighting the changing conditions that Chinese women and mothers lived in and how such conditions produced distinctive subjectivities across generations: these changing conditions and subjectivities reflect the shifting focus of Chinese feminist scholars and practitioners; b) by recognising the value of the socialist ideology of ‘liberated women’ and arguing that this valuable tradition can also benefit today's mothers in combating the 'guilt' feelings of being a working mother.

4. Contributes to an emerging (feminist) field in China that seeks to reframe mothering and childrearing as a social and family practice (countering the scientisation of early years/childrearing).

5. Contributes to applications and refinements of some concepts developed in the West such as historical time, family practices and intensive mothering.

6. Contributes to the grandparenting literature in China by situating intergenerational conflicts found in Chinese ‘coalition parenting’ (Goh, 2010) within the intergenerational transmission process (i.e., the younger generation’s efforts of leaving their own mark or dis-identification with their mothers) and changing ideologies of motherhood across historical time. This approach can also help reduce intergenerational conflicts by revealing these
personal/biographical and historical connections with women’s rearing practices.

7. Contributes to the limited literature in studying mothers of varied social-economic status in China as well as from smaller cities as the majority of literature is about middle-class women from large cities such as Beijing or Shanghai. The studied women live in a middle size city and have varied social-economic backgrounds; their experiences therefore have relevance for a larger population of Chinese women.

8. Makes a methodological contribution in being one of the first studies\textsuperscript{104} to apply a version of the BNIM in China and combining it with a historical approach.

9. Provides some implications for both contemporary women and policy-makers who seek a more ‘guilt free’ mothering, recognizing and embracing the connections between women’s different roles and practices.

\textsuperscript{104}The other was done by Zhang (2013) with families from Shanghai who sent their children to New Zealand to study. However, her study does not have a historical research design.
Appendix I An Introduction to the Families

Thirty six women from three linked generations from twelve families took part in the study. The following diagrams provide a brief summary of three generations of women according to their age, occupation, number of children and social-economic status. A blue line denotes the mother-daughter relationship and a yellow line the mother and daughter-in-law relationship. These diagrams provide a reference point to enhance the analysis of women’s and their families’ lives presented in the later chapters (Chapter 4, 5 and 6). Detailed information about each woman and family including a detailed explanation of social stratification as used in this thesis for each generation can be found in Appendix V. An explanation of the meanings of terms ‘high’, ‘middle’ and ‘low’ SIES and how they differ from western class stratification systems is given in Chap 6 in which social mobility across the chain of women in each family is analysed. Information about the women’s employment, education, and marriage is given in Appendix XII, XIV and XV.

Family Zhao and family Li are the two families that keep their high SIES across three generations:

Family Zhao

GG Zhao Xue: Born in 1931; Senior official; Four children; High SIES

GM is the eldest child

GM Zhao Dong: Born in 1954; Business women; Two children; High SIES

M is the second child

M Zhao Jia: Born in 1977; Senior manager in a foreign company; Two children; High SIES
Family Li

GG Li Bei: Born in 1932; Advanced worker; Three children; High SIES
GM is the eldest child

GM Li Mahua: Born in 1954; Business woman; One child; High SIES
M is an only child

M Li Wei: Born in 1982; Finance manager (part-time); One child; High SIES

Family Qian is the only family that moves from high SIES at the great-grandmothers’ generation to middle SIES in grandmother’s and the mothers’ generation.

Family Qian

GG Qian Rui: Born in 1931; Official; Five children; High SIES
GM is the second child and oldest daughter

GM Qian Jie: Born in 1952; Administrator; One child; Middle SIES
M is an only child

M Qian Hua: Born in 1981; University lecturer; One child; Middle SIES
Family Sun, Chen, Jiang and Han are the four families that keep middle SIES for three generations.

Family Sun

GG Sun Feng: Born in 1932; Administrator for school; Seven children (1 died); Middle SIES

GM Sun Xian: Born in 1952; Administrator in government; One child; Middle SIES

M Sun Lei: Born in 1980; Middle level manager; One child; Middle SIES

Family Chen

GG Chen Juan: Born in 1922; Primary school teacher; Eight children (1 died); Middle SIES

GM Chen Rong: Born in 1963; Secondary school nurse; One child; Middle SIES

M Chen Tian: Born in 1985; Secondary school teacher; One child; Middle SIES

Family Jiang

GG Jiang Ke: Born in 1929; Worker for SCO; Six children; Middle SIES

GM Jiang Ping: Born in 1955; Small individual business; One child; Middle SIES

M Jiang Yuan: Born in 1981; Small individual business; One child; Middle SIES
Family Han

GG Han Jun: Born in 1935; Kindergarten teacher; Four children; Middle SIES

GM Han Xu: Born in 1961; Administrator in university; One child; Middle SIES

M Han Ting: Born in 1986; Nurse in university; One child; Middle SIES

Family Wang, Zhu, Shen and Wu are the four families move from low SIES to middle level

Family Wang

GG Wang Lan: Born in 1930; Farmer; Five children; Low SIES

GM Wang Xia: Born in 1965; Worker for SCO; Two children; Middle SIES

M Wang Cheng: Born in 1989; Accountant for family factory; One child; Middle SIES

Family Zhu

GG Zhu Yu: Born in 1933; Temporary jobs; Five children; Low SIES

GM Zhu Lin: Born in 1959; Administrator in SCO; One child; Middle SIES

M Zhu Kun: Born in 1984; Administrator in private company; Two children; Middle SIES
Family Shen

GG Shen Ai: Born in 1938; Farmer then worker for SCO; Seven children; Low SIES
   GM is the oldest child/daughter

GM Shen Hong: Born in 1956; Laid-off worker; One child; Low SIES
   M is the only child

M Shen Meng: Born in 1982; Primary school teacher; One child; Middle SIES

Family Wu

GG Wu Fang: Born in 1928; Temporary worker; Eight children (2 died); Low SIES
   GM is the third child

GM Wu Min: Born in 1956: Dentist; Two children; Middle SIES
   M is the older child

M Wu Juan: Born in 1975: Community clinic; One child; Lower Middle SIES

Family Chu was the only one family keeps low SIES across three generations

Family Chu

GG Chu Hua: Born in 1935; Farmer; Nine children (3 died); Low SIES
   GM is the second child/daughter

GM Chu Mei: Born in 1967; Administrator for rural government; Two children; Low SIES
   M is the daughter-in-law

M Chu Xiu: Born in 1990; Worker for private factory; Two children; Low SIES
Appendix II A Brief History of Bengbu

It is not new to point out the danger of assuming a similar impact of a particular event or historical period on all of China, due to its vast size and diversity. For instance, for the great-grand mothers in this study, although the city where they live or lived in was governed by the Japanese army between 1938 and 1942. For example, there was much less violence going on before and during this period in the city of Bengbu where I carried out the study, compared to Nanjing, where the massacre took place. On the other hand, some of my interviewees in Bengbu experienced the “Running and Rebellion against Japanese” (guizipaofan) when their parents chose to escape and leave their homes either through fear of the Japanese army or out of loyalty to their country. This meant much uncertainty but at the same time an opportunity to ‘see the world’ for some young girls.

Therefore, there is a necessity to introduce some history of this particular city where the study is focused.

Located to the south of the Huai River, Bengbu was a little village with 500 residences at the end of 19th century. In 1899, the UK and German government persuaded the Qing Dynasty to build a railway from Tianjing to Pukou (an area of Nanjing). In 1909, Bengbu was chosen to be the location for a railway bridge across the Huai River, as an essential part of the long-term railway plan, due to its geographical advantages. Consequently, around 20,000 migrant workers came to this small village for two years to build the bridge, which changed the peaceful and slow life of the villagers. After the railway started working in 1911, Bengbu Pier became busy with different types of trading. As a result, many poor rural peasants came to this new place to find a job. From then on, the original village transformed into a city and the majority of the population were migrants from other places, including business men and their families, workers and peasants. By the 1930s, the population had shot up to 100,000. Bengbu was established as a middle size city from then on.

105 Information from ‘Bengbu History’ (Bengbu Shi Zhi) 1995.
This is only a snapshot of how Bengbu was transformed into a city in the early 20th century. However, this part of its history can be considered critical in understanding women’s narrators’ experiences. First, this city has a relatively short history, compared with places like Nanjing, Shanghai or Beijing. Therefore, even though some rich business families moved to this new place due to the opportunities available in the early 20th century, there is a general lack of ‘noble’ families – those whose wealth and status was built via generational accumulation and heritage. This is the reason that some of my interviewees commented on the lack of really rich people in this city.

Second, as the majority of the population were migrants from Shandong, Henan, Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces there is a real mixed culture in Bengbu. This can be shown even today by the food, clothes and languages people use in this city- a combination of cultures from North and South. Therefore, it can be argued that this city represents a culture that is typical of the ‘Central Plains’ area.
Appendix III The Cultural Revolution (CR)\textsuperscript{106}

1 The Four Clearances

The “Four Clearances” happened between 1963 and 1966 in both rural and urban areas. In 1963 when the national economy faced severe challenges, views about what had caused that, particularly about the reasons for the Great Famine, were split between two groups of central leaders. Mao Zedong thought it was mainly a natural disaster, while Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping regarded it as being caused by political mistakes. This caused Mao’s to criticise them and he decided to start another political movement to “Clear Out” the party. The Four Clearances referred to were “Clear the thoughts, clear the politics, clear the party and clear the economy”. This movement was the prelude to the Cultural Revolution during which Liu Shaoqi died and his wife was imprisoned for 12 years.

2 Formal Start

In the 1960s, Mao Zedong, the CCP leader, started to feel that the government led by President Liu Shaoqi was moving too far in a revisionist direction, with an emphasis on expertise rather on ideological purity. In addition, his own position in government had weakened after the failure of his ‘Great Leap Forward’ (1958-60) and the ‘Great Famine’ (1960-1963) that followed. Mao gathered a group of radicals, including his wife Jiang Qing and defence minister Lin Biao, began their attacks on these leaders. The attacks on revisionist, expertise and cultural workers targeted a large range of people, including not only academics in higher education institutes and teachers in secondary and primary schools, but also writers, media workers and officials at different levels. Mao’s personal charm and influence inspired a group of students from the top universities in Beijing to respond actively, and they later named themselves the ‘Red Guards’ (Red to symbolise their loyalty to Mao and Guards meant to guard Mao and his spirit). These students started to criticise and attack their

\textsuperscript{106} I used MacFarquhar (1997) and Bonnin and Horko (2013) as the main references for this Appendix.
teachers or the managers in their organisations. In August 1966, Mao launched the ‘Cultural Revolution’ through the Central Committee of the Chinese Party. He praised the Red Guard’s ‘revolutionary movements’ towards the current leaders, managers and teachers; therefore, in the early period of the Cultural Revolution, the revisionist adults were the major target of attacks.

3 The Intensive Period of CR

Endorsed by Mao Zedong, the revolutionary movement of the Red Guards became more violent and created chaos. Schools and universities across China could not work properly due to this political chaos. Large groups of young people wandered around the campuses and streets and there was much violence- initially towards teachers, but then towards each other and ‘worker and present soldiers’. Anarchy resulted. In 1967, massive violence ended up with hundreds of deaths and thousands injured resulting in Mao deciding to ‘educate’ these students, including the Red Guard. In December 1968, Mao closed all the universities and asked all the students, including secondary students, to go ‘Down to the Countryside and Up to the Mountain’ to be ‘re-educated’ by the peasants and workers. He proposed that the young people should face their future in four directions (‘Four Facings’): ‘Face the Rural, Face the Grass-roots, Face the Workers and Face the Borders’. Among these four facings, three of them related to rural areas with the exception of facing the worker. The ‘Border’ meant the ‘Production and Construction Corps for the Borders’. These were remote and barren areas near the national borders which were specifically established to accept the ‘educated youth’ from urban areas (ibid) who would come to develop these waste lands into ‘a new home’. The policy of ‘four facings’ gave some room for the students to be able to stay at the city as ‘facing the worker’ implied a stay in the city. However, in reality, the opportunity to stay was very rare. Also, this ‘Four Facing’ policy was hardly implemented before Mao called all the young people to go down to the countryside the following year.

Encouraging intellectuals, officials and students to go to rural areas to learn from the peasants had been started by Mao from the establishment of the PRC (1949).
Therefore, some urban youths started to go to the countryside from the early 1950s. Most chose to go to the countryside themselves to express their loyalty towards the CCP and Mao Zedong. However, the large scale of migration of urban youths to rural areas happened from 1968 and the majority of them were forced to go. From 1968-1970, there were 4-6 million youths sent to rural areas. Their length of stay varied from between 1-2 years to more than 10 years. Similar to most of these political movements, the specific selection criteria for who should go where were very subjective. Although the family background of the young people (i.e., their parents’ occupations, political background and the criteria of ‘Black Five Group’) was the central principle in allocating students to different areas, in practice there were many variations depending on their parents’ power and resources. For example, if a family had more than 1 child and if the older children had already gone to the countryside, the youngest one might be able to stay with the parents. If the family had only one child, they might be exempted from sending this only child to the countryside. As mentioned previously, within the ‘Four Facings’ policy, ‘facing the workers’ was the most popular as this meant the young people could still stay in the city or closer to home. For such a ‘lucky’ destination, only the most powerful families with very ‘pure’ political backgrounds could gain such an opportunity for their children. These subjective judgements worked alongside the macro-level policy, defining the fate of many individuals and their families for this 10 years or more.

4 Coming Back to the Cities

There were three main ways for ‘educated youths’ to come back to the city: one was when the Gaokao was open to everyone; they were allowed to participate in the examination and the successful candidates could leave the rural areas; the second was if someone became seriously ill; the third was when someone’s parents became very ill and needed them to take over their position at work; and the last one was when working opportunities came up in the cities. The last was the most normal way for the majority of the ‘educated youth’. Usually, the ones who had stayed in the rural area for the longest time would be given first consideration to be selected for
going back to the city to work. However, such a process was also influenced by someone’s family background or connections. For example, GM Jiang Ping’s father did not have information about what kinds of organisations were recruiting ‘educated youth’. Therefore, as Ping explained, when an opportunity came up, she felt it strange that the girls with better family backgrounds were not selected and Ping was the one who left the rural area earliest. Only when she came to the city did she realise the reason these girls gave up the opportunity: this was because their parents told them the next lot of organisations were better as they were national level State-Owned Organisation (SOO) instead of Big or Small Collective Organisation (BCO/SCO) (see Appendix V for the differences of these organisations). This ‘inside’ information could decide the fate of these ‘educated-youths’ in their career routes.
Appendix IV Searching Strategies

The literature search was performed throughout the research, starting from the early stages of my study in October 2014 until the completion of the thesis in November 2017. The English and Chinese literature was searched separately. The comprehensive search of English literature was conducted in the wide range of databases that were available for use by UCL students, such as the Wiley Online Library, Explore, the Taylor & Francis Social Science and Humanities library, ProQuest, EBSCO and the Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts. I also used Google Scholar and Google Books where applicable. Books, Dissertations and Theses relevant to the topic of my study were borrowed from the Institute of Education Library.

There are different types of keywords used for searching. The first group is to do with the key researched topic – mothering. The keywords used include ‘mothering’, ‘motherhood’, ‘parenting’, ‘childrearing’, ‘mothers’ lives’ combined with or without ‘China’, or ‘Chinese’ in different ways. The second group of key words related to specific issues that I was interested in analysing or interpreting in connection with my empirical materials. For example, ‘women’s history in China’, or ‘practices’, ‘social practices’, ‘family studies’, ‘intergenerational transmission’, ‘mother-daughter relationships’ and so on.

A similar search was undertaken in Chinese with the major databases available in China, including the National Social Sciences Database (国家哲学社会科学学术期刊数据库), China National Knowledge Infrastructure (中国知网), VIP (维普网), and the National Library (国家图书馆). The different groups of searching keywords are similar to those described above, but in Chinese. Relating to the main researching topic, the search terms include ‘育儿’, ‘母职’, ‘母亲’, ‘抚养’, ‘抚育’, ‘隔代养育’ and so on. Documents concerning local and national history in China and
in Bengbu have not only been undertaken on-line, but also collected from national and local libraries in China during field visits.

However, I found one of the most effective ways of finding the relevant literature was through reading the classical or highly recommended books/articles in the relevant areas and learning from their comprehensive references. Therefore, books’ and articles’ references are very good resources that were used very often during my research.
Appendix V History of Social Stratification in China and Its Implications for Women’s Social-Economic Status

1 Glossary:

BCO: Big Collective-Owned Organisation. Explained in the text.
CCP: Chinese Communist Party, the governmental party for China since 1949.
GG: Great-grandmother generation, the oldest generation in this study
GM: Grandmother, the middle generation in this study
M: Mother, the youngest generation in this study
GMD: the Goumindang, Nationalist party. They unified China and established the Republic of China in 1928. GMD was the major rival to the CCP. Sun Yat-sen founded the Revolutionary Alliance (Tongmenghui), which was the precursor to the Nationalist Party (GMD).
PRC: People’s Republic of China, the new government established by the Chinese Communist Party in 1949.
ROC: Republic of China, the government established by Sun Yat-sen in 1912. It was interrupted by war between 1912 and 1927 but was re-established by the GMD in 1928. It was replaced by the PRC in 1949.
SIES: social-economic status
SCO: Small Collective-Owned Organisation. Explained in the text.
SOE: State-Owned Enterprises, including BCO, SCO and SOO.

2 Introduction

Social stratification in China became a politically sensitive topic after the establishment of the PRC. This situation only changed in the late 20th century, signalled by an endorsement of the ‘Research on Structural Transition in
Contemporary China’ conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), and the publication of the report of this research – ‘The Report on Social Stratum in Contemporary China’ (Lu, 2002). This book is still one of the most popular and widely referred-to references when discussing social stratification in China today. The usage of the term ‘social stratum’, instead of ‘social class’, has also been coined since this book. There are no obvious differences in meaning between social stratum and social class, except that the meaning of ‘social class’ has been associated more with conflict between different classes, according to Marxist theories and Mao’s social class theories and practices during the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, ‘social stratum’ conveys a more ‘harmonious’ view of the differences between people with varied social positions (Li, 2011). Since the publication of this report an increasing number of researchers have focused on social strata in China, among whom Li (2009); Li (2011); Li (2008) have been the most commonly cited, having researched this issue for more than 15 years. They have addressed issues such as the middle-class, “upside down T-Shape” stratum, urban/rural differences, the increasing differences within cities and gender inequality within social stratification in China. However, in the following analysis, it is the women’s social positions that are the focus of research. It significantly differs from traditional social class theories, both in the West and in China, which tend to either define women’s social class according to their husbands’ class (Hu, 2010; Stanworth, 1984) or to neglect women’s own objective and subjective social class realities and experiences by only taking the household’s heads’ (in the most cases, they are men) social class position when stratifying families (Garnsey, 1978; Li & Lv, 2008). I use the term ‘social-economic status’ or its abbreviation SIES to differ from the ‘socioeconomic status’ or SES used often in the West, which is based mainly on educational level and occupations. As the discussion below demonstrates, the stratification of Chinese women in three historical times are too complicated to be simplified to SIES. In the term of social-economic status, I will include social, economic, cultural and political indicators that shape these women’s status.
3 Stratification from 1949 – early 1980s: the Great-grandmothers’ Generation

There is very limited discussion about social strata before 1978, which is agreed as the new era of contemporary China – a starting point for marketization (as opposed to the planned economic system run by the CCP) and open-door policies (as opposed to the closed door policies in international communication and trade during the early CCP government). The assumption is that before 1978, as Mao and the early CCP executed ‘equalization’ policies, citizens experienced few differences in terms of their SIES. Some researchers, such as Bian, Lu, and Sun (2002) called it the ‘de-stratification’ period in China.

However, as Li (2010), one of the few who do address the issue of social stratification in the early PRC period, points out, considering the relatively equal economic status, the social and political status of individuals varied greatly, even during the pre-1978 period. The major influence on someone’s social and political status are the different political levels of their organisation (danwei), the different positions within an organisation, and their hukou (residency) status (see below). Combining these elements, Li (2010a) argued that the different stratum of people in the early PRC period can be judged by their ‘group-status’. To be specific, there were four types of group-status that defined someone’s stratum: their hukou status, the status of cadre or non-cadre, the status defined by the different levels of cadres, and the status of one’s organisation (danwei).

**Status of Hukou:**

This is a residency system only found in China. A Hukou is someone’s residency certificate. It contains not only information about where you were born and who your parents were, it also defines someone’s access to social welfare and their rights, including where you can have/buy property, where you can get married/divorced legally, where to give birth, which school to go to, access to jobs, your medical insurance and your pension. Plus, once you are assigned a hukou (defined by your parents’ hukou status), it is nearly impossible to change it. There were two
types of hukou status during the early PRC: rural/urban and big cities/all other cities. Compared to the urban hukou, a rural hukou meant a significantly disadvantaged position as there were far fewer and lower quality public facilities and social insurance in rural areas than in urban ones. Then, some large cites with more resources to spend and enhanced public facilities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, could give more benefits to their local people – exclusively those with local hukous. As a result of this, the highest status hukou was from a large city; the medium an urban hukou and the lowest a rural hukou.

Status of Different Political Levels of Danwei:

Danwei, again, is a very special term in China. It means one’s workplace or organisation. But, under the ideology of the Chinese Communist party, such an organisation is more than a workplace. It also relates directly to one’s welfare, as well as acting like an individual’s ‘political parents’ who can intervene in one’s personal life, such as child birth and marriage. If Hukou defines a larger area of benefits some individual can be entitled to, then, the danwei defines the level of social welfare one can enjoy within the same hukou system. Therefore, these two worked together, defining nearly every aspect of one’s life opportunities, before the changes that were introduced by Deng Xiaoping’s Reforms in 1978.

According to both Li (2010a) and Lu (1989) analyses of danwei, the level of a danwei is defined by the political and administrative level of its owner, from national level (state-owned and controlled directly) to provincial, municipal, district and township level, five levels in total. In everyday life, local people like to treat it as three levels instead of five: the national level will be called State-Owned Organisation (SOO) with the highest status; the provincial and municipal levels are called ‘Big Collective-Owned Organisations’ (BCO) while the district and township levels are called ‘Small Collective-Owned Organisations’ (SCO). Considering the number of families I have in this research, I decided to adopt these three levels of danwei. However, there are people who are excluded from all these levels, such as farmers or urban citizens who only have part-time or intensive labouring jobs.
Furthermore, all bureaus or any danwei relating to military affairs will be regarded as high status compared to others. According to local people, the status differences between a SOO and a BCO is not obvious, therefore, I have combined these two categories. To sum up, I define three levels in this criteria, from high to low they are: state-owned organisation, Big Collective Organisations and bureaus and military organisations (high); Small Collective Organisations (medium) and excluded groups such as part-time workers and farmers (low).

Status of Cadre:

Cadre and non-cadre defines one’s benefits clearly. In the city, about one sixth of people were defined as Cadre in that period (Li, 2010, p.58). Similar to one’s hukou status, it is nearly impossible to change one’s status from non-cadre to cadre. In terms of the criteria of who can became a cadre in the early days, Li said that level of education was the key criteria. According to my data from the great-grandmothers’ generation, it seems to be partially true, particularly for women. For this generation, it was extremely rare for any to achieve the educational level (college up) that was required to become a cadre; however, I found this depended on how early they started to work for the government. If they started to serve the communist party before 1949, they would all be regarded as cadres.

There is another level of status that was worse than non-cadre: the Black Five Groups. This became a life changing criteria introduced from the late 1950s which became a very important criterion for everything during the 10 years of the Cultural Revolution. No matter what you did before, if you were defined as being in the Black Five Groups, you would be punished and defined as having the lowest social status. The Black Five Groups criteria totally depended on one’s parent’s political background, and included landlords, rich peasants, anti-revolutionaries, ‘bad influential’ men and The Right.

Therefore, during that period, there were three levels of status of cadre: Cadre, non-cadre and the Black Five Group (BFG).
Status of Different Levels of Cadre Members:

There are about 30 different levels of cadre membership defined by the Chinese government making it one of the most complicated and longest ranking systems in the world (Li, 2010a). However, I do not see the usefulness of using such a detailed stratification system with my interviewees, as becoming a cadre was rare for a woman. Therefore, according to these women’s occupations, I have summarised three levels of cadre that are relevant to them: senior official (high level); middle level official (middle level) and teachers and staff in public schools and kindergarten (low level) (Li, 2008). Middle and low level of cadre signifies a medium social position whereas a high level of cadre can be seen as benefiting from a higher level of social-economic status.

Childcare Arrangements:

As the mothers’ subjective experiences of their social position is key, I argue that for the great-grandmothers’ generation, it is worthwhile to take into consideration the use of nannies as a symbol of a women’s social-economic status (SIES). First, help from a nanny makes a great difference to a women’s own feelings about their social stratum as well as, in some situations, deciding the (life or death) fate of their children. Second, some women enjoyed a free nanny from the government, either because of their own high social status or their husband’s, both of which are important criteria for their SIES. Other women can hire their own nannies and this can demonstrate their economic situation - either from their own income, their husband’s or their original family’s. Therefore, this additional criterion can not only take into consideration women’s subjective feelings about their social-economic status, but also can work with other criteria to make the judgement more accurate. I regard the use of free nannies as symbolising a high SIES, whereas the use of paid nannies needs to be checked alongside other criteria to see if a woman should be assigned a high or medium level SIES. Similarly, having no help from any nanny can either be medium or low SIES. Overall, 3 great-grandmothers were at high SIES, 5 at middle SIES and 4 at low SIES.
Table 14 The stratification result of the great-grandmothers’ generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Code</th>
<th>M’s Occupation</th>
<th>Cadre Status</th>
<th>Husband’s Occupation</th>
<th>Nanny</th>
<th>Hukou</th>
<th>Stratum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Zhao Senior Official for Bureau for Security and Police, for Tax and Finance;</td>
<td>Yes (High</td>
<td>Senior Official for Bureau for Security and Police but was demoted during CR</td>
<td>Yes,</td>
<td>Urban (middle</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and for Military Preparation</td>
<td>level)</td>
<td></td>
<td>free</td>
<td>city)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Qian Middle level Official for Military Hospital; Chemistry Industry; Bureau for</td>
<td>Yes (Middle</td>
<td>Head of Military Hospital</td>
<td>Yes,</td>
<td>Urban (middle</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural and Communication</td>
<td>level)</td>
<td></td>
<td>free,</td>
<td>city)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>then paid by self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Sun Administrator for a primary school</td>
<td>Yes (Low</td>
<td>Middle level official in Army than moved to work in school</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Urban (middle</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>level)</td>
<td></td>
<td>city)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Wu Part-time labour jobs; then become manual workers for SCO</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Manual worker for SCO</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Urban (middle</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>city)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Li Advanced worker for Textile factory (SOO)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Senior official in Tax Bureau</td>
<td>Yes,</td>
<td>Urban (Shanghai)</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>paid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Wang Farmer then Part-time labouring jobs</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Selling vegetables, then manual worker for SCO</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Rural until she was 50</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Chen Primary school teacher</td>
<td>Yes (Low</td>
<td>Primary school teacher</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Urban (middle</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>level)</td>
<td></td>
<td>city)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

291
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Part-Time</th>
<th>Worker for SCO</th>
<th>Yes, paid by self</th>
<th>Urban (middle city)</th>
<th>Middle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Chu</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Zhu</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Worker for SCO</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, paid by self</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Jiang</td>
<td>Worker for SCO</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Head of Commodities Bureau</td>
<td>Yes, paid by self</td>
<td>Urban (middle city)</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Shen</td>
<td>Part-time labour</td>
<td>Black Five Group</td>
<td>Engineer for BCO</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Urban (middle city)</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Han</td>
<td>Kindergarten teacher</td>
<td>Retired early</td>
<td>High status official in the army</td>
<td>Yes, paid by self</td>
<td>Urban (middle city)</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4 Social Stratification from 1980 – 2000: the Grandmothers’ Generation

Due to the huge social, economic and cultural changes between the great-grandmother and the grandmothers’ generation, the stratification criteria were different. In fact, this generation experienced all the important social movements which caused huge changes in people's lives, including the Cultural Revolution, Reform, the One-Child Policy, ‘Go down to the Sea’ and the large numbers of laid-off workers (see Chapter 1). Many scholars agree that after Deng Xiaoping implemented his Reform policies in 1978, political stratification started to be replaced by economic differences. However, from most of my interviewees’ recall, the real economic differences did not start until the early 1990s. This is probably due to what Li (2010) called ‘institutional inertia’. Even though there are signs of change in society, most people still tend to think in the old way for a while, and it even takes longer to change both organisational and individual behaviours. However, those who ‘woke up’ early gained the most among this generation. Between the 1980s and 2000 these women’s children went to college, university or started some sort of work. This period has been studied a lot more by Chinese sociologists than the time of the great-grandmothers’. Therefore, instead of creating my own criteria, I will use Li’s revised version of the International Socioeconomic Index of Occupational
Status (ISEI) (2011, p.255)\textsuperscript{107} as the main criteria. This criteria combines the level of income, education and reputation of occupations. Furthermore, Li has revised some international occupational categories to reflect the reality in China. However, as the focus is the early reform period I will also take into account some danwei’s status. Specifically, being a manual worker in a SOO and BCO will be regarded as a medium position, while being a manual worker in a SCO will be assigned in a low position. Being a manager or technician in a SCO will be regarded as a medium position.

The importance of the hukou status still works for this generation and the impact of their husband’s occupation will also be taken into account, for the same reason as explained in the great-grandmothers’ generation.

I will not list education level as an important criteria on its own for this generation as many grandmothers were forced to stop education when the Down to the Countryside movement happened in the 1960s. In addition, Li’s revised version of ISEI has already taken into consideration of an individual’s education level.

The overall results of the stratification according to the discussed criteria, are 8 out of 12 grandmothers defined as Medium SIES, 2 of the grandmothers are low status and 2 grandmother at a high SIES.

Table 15 The stratification result of the grandmothers’ generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Code</th>
<th>Hukou</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Husband’s Occupation</th>
<th>Stratum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01 Zhao</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Sales for SCO and business owner in later life</td>
<td>Senior level government official</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02 Qian</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Advanced worker for BCO, administrator in the factory, changed to administrator to a company</td>
<td>Middle level government official</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{107} There is a detailed list of this ISEI in Li’s (2010, p.175-184) book which I use as reference when categorising the high, medium and low status of these women.

293
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Career Experience</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Social Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Teacher then became an administrator in the Policy Bureau then moved to be a middle level official in the Tax Bureau</td>
<td>Middle level government official</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Wu</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Lowest-level medical worker, then started her own dentistry surgery</td>
<td>Manual worker for BCO</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 Li</td>
<td>Li</td>
<td>Medium City then to Big one</td>
<td>Manual worker for BCO, became business owner later</td>
<td>Worker for BCO, became business owner later</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Wang</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Manual worker for SCO, then stopped to work as housewife.</td>
<td>A manual worker for SCO, became owner of a factory</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Chen</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Medical worker for a primary school</td>
<td>Primary school teacher, then started his own small business, returned to teaching later</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08 Chu</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Farmer, than worked in a clinic</td>
<td>Farmer and then became a cook</td>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09 Zhu</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Manual worker and then administrator in a SCO</td>
<td>Technician in a SCO</td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Jiang</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Administrator in a SCO then started a small family business later in her life</td>
<td>Low level official, then started small family business</td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Shen</td>
<td>Rural to Medium City</td>
<td>Manual worker at SCO before being laid off</td>
<td>A manual worker in a SCO</td>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Han</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Administrator in a university</td>
<td>Administrator in a university</td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Social Stratification of 21st Century: the Mothers’ Generation

For the M’s generation, Li’s ISEI applies better than for the other two, as he had used data from the Fifth (2000) and Sixth (2010) National Census to stratify the Chinese population and this covered the period when the youngest generation entered the job market. According to his results, social structure is totally different between urban and rural areas. Urban areas are becoming more like an ‘olive shape’
(or ‘semi-olive shape’) while rural areas are still like an ‘upside down T shape’. The ‘semi-olive shape' social structure means there clearly is an increasing number of people who can be defined as middle-class in the urban area, even though they may not be the majority. By contrast, the ‘upside down T shape’ means only a small proportion in rural areas can be called middle-class and the majority of the population is of low status. Not only do the urban areas have a larger population of the middle-class and a smaller one with a low SIES, but also, within the cities, the low SIES population consists mainly of migrant workers from rural areas. Put in other words, the increasing gap between the rich and poor in today’s China can be explained partly by rural and urban differences. It is not strange, therefore, that we will find later that the majority of mothers from all 12 families will eventually be defined as middle-class. There is a specific and long list of the types of occupation can be categorised as a high, middle and low social status in Li’s ISEI, which I will use as a reference.

I will also take into account their husbands’ occupation as the other two generations. *Hukou* will still be an important indicator here for this generation. Additional to the rural and urban *hukou*'s differences, there is also a trend in increasing differences between the extra-large cities (mainly the first-tier cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangzhou) and the middle and small cities (the third or fourth tier cities, such as where my field work took place).

In addition, I added one more indicator – the type and the number of owned properties. It is not until the end of the 1990s and early 21st century that Chinese people started to demonstrate huge differences in their ownership of properties. Before this period, particularly before the official abandonment of the traditional allocation method in deciding one’s living conditions in 1998108 (Li, 2010, p.213),

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108 It was a relatively fair process in allocating living places for all the members within a *danwei*, with even senior managers living in similar conditions to a normal worker, except for having a little bit more space. Although there are differences according to the political level of someone's *danwei*, the overall living conditions were similar. The allocation system was mainly decided by someone's years in this *danwei*, her/his position and real need (such as getting married). In theory, everyone will get a place as long as they do not worry about waiting for a bit longer.
small differences could not easily be demonstrated by where people lived. However, once everyone had to pay to their living places, property became one of the best signals of someone’s status. Starting from the early 21st century, most newly developed apartments are also designed in a more exclusive way, with walls that separate one community\(^\text{109}\) (xiao qu) from another and resources within the wall being exclusively for the people in that community. Therefore, the people who live in the same or similar community/property tend to demonstrate very similar SIES (ibid.). According to his investigation of one central area in Beijing in 2006, Li proposed six types of properties which can be used to stratify people’s SIES (a detailed discussion about the six types can be found in the research proposal). The specific six types are (from the highest to the lowest status level): buying their own property from the open market; buying their property from their work place; property that was demolished and rebuilt so the people were moved out first and moved back to their original place; economical/affordable housing; private property and temporary property (ibid.). However, interestingly, all of the youngest generation of mothers in my study live in commercial apartments\(^\text{110}\). This is partly because Li’s survey was done 10 years ago and for the last 10 years nearly all families with a medium level income will manage to own some commercial apartments, at least for their adult children. However there is a difference in the location, quality, size and the number of the apartments. Li (2010) also proposed an indicator when defining who belongs to the high SIES in China by using the number of the flats one can own. He proposed if someone has more than 2 -3 commercial flats, this person is more likely to be defined as of high SIES in today’s China.

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\(^{109}\) Community here is different from the traditional Western concept which can include many different houses within one or two street blocks. Here, one community is defined by apartments developed by one developer and there are gates and walls/fences separated one community from another to protect the privacy of people living there. Usually, a middle size of community consists of 10 – 20 blocks of apartments, accommodating 1200 – 2500 households.

\(^{110}\) If looking at three generations within a family, there are still differences between their properties’ status, judged by these four different types of property. It is actually an interesting indicator to stratify the great-grandmothers’ generation’s retirement status. The description of living conditions will still be a key part of the later analysis.
I decided not to list education as a separate indicator here as Li’s ISEI has already taken into consideration educational levels. Furthermore, although this generation’s education became much more important than in the previous two generations, the educational level still only has made a partial contribution to a woman’s final SIES for three reasons:

First, in late 1990s the ‘massification’ of higher education started, and this was the period when most of the youngest generation started to get into university. As a consequence, the overall level of education increased significantly and by 2005, the national enrollment rates at universities reached 24% and by 2014, 37.5%\textsuperscript{111}. The enrollment rates in the city of Bengbu are higher than the national level due to its position: a middle sized city in the East of China where education and the economy is much more developed than in the western part of China and in rural areas\textsuperscript{112}. Five of the twelve mothers’ educational trajectories demonstrate that even though they did not achieve high enough scores for the Gaokao to get into universities directly, they still managed to use indirect ways to reach either College Diploma or Bachelor Degree levels. This reflects that more access was offered by the government in this period to encourage more young people get into higher education institutions.

Second, the start of the class forming process since the late 1990s also makes individuals more dependent on their family’s economic and social resources to get rich or upwardly mobile, rather than on their education.

Third, this does not mean that education was less important. Instead, the major inequality in education quality and therefore the level of education that an individual achieved comes firstly from rural and urban differences, then, from the differences between the large metropolitan and small cities. These differences have already been caught by the indicator of Hukou.

\textsuperscript{111}《高等教育第三方评估》(The Third Part Evaluation of Higher Education in China), 2015, download from the official website for the Ministry of Education in China: http://www.moe.gov.cn/
\textsuperscript{112}See the Department of Education in Anhui Province’s website: http://www.ahedu.gov.cn/917/view/19349.shtml. Also, see (Zhang, 2002)
According to all these four criteria, the results of the mothers’ generation’s social stratum is: 9 out of 12 families can be defined as typical middle-class/medium level SIES; 2 families can be defined as high SIES; and 1 low SIES.

Table 16 The stratification results of the mothers’ generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Code</th>
<th>Hukou</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Husband’s Occupation</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Stratum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01 Zhao</td>
<td>Big City</td>
<td>Senior Manager</td>
<td>Owner of a middle sized business</td>
<td>One large and expensive commercial flat and one smaller</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>commercial flat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02 Qian</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Lecturer in university</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>One middle sized commercial flat</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 Sun</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Middle level manager at a private company</td>
<td>Technician for a military company</td>
<td>One middle sized commercial flat</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 Wu</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Basic level medical worker</td>
<td>Uncertain, seems to be jobless currently?</td>
<td>One middle sized commercial flat</td>
<td>(lower-) Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 Li</td>
<td>Big city</td>
<td>Financial consultant – part-time?</td>
<td>Self-employed: stock market</td>
<td>One large expensive commercial flat as well as large space</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to live at parents’ home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06 Wang</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Accountant for family’s factory</td>
<td>Driver for a private company</td>
<td>One large good commercial flat</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07 Chen</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Senior school teacher for a private school</td>
<td>Manager on the railway</td>
<td>One commercial flat</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08 Chu</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Migrant worker, started own small family business (a restaurant)</td>
<td>Migrant worker to started own small family business (a restaurant)</td>
<td>Living with parents-in-law.</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09 Zhu</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Manager for a private factory</td>
<td>PE teacher in a primary school</td>
<td>Two commercial flats</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Jiang</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Senior manager for some private restaurants and now started own small business</td>
<td>Security staff helping the Police, not belonging to the government</td>
<td>One large commercial flat</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Shen</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Primary school teacher for a private school</td>
<td>Primary school PE teacher for a private school</td>
<td>One commercial flat</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Han</td>
<td>Medium City</td>
<td>Nurse in the clinic of a university</td>
<td>Manager for a private small business</td>
<td>One commercial flat</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix VI Interview Schedule

1 Key Lived Life Information

The following information was collected from every interviewee:

Date of birth;
Education;
Occupation;
Age of getting married and having children;
Number of children;
Husband’s age, education and occupation;
Parents’ education, occupation, family’s living conditions;
Her mother’s age when she started having children, and when her mother had her.

2 Observations

Once getting into the interviewee’s home, I observed the size of the flat, the furniture and equipment, and the overall style of decoration. I also recorded my initial impression of the flat and my initial interactions with the interviewees and other family members if they were present.

3 SQUIN (Single Question In Narrative)

‘As you know I am researching the changing and continuity of mothering practices in China across three generations of women. However, in this interview, I would like to hear your life story. All the important experiences and events that happened to you. You can start from wherever you like. You can start whenever you feel you are ready and I will wait for you.’
如您所知，我的研究时比较中国三代母亲的育儿经历。但是，在这个访谈中，
我希望能听听您的生命故事，包括所有您认为重要的经历和事件。您可以从任
何一个生命阶段开始说。您可以慢慢准备，当您感觉准备好了，就可以开始说。
我不会打断您的叙述。
Table 17 Interview schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Topics to be covered</th>
<th>Example questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 How do current mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers recount their childrearing practices?</td>
<td>1.1 Life stories: the ‘life history chronology’ with dates and information on biographical events and their timings;</td>
<td>1.1 “I am interested in the story of your life, bearing in mind that the focus of the study is childrearing practice. Take your time. Start where you want. I will not interrupt you.”(This is a brief version. See the SQUIN above for the full version of my question in both English and Chinese.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2 Daily mothering practices, including but not constrained by the following aspects: <em>doing the month</em> (how and why), feeding and weaning (choice of breastfeeding, bottle feeding and solid food/meal time, when, where with whom and why); clothing (what to wear, who should dress the young children and why); playing (when, where with whom, doing what and why); nappy wearing decisions (when to wear, how often, changing practices and why); sleeping (when, where, with whom and why); weaning practices (when and how); toilet</td>
<td>1.2 It is better to ask about the aspects that come out from women's own narratives first. For example, &quot;you mentioned that you found ‘doing the month’ was particularly difficult, could you explain to me how you spent that month and why it was difficult?” Once I had focused on the areas women highlighted themselves, I can extend to other mothering practices which have not been mentioned.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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113 This tool was designed according to initial research design with four research questions instead of three. Although at the later research stage, the research questions were changed/reduced, the topics and questions needed to be covered during interviews were very similar.
| 1.3 | Decisions/negotiations on childrearing arrangements. Compared to 1.2 which focuses on what mothers do, this question focuses on the decision about who does what and when. There will certainly be some overlap between these two questions. However, it still necessary to list 1.3 as a separate topic in order to capture the decision-making process and the negotiations that mothers have been through, which is a key aspect of the ethic of care. |
| 1.4 | Women's experiences in transition (Hollway, 2015): what are the largest/most clearly remembered/most influential changes involved when women becomes mothers? Their emotional reaction to this change? Do different cohorts produce different or similar experiences of identity transitions? Do they deal with the transition similarly or differently? In Urwin's report, (2007) they mentioned about loneliness, the relationship with mothers' mother, the return to work and weaning |
| 1.3 Here, again, it is better to connect this question with areas that were mentioned in the mothers’ narratives of their life stories. For example, ”you said that you decided to leave your baby to your mother-in-law from the time she was two month old so that you could go back to work, could you tell me a bit more about this decision and how you felt about it? Was your mother-in-law happy about it? What about other family members such as your husband and your own mother?...” |
| 1.4 Whenever possible, questions should also be linked to women’s own narratives of their life stories. The example questions include: Can you describe the largest change you experienced after you had your son/daughter, compared to the prenatal period? Did you feel particularly low after your son/daughter was born? When was that? Why? How did you get over it? Are/were other family members particularly helpful/supportive during this period? Could you give |
2. How do the perceptions and experiences in the following areas impact on mothering practices: childhood; women’s roles as a mother, wife and daughter (including daughter-in-law); filial piety and other key values relating to the Chinese ‘family’; individualism and familism; the value of women working outside the home?

| 2.1 Women’s perceptions and experiences in the following areas: childhood; women’s roles as a mother, wife and daughter (including daughter-in-law); filial piety and other key values relating to Chinese ‘family’; individualism and familism; the value of women working outside the home. |
| 2.2 Compare women’s own experiences and views with the mainstream and/or with other family members. Asking about any conflicts or confusions women have experienced in these aspects and how they have dealt with them. |

Whenever possible, questions should also be linked with women’s own narratives of their life stories as above. If not, the following questions can be asked during the sub-session-3:

Some examples: How did you grow up? What did you think was the most important thing for your children, particularly during the pre-school period?

Do you think filial piety is important in today’s family? Why or why not? What is the most important thing to be “Xiao shun” for today? Did your husband/mother/mother-in-law agree with your view? Did/does this impact on your child care arrangements?

Do you think having a career is important for a woman? Why? Do you think there is a conflict between family and work? Does your husband/mother/mother-in-law agree with your view? Why? What is your own experience?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. How the practices change or are maintained across generations?</th>
<th>3.1 Changes and continuities in daily mothering practices, including but not constrained by the aspects listed in 1.2.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2 Changes and continuities in perceptions and experiences in the areas listed in 2.1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3 Changes and continuities in the transitional experiences of early motherhood?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions here may be already covered above or women have inevitably talked about changes and continuities in their narratives. Some examples:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the differences you have observed compared with your mothers’ or even grand-mothers’ period?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Or What are the differences you have observed between what your daughter/ grand-daughter does, compared to your own time or your mothers’ time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The above questions are very broad without directing women to a particular aspect of motherhood experiences. Depending on the women’s answers and their earlier life stories, I can also focus on some specific aspects that are mentioned by the women.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. What is the transmission process of childrearing practices across generations?</th>
<th>4.1 In terms of specific practices, what has been transmitted, modified or rejected between generations and why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.2 In terms of identity as a mother, how far women follow or reject the role models provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The transmission of specific practices will probably have been covered in earlier questions. Here I will choose to follow up some questions that were mentioned by the interviewees earlier and also highlight some questions relating to identity transmission:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
by their parents or other family members.

|   | You said you have learned a lot from your mother/father/mother-in-law… about childrearing? Could you tell me a bit more? You said what you are doing is totally different from your mother/mother-in-law… in caring for your young child? Could you say a bit more about these differences? |   |
Appendix VII An Example of Interview Summary

The Great-Grandma from Family 01 Zhao

Date: 2015-4-25, 2015-4-30, 2015-11-28

Time: the first afternoon about 2 hours, the second time about 1 hour and 20 minutes and the third time about 20 minutes.

Venue: GG’s own home for the first two interviews, her ward in hospital for the third interview.

1 GG’s Time Line

1931: Born February 1931 in FC where both of her parents were local. She was the only child.

1940: She started primary education late, around 9 years old in FC. She was the first (only?) girl who had gone to school in her father’s side of the family.

1942: She moved to BC when she was about 11, with her mother.

1948 (17 years old): She was in year 2 of secondary school (junior middle school\textsuperscript{114}), when she was persuaded by the Youth Preparation Committee (it is an organisation that help to recruit youth into the communist party as well as to organise them to do some work for the party) to leave school and to work for them. She had already worked informally and secretly as a messenger for the CCP before that.

1949 (18): She started to work for the Public Security Bureau, where she worked for about 17 years before the political turmoil started in 1966.

1952: She got married with the man she ‘chose by herself’ at the age of 21. Her husband is 3 years older than her.

\textsuperscript{114} The Chinese educational system at that time was similar to the current one: there are about 5-6 years of primary education and another 6 years of secondary education. However, for the secondary level, there are two separate parts: one is called junior middle school level and the other is the senior middle school level. During the great-grandmothers’ time, there were very few women who could go on to the senior middle school level.
1954: 2nd March, her first child (daughter) was born when she was 23.

1955: the second daughter was born.

1958 (27): the third daughter was born.

1964: the fourth child (son) was born when she was 33.

1966 - 1971: She was moved to the Finance and Tax Bureau (FTB) as the revolutionary army took control of the Public Security Bureau (PSB).

During the Cultural Revolution period (1966 - 1976), her husband was punished and removed from his position. There was a period when she had to use her own salary and welfare to support 7 people in the family, including 4 children, her mother, herself and her husband. This period lasted about 3-4 years until his individual injustices had been readdressed. (She forgot which year this happened.)

Around 1972 – 1974/6: She was moved to the Chemistry Industry Bureau.

1974/6?: She was moved to NC, another city in the same province, for a temporary period. She said she was going to work for the Heavy Industry Bureau, but things did not work out in the end. She left there quickly and moved to HC and the Combat Preparedness Bureau (CPB).

1976 – 1986: She worked in the Combat Preparedness Bureau (CPB). She took her youngest son with her when she worked there and this son was recruited as a member of staff and also worked there.

Around 1986: She moved back to BC in an organisation belong to the Commercial Bureau, as it was close to home. During this she also transferred all her children who were in other cities (3 of them, 1 in HC, 2 in Huainan) back to BC.

Around 1988: She retired at the age of 57. (She said she worked for 40 years) Since then, she was elected as the representative for the retired people. She is still working in this voluntary position when the interview happened.

Oct of 2015: she had broken her legs and was transferred to hospital. When I interviewed her the last time, in November 2015, she was still in the hospital, aged 84.

2 Interview Context and Encounter
This GG was recruited via her oldest daughter (the grandmother of family 01). Her daughter was my father’s old colleague as well as a current friend. This GM is very willing to help and she agreed to the interview quickly and persuaded her mother and daughter to join the interview, too. Compared to the GM’s easiness with the interview, I was told by her that the GG was worried about the interview as she did not know what to say. However, she persuaded her mother to agree to my interview.

The GG lives in a community where the apartments were distributed only to officials and their families about 30 years ago. It used to be a very central place in the city (a few miles from the old venue of the municipal government) and was regarded as a good and privileged living place once it was built. Now, compared to the modern, commercial apartments, this community appears to be old and crowded. Nevertheless, the location is still good as it is opposite the best local hospital, the post office and only few miles away from two parks and close to a big shopping mall. (I have some photos)

The whole interview took place in her lounge. The lounge is both a living room and a corridor which connects all the other rooms. This is the typical style of using the corridor also as a living room around the 1980s when people had no separate space for a real living room. Therefore, the space was narrow and was almost filled up by a small dining table, two chairs and a fridge. Interestingly, there are around 6-7 chairs on top of each other, put in the corner. This is quite unusual for this type of room. Later on, during the interview, I understand that GG is still playing an active role in representing retired officials. As a result, there are meetings held at her place regularly.

There are hardly any pictures hanging on the walls, apart from a very old-fashioned picture of a cat, hanging sideways and which appears dirty.

The whole apartment consists of two bedrooms, one for the GG herself, the other for her son, one toilet, one kitchen and the lounge/corridor we had been sitting in during the whole interview. I only had a glance at her bedroom which looks crowded but
tidy. It seemed all her personal belongings are placed around her bed in her bedroom, two large pictures, one of them was a picture of herself and her husband which was taken when they got married, the other one was herself, in a very fashionable circled hairstyle during the 1970s. Then, there are different types of bottles piled up in her room. There is a washing basin at the corner.

When I first arrived at her flat, the GG treated me in a very polite but distanced way. She immediately went to make a cup of tea for me after my arrival. Then, we sat at the each end of a small dining table in the lounge.

I started by asking the permission to use my recorder. She was very hesitant to say yes but did not want to say no directly. Instead, she asked what I wanted to know. I explained briefly my purpose (to understand childrearing experiences of mothers from different generations) and asked again about permission to use a recorder, she still did not say yes or no, instead, started to talk directly. This made me unprepared. I tried to open my recorder and at the same time write down what she already started to say without being recorded and the same time, worried about not having addressed my question in the way I had planned…

In the end, she did not ‘reject’ the use of recorder by never talked about it, even though it was obvious that the recorder had been turned on (with the red light) and put in front of her.

I visited her the second time several days later. After I tried to draw her life timeline, I realised that I forgot to ask some important ‘facts’ crucial for her biography. Therefore, I phoned her about 2 days later, asking if I can visit her again. To my surprise, she said she also thought about contacting me! She said there were something she did not correctly explain last time. I was very happy to find that she was so serious about what she had said to me in the interview! Furthermore, the second visit became something that both of us ‘wanted’. Personally, I felt much closer to her during the second interview, compared to the distant and slight coldness feeling of the first.
At the end of the second interview, she seemed still happy to talk more and did not rush to finish the whole interview. She was pleased to just chat with me there. When I finally said goodbye to her, she walked me to the door way and looked down the steps until I was totally out of her sight. I felt very touched, which also made me miss my own grandma …

The third interview happened, unfortunately, in the hospital. I was going to ask some more questions. After hearing that she was in the hospital, I decided to visit her anyway, no matter whether I could interview her or not. I arrived at her ward and found a picture totally unexpected to me: I thought as someone who was in a relatively high position and who had been well looked after by the government, I expected to see her in a private room. Instead, she was put into a small room with another two aged patients! Each patient had a visitor/carer which means this small room has to accommodate 6 persons at the same time! There is one television for everyone to share and there was an entertainment programme on when I arrived. This became a loud background to my third interview. The GG’s second daughter was there to look after her. During the short interview time, the third daughter arrived, too. I left very soon after she arrived as there was simply no room left there. I gave a brief introduction about myself and was pleased that GG seemed to recognise me even after five months. She insisted I still asked my questions. As I did not want to disturb her too much and the environment was not really suitable, I finished my third interview within 20 minutes, with a loud background, her daughters around and other strangers nearby.

3 Biographical history with dates for each major event and transition

3.1 Her own childhood

She did not talk about her childhood or parents spontaneously until I asked questions directly relating to them.
Her first comment about her childhood is “Nothing special when I was little. Very average and ‘flat and light’ (平淡).” Then she gave an overarching comment of the family she was born to: my family (She meant her father’s side of family) is very feudal. She emphasised that she was the first girl that went to school from her family because of her mother: “My mum is relatively open-minded, she has had some education.”

Then, she talked about the landlord’s family where she and her mum rented a room in the city of BC, a different city from where she was born. She has a clear memory of her landlord’s son and daughter-in-law’s names and their occupations/positions in work after the establishment of PRC: the landlord’s son became the director of the Cultural Bureau and his wife became the manager of the Medical Company. Then, the next hero in her childhood story is her cousin who went to Fudan University (one of the most prestigious universities in China, both at that time and now) and worked secretly for the CCP before the establishment of the PRC. Then, the whole narration went back to her work – how she was involved into working as a messenger for the CCP when she was still a student.

It was unclear why she and her mother moved to this new city, BC, from their hometown, FC. During the third interview, she mentioned about coming to this city because of her education. However, because of the contradictory facts she gave, I am not confident about the reason she provided.

It is only later, during my question directly about her father, I found out that her mother and father were separated very early on. She moved on from the question about her father quickly by saying “I do not remember anything about him.” However, she did correct me that it was not a divorce between her parents at that time; it was “he went to another place and married another woman.”

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115 She said she went to BC to attend the private secondary school which was moved from her hometown to BC. However, she also said she came to BC at the age of 11 which was still at the primary school level. It is bit confusing and I could not check with her in that environment.
Her mother did not marry again which probably was the reason that this GG is the only child, which was not common at that time. (This reflects the same experiences of my father’s mother and my father being the only child, too.) This GG, therefore, was raised up by her mother on her own by selling stuff. She did not mention what her mother sold, but simply said she was a street vendor (摆地摊). However, this does not mean they lived by themselves. In fact, according to her description of her cousin, it seemed that they lived with her cousin’s family together as they all rented rooms from the same landlord. This means within a large house, they lived in different rooms. As GG seemed to have had a relatively close relationship with her cousin, these two families probably supported each other during the early days.

3.2 Education

As mentioned earlier, she regarded of going to school, as the first girl of her family, important. She also viewed the delay of her education – she said she started late in school – as a sign of the feudal characteristics of her family (father’s family). By contrast, she said her mother has had some education in an old style private school (私塾) and was open-minded.

However, the first time when the topic of education was brought out in her narration was related to her work and the disruption of formal education– she mentioned how she was selected and persuaded by Youth Communist Committee to leave school and started to work early. After that, she did not talk about any experiences related to schooling and moved on to the topic of her work quickly.

She went to school at around 8 or 9 years old and finished her primary education in a private primary school first at her own hometown – FC, then moved to BC when this

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116 Private tutoring was the most popular education arrangements for primary education for children. There are two forms. One is a school run usually by one tutor but at his home. He can have several children (mainly boys), taught at the same time regardless of the age or other differences. The second form is that a private tutor is invited to the children's home to either teach one girl/boy or two or three of the children from the same family together. Most girls were educated in the second way. In general, education for a girl was very rare at that time and was only for some rich families.
school was moved there. The years of her going to school and the reasons for coming to BC with her mother are not very clear due to the noisy interview environment and her weakness in answering questions. She said “we came to BC because of the school.” She also had very clear memory of the headteacher of the primary/secondary school she went to and it seems it was a girl’s school. She even remembered the headteacher’s husband’s name who was the headteacher of a boy’s primary/secondary school.

However, after two years of secondary school (junior middle level education), she was persuaded to stop her education and started to work for the CCP formally in 1948, aged around 17.

3.3 Marriage

The topic of marriage brought up by my question of when she started to work. When she finished her initial narration of my first question (about her childrearing experiences), I asked her “Did you start to work after you had the first child?” She raised her voice and appeared a bit excited (激动), and explained that “I started to work before I married!” She than explained the disruption of her education when she was 17 years old. Then, she explained the 28-5-Regiment policy for men and emphasised that the current TV soap misrepresented the historical fact.

“Only a man who was more than 28 years old, had at least belonged to the CCP for 5 years and was at the Regiment-level and above could get married. Everybody else, no matter who you were, were not allowed to fall in love with anyone! If you were discovered, you would be expelled. … You had to get permission to fall in love.”

Then she explained the reason she married “her father”117. “The organisation had introduced more than 10 men in high positions to me, but I did not agree to them. I waited until the first “Marriage Law” was issued in 1951.” Then, she moved on to

117 She never talked about “my husband”. She always said “her father”. In Chinese, there is no difference between her or his; he or she; him or her in verbal communication. I put it down as “her” in English as she has 3 daughters but only 1 son.
talk about the work again, the fact that both of them were very busy and when the
four children were born.

Then, she went back to the topic about her refusal to the ‘proposals’ made by her
organisation. “Then, why, if you were progressive, why did you refuse to marry
those senior cadres? It is because, some of them, some of them, had divorced. I
would not marry anyone who had divorced (laugh).” She even remembered several
men’s names who became the deputy-director or went on to the university to work
later in their career.

Then, she tried to modify her explanation after a short pause, “In fact, some of them
did not marry before. ... I just feared, feared about the large age differences, at least
6 years older than me, most were more than 10 years. …. Then, her father, he
graduated from a university and he also worked before 1949. He is also honourably
retired¹¹⁸. I am also honourably retired.”

It is here I asked again why she feared the age differences and why she did not want
to marry someone that had divorced before. The GG emphasised that it was not the
age differences she worried about, but the divorce. Because “(laugh) I thought if you
had divorced your wife before, then, in the future … They could not meet my moral
criteria. (laugh).” She paused for a while, and then, modified her statement again by
saying that there was understandable reasons for these men to get divorced at that
time, which does not mean they are morally bad. However, “that was how I viewed
things at that time.”

¹¹⁸ “Honourably retired” is different from normal retirement. This is a special protection
mechanism the Chinese government arranged for people who started to work for the CCP
before the establishment of PRC (before October of 1949) to respect their big contribution to
the new country. People who are honourably retired had 100% medical care after retirement,
better pensions and provided a free special carer if they were needed.
3.4 Work

The topic of her work was the most important theme from her narrations in terms of both the length of time she spent in talking about it and her emotional reaction to it. Furthermore, her own biographical facts demonstrated how her life trajectories and her social position were defined by her work.

The topic of work actually started before I explained my research. She mentioned about her long term insomnia as the result of her extremely busy working schedule when we chatted after my first arrival at her place. Then, when she started to talk about her childrearing experiences, she spent equal time about talking specifically about her (lack of) experience of childrearing and about her work.

There were lots of changes of jobs during her life. However, she talked about the work in the PSB and FTB most. The other three jobs were only mentioned briefly.

1948

She was persuaded by the Youth Preparation Committee to stop her secondary education and worked for them before the establishment of the PRC.

1949 – 1966: PSB

She worked in the Inspection Division of the Public Security Bureau (PSB), responsible for confidential documents. The majority of work had to be done in the middle of night. However, very often, she also had to work during the day time when too many things had to be done. There were four of them, all women, working in this division initially. However, gradually, all of the other women had been transferred to other cities or positions as the result of job changes for their husbands. She was left to do all the work on her own for a period. Then, she asked to be moved to the Registration Division as “the work in Confidential Section was too much”. She worked for the PSB for more than 10 years until the Cultural Revolution started
and the revolutionary soldiers took over most of the governmental organisations, including her working place. As a result, she was moved to the Finance and Tax Bureau (FTB).

She mentioned in her third interview that there was a period that she was also transferred to work for the Court. She commented that the Court and the PSB argued with each other in order to get her to work in their own organisations.

1966 – 1972: FTB

She was moved to the FTB, charging the property tax and managing receipts and certificates. She claimed that was the most important task in the FTB at that time. She shouldered the responsibility “normally, needs two to three people to do”. In addition, she had to teach other colleagues some basic skills in working in FTB. She specifically mentioned a couple who did not know how to use an abacas. She had to do the work for them and at the same time, train them how to use it.

1972- 1976: CIB

She asked to be moved to the Chemistry Industry Bureau (CIB). She did not clearly explain the motivation behind this. When I asked her if this movement was an arrangement by the government she said she asked to be moved herself. When I asked her motivation for this directly she said she wanted to know more about different areas, but she also refused my explanation of her being curious about things unknown to her.

1976 - 1986: NC and Combat Preparedness Bureau (CPB)

This period involved a temporary transfer from BC to NC, another city in the same province. She said she was going to work for the Heavy Industry Bureau, but it turned out that things did not work the way she wished. Therefore, she left there quickly (not clear about how long after) and moved to HC (another city) to work for
the Combat Preparedness Bureau (CPB). It was not very clear who she had taken with her when she was in NC. On the one hand, she said she had only left her oldest daughter with their father and took the other with her; on the other hand, she talked about her second daughter had already began to work in NC before she arrived.

Then, her youngest son was recruited to work in the CPB at an early age, around 19 years old. She emphasised that CPB was managed by the central government, where only the children of their own staff were allowed to work.

Around 1986: Five Hardware, Transportation and Chemistry Station (FTCS, an organisation managed by the Commercial Bureau)

She moved back to BC by transferring to FTCS in the end, as “it was close to home (where her flat was, GX added)”. During the same period she also transferred all her children who were in other cities (1 in HC, 2 in NC) back to BC “so that the whole family got together”.

Around 1988: She retired at 57. (This was calculated according to her claim of working for 40 years). Since then, she was elected as the representative of the honourably retired people and was still working in this voluntary position when the interviews took place.

She emphasised that no matter where she worked, she always did a job that needed two or three people and her work had never been anything other than busy. However, she talked much more about the first two jobs (working for the PSB and FTB), than the others. I wonder if this was because of the topic of this research (as that were the period that her children were young); or, because of having the young children, the stressful schedule and high responsibility from her jobs might to be harder to deal with.

The GG, interestingly, did not talk about social movements spontaneously. She only mentioned about the revolutionary army taking over the PSB during her narration
about her life of work. However, this does not mean she had not been impacted by these movements: her husband had been affected hugely by the Cultural Revolution as he “had said something inappropriately and criticised the policies at that time”. This experience of her husband only came up when she talked about how she had to support 7 people on her own during this special time. Her husband was removed from his position and had no income. She had to post money to him as well as support her own four children, and her mother. As she explained, this capacity to support her whole family during both the Great Famine and Cultural Revolution Period was to do with the care from her working unit who regarded highly her loyalty and work capacity. She said she did not stop working during any social movements, including the Great Famine or the Cultural Revolution. As a result of this undisrupted busy and hard work, her families “were well looked after by the government”.

**Gender issue at work:**

GG emphasized that there were very few women in her position. “Only 6 of us were female in the whole PSB! ” When I asked that if she had ever worried about working in an environment surrounded by men, she said “women were the ones being treasured” Then she went on with a specific story of one of her male colleagues said something “that seemed to be disrespectful to her”. Even though she did not hear what he said or had any reaction to it, someone else heard it and immediately reported to the leader. Because of that, this man had been expelled.

When we were discussing the traditional view of avoiding seeing men during the “doing the month” period, the GG commented that this was impossible with her work as if there was something your male colleagues needed to ask you, you had to deal with it. Here,, she said there was only work, no gender issue.

**3.5 Motherhood**
3.5.1 Overall care arrangement

As mentioned earlier, she started to talk after I briefly explained my research purpose (about women’s childrearing experiences across generations). Right from the beginning, she emphasised that “I had little experience of childrearing.”

During the period of the first two children being young (before they started the school at the age of 6 to 7), there was a nanny, employed by the government to look after her two children full-time, living at her home. She talked about the nanny had received a very good salary (9 yuan for each child). This was the period of “Supply System”, which means most things you needed for living were supplied by the work unit and government, including accommodation, three meals and transportation etc.. Therefore, everyone only had a basic salary, about 9 yuan per month, which was also equal among people from different positions. There was a special subsidy of 0.5 yuan for every woman and man. For women, the purpose was to buy necessary sanitary products (ie., means proper toilet tissue at that time), whereas for men, it was to buy cigarettes. Then, there were ‘generous’ subsidies for children: for each child they would be given 9 yuan to buy anything needed for the children. Therefore, at that time, according to the GG, there was a saying that “if you have one child, you could become a ‘middle-class peasant’; two children, you would be an ‘upper class peasant’ and with three children, you became a ‘landlord’!”

However, the system changed from the ‘Supply System’ to the ‘Salary System’ when she had the third and fourth child. This new system meant you have greater salaries (which were also differentiated by your working positions), but you needed to buy what you needed for living. As a result of this new system, she asked her mother to stop working and come to help her, instead of hiring and paying for nannies.

Her motherhood also featured the absence of her husband (children’s father) as they hardly ever lived under the same roof. This absence of husband/father will be
discussed in a later section. Therefore, she had been living with her four children with either a nanny or her mother for most of the time when her children were small.

3.5.2 Discipline:

When talking about childrearing experiences, the GG started by saying, “I have no experience in childrearing. It was a Supply System. The nanny was employed by the state. I have four children. The first two were looked after by the nanny while the other two were cared for by my mum. I asked her to stop working and come to help me”

Principle 1: Blaming your child first

After the initial claim of the lack of the childrearing experiences, she brought up one of the main aspects of childrearing, discipline:

“When it came to educating children, first, the children, (pause), they should be industrious and thrifty in managing the household (laugh). It’s simple. At that time, we were working, and it was very strict. For the children, we also would not allow them to break the law or the rules. If, for example, a child fought with a neighbour’s child or there was any conflict, we always blamed our own children first.

Blaming your own child first seemed to be regarded as one of the most important discipline methods of GG. She gave an example later, during my second visit, on how she used this method with her oldest daughter, who, “was the most outgoing one and was very direct with people and sometime offended others.” She described one event in particular when she went back from work to find her daughter was in a quarrel with one of the children of her neighbour. She told her daughter off immediately and went to apologise to the other family. However, some workers who were building the road and witnessed what had happened said, “It was not your
daughter’s fault! It was the other children! You daughter suffered a great deal (吃大亏了), they beat your daughter and you should console her instead of telling her off!” She repeated herself twice that even in this situation, “I went to this family and said ‘My daughter fought with your children. I am sorry. I didn’t educate my daughter well.’ This made them felt shamed and they said, ‘Don’t worry. It was not your daughter’s fault! It was our children’s problem’”. In this case, the GG obviously, did not think it was her daughter’s fault. She commented about this neighbour had a relatively lower status in her working place (the husband was a driver) and with less education (his wife had no education) and they had 8 children who tended to create troubles. Plus, there was witness. However, no matter what was the condition, she insisted to enact the ‘blaming your children first’ principle.

**Principle 2: not allow to accept gifts.**

When I asked for examples of how she treated her children strictly, GG added that “I did not allow, any of them, we were very strict at that time, not allow to accept gift or money from anyone. … I worked for the PSB, this was particularly strict. I needed to set a good example. I had to be strict with my children. … I even would not allow them to have meals at other’s home. Or even at friends’ or relatives’ home. They had been always had meals at home. I had told the nanny clearly about that. (laugh).”

**Not beating them**

Interestingly, although she said she was very strict with her children, she commented “I seldom beat them. …. Only have beaten my oldest daughter. …. The number two child was never beaten. The number three was only beaten once. She said she went to swim and crossed the river on her own. (laugh). Such a little age, crossed the river! (laugh).”

**Reading to avoid troubles**
The purpose of the strict discipline seemed to be to avoid the face-losing situation in front of her colleagues. She mentioned this during the second interview when I asked her if she had ever bought books for her children. She said, “Yes. My children always had books to read. I was worried about them going out to play with the neighbours’ children. We lived in the same community with my colleagues from the PSB, this would have sounded bad if the children caused troubles. On the one hand, they could be educated by these books, on the other hand, this could avoid them going out to cause troubles.”

3.5.3 Work first, children were looked after well as the result of my hard work

During the second interview, I asked if she ever missed her children as she claimed she “worked all night and very often during the day, too”. “There were hardly weekends and when there were, you were totally exhausted.”

She said “You were very busy! All your mind was focused on the work. Sometime after I finished the job, I still needed to consider how to deal with some difficult issues. For example, during the period of “Against Revisionism”, … you need to check every individual’s archive….This is a big responsibility. …”

“It is not like now. The nanny was responsible for everything, not only cooking, housework, but also everything about your children.” “They are also wet-nannies. It is totally different from now. That’s why they had such high salaries.”

The GG specifically emphasised that it was her work rather than her husband’s work that provided her children with the free nanny service when I asked directly if she ever felt regret about her motherhood experiences. She said, “What can I be regretful about?!?” Then she gave me a specific example of someone who was around 100 years old and still lives in the same community where she lives. She emphasised the fact that even he worked well but his wives’ (it seemed he had several wives during different periods) capacity in work was relatively low, therefore, she/he had not been given free nannies. “This was according the work of women, not the men!”
3.5.4 Living arrangement:

Individual Dormitory

She said before she had any children, everyone lived in the “Collective Dormitory”, separated by gender, regardless of being married or not. Because of the child, she was allocated an individual dormitory that she lived with her child/children and nanny (and her mother later). However, even after having her children, her husband still had to live in somewhere else – in his dormitory.

A big courtyard

All these individual dormitories for families from the same working unit consisted a large courtyard which was relatively closed to the outside. When I asked specifically about where her children played, if they were not at home, they would play in the courtyard. She said as it was a relatively closed area so that they were safe to run around and play.

3.5.5 Childbirth and ‘doing the month’

When I asked about her experiences of doing the month, she talked about the difficult labour of her last child. She said it was because of her busy schedule of work, she never had time to do the regular check-ups for pregnant women and she did not know her child was in breech until she was in labour. They had to use forceps to help the baby came through. She also got Pelvic Varicosity and Ovarian Cyst because of the high pressured work. During her last pregnancy, she worked for the FTB\(^1\) where she had to help the couple who did not understand how to use the

\(^1\) Here, the facts seemed to be inconsistent again. She said she worked in FTB from 1966 whereas her youngest son was born in 1963. Therefore, she could not have been working for the FTB when she had the difficult labour of her last child.
abacas. Therefore, she not only ended up doing more work but also had to train them. All these illnesses plus the lack of check-ups resulted in complications with her labour and she could not stop bleeding. In the end, a specialist doctor from Shanghai came to BC to conduct an operation on her for four hours and removed both of her uterus and ovaries.

Then, in terms of the experiences of “doing the month”, the GG seemed to remember little apart from the “nurses were very helpful and, compared to today, the nurses could do a lot for me.” She said she had both nurses to help her in the hospital and her mother at home. However, “as the nanny had already been appointed once I got pregnant, there was not much help needed.”

There was 56-day maternity leave for women at that time; however, “I never stopped working before giving birth and I went back to work immediately after being rested for 1 month. … I can never had 56-day maternity leave. …. Too much work left there, you had to go back.”

3.5.6 Presence of father:

She mentioned very little about her own father and claimed that her husband “hardly had anything to do with home/family” in the very beginning of her narration.

It is unclear why her and her husband separated during most of their lives. She talked about the confidential side of her work so that she had to live in the accommodation her work unit found for her and she could not tell anybody else. However, she did not mention why, after she changed her job, they were still separated.

She said when they lived in different dormitories, she and her husband could only meet on Saturdays. “He came home on Saturday and had to go back to his own dormitory on Sunday. This is what they called ‘Spend a Saturday Together’. “
She said, except for the oldest daughter who had been living with her father for a while, all the other children knew little about their father. Interestingly, she also commented on her own relationship with this oldest daughter as the most distant one “as she was the oldest one and spent more time with her father.” However, it was very unclear when her oldest daughter moved to live with her father. The GG also claimed that she was living with all of her children until she moved to other cities to work. But before she left the BC, she had already arranged the work for her daughter. Therefore, it sounded like her oldest daughter had been living with them until she was grown up enough for work (around 22 years old).

The GG mentioned little about her own husband until she was asked if any of her family had been impacted by the Cultural Revolution. She talked about her husband having said something inappropriate so that had been moved from his position. Then, on the one hand, she said she had to send money to him; on the other hand, she claimed that it was his own responsibility to look after himself. “Everyone has to be responsible for herself/himself”. “I also had to take the responsibility of our children. … The children were brought up because of my work, not because of him! … It is something like a matriarchal society (laugh). ”

3.5.7 Values Sought to Transmit

Work ethic

The GG not only talked at length about her work, her outstanding performance, and the extremely busy schedule, she also talked about how she guided her children’s behaviours according to the way she worked:

“No matter what, I and her father had always been given awards and made contributions to our work, …. For the children, we educated them by asking them to look at the example we demonstrated in our work.” This statement was given when I asked if she had other things she remembered deeply after she finished her first part of spontaneous narration about her childrearing experiences.
She appeared to be happy about the result of the transmission of this strong working ethic to all her children. She spontaneously talked about how all of her children worked hard and became leaders (managers, or directors etc.) in their own working areas.

**Independence**

This is another characteristic she emphasised during her narration, both of herself and of her children. She said some people felt it strange that she did not use her personal connections in the government to help her children to seek an official position. She said, “I did not want to. They went to work wherever their capacities meet the place’s requirements. I told them, you should not depend on me. One may distinguish himself/herself in any profession. No matter where you end up, as long as you work well…. Everyone has to be responsible for her/his own future, instead of depending on their parents. Therefore, I never did any special arrangement for them.” She also commented that because she travelled to several different cities to work, therefore, her children were all independent, from a relatively young age.

**Strong women**

From the beginning of her first part of narration, an image of a woman who can control her life starts to emerge: she said in the first part of her narration that “she asked her mother to stop working to help her”, or “I asked my son to give up his job and he came back home, living with me.” Later on, she emphasised that her capacity of work was the only reason that the whole family can survive and her children were brought up by herself, with no help from her husband. All these descriptions demonstrate a very independent woman who works for her children and family.

However, the first time that the “strong women” appeared was when I asked about her children’s relationship with their father in the second interview. She commented that most of her children knew little about him. She went on to explain that “all my
children were named after me, Zhu, it seemed that I was a bit too, his family thought I was too, strong. I have never had a meal at his family. …”

When I asked if she considered anyone had any influence on her strong personality. She said, nobody. “I have a strong self-esteem. I had always been ahead, compared to everybody else, at work. … I was on my own, I have always had a strong self-esteem. I regard women are equal to men. I have never been dependent on men. I have always relied on myself. I also told my children to rely on themselves. For example, have you talked to my oldest daughter yet? She is just like me. Her husband has to listen to her.”

Here, interestingly, the daughter she regarded as being more distant from her, compared to the others, was referred by her as the example of a successful transmission of a strong personality.

3.5.8 Supporting systems in childcare

In her stories, a strong social support system, instead of a family one, seems to be the key for supporting childcare. She relied on the free nanny system for the first two children; then, during the Great Famine and the Cultural Revolution, her personal good relationship with her leaders helped her family to go through it without losing anyone.

However, her mother’s role in helping her with childcare is also crucial. Her own mother has not only helped her with the two younger children, but also went on to help GG’s daughter’s children (the grandchildren from the oldest daughter). Compared with most of other grandmother at GG’s time, the fact that she did not help her own daughter with childcare was unusual and it was her mother’s stepping in help her to be freed from this particular family responsibility.
Nevertheless, in GG’s own narration, her mother has also relied on her. Her mother’s formal job was obtained according to GG’s position at work and after her mother stopped working, it is her supporting her mother, too.

4. Family network

GG’s Mother has, clearly, provided the most important support during different periods of GG’s life. This has been recognised by the GG, but, she talked about her mother in a very distant way. There is no emotion involved in her description of what her mother has done. In contrast, the father has hardly been mentioned by the GG at all. When I asked directly about him, GG would pass the question quickly, by claiming to remember little.

The next important family member, according to GG’s narration, is her cousin, who she had been living close to in BC. This cousin has hugely impacted on her career trajectory by involving her in secret work for the CCP in the early days.

Overall, her relationship with her families were never mentioned by her spontaneously. The information was obtain during semi-structured interviews.

4.1 With her own children:

She described her children as “been nice to her” and “listen to her”. She never used the word “filial piety”. However, being nice and listening to someone’s parents are regarded as typical filial piety principle in China. Before she was forced to move to hospital recently, she had been living with her son in her own flat. Again, this is very traditional arrangement in China – the aged parent(s) live with their (the oldest) son instead of daughter(s). Her daughters who live in BC visit her very often. One daughter lives in another city and she kept inviting her to live with them, but she said she would like stay as her own place. Every day, there will be at least one of the children phone her to check on her. The GG said if she called any of them, they would come immediately.
Relationship with her daughter:

The oldest daughter seemed had been mentioned most during the interviews even though the GG regarded her as the most distanced child. The reason the GG gave was because this oldest daughter had to live with her father for a period. As I mentioned earlier, it seemed this separation did not happen until the oldest daughter started to work. No matter what the reason is, it seemed to me that both the GG and the GM did not regard their relationship as emotional intimate. However, both of them, talked about their similarities in having a strong personality.

4.2 Other relatives:

She has mentioned these cousins and aunts:

The oldest cousin, the number two cousin, the number three cousin and the number four. They are all sons of her father’s brother and sisters.

Then, she mentioned her number four aunt and number five aunt. Both of them joined the army. Then, the number four aunt became the manager of a factory that produces medicines.

She mentioned all these people briefly and only when I asked directly. She had no intention of talking any more about these people apart from telling me what their jobs were.

However, when she talked about how her husband’s family “consider her as too strong”, the GG mentioned how her husband’s brother caused some troubles between her and her husband. “He called home, sometime, around 1-2 am … He had always been a mischief maker.”

5 Other thoughts/reflections
A hard and excellent worker, strong and independent woman: this is a clear picture she has depicted during her narration. This is also an image she felt has been successfully passed on to her children.

The intention to persuade the researcher to trust this image she created is particular clear when other facts has been put together from her and her children’s biographies. First, there is a clear connection of the career choices among different family members – the choice of the area relating to chemistry or medicine. Her aunts, three of her daughters, her oldest daughter’s husband and then, their daughter and son-in-law are all in the similar area and had all been very successful in their areas. It is interesting to point out that even the wife of her landlord’s son is also a manager in the Chemical Company in BC. Second, her son’s first job in the Combat Preparedness Bureau (CPB), obviously was because of her. Third, she claimed that she had very good relationship with both old leaders and the ones at the current powerful positions. It will be surprising, that, in this situation, none of her children had benefited from these connections, even though she emphasised that she never helped her children directly.

However, I still buy her story of a strong, independent and capable woman who also transmitted such values to her daughters or at least the oldest daughter successfully. This is because my interviews with her oldest daughter and her granddaughter made me see the similarities between these three generations of women, even though none of them talking about emotional bonding. From all three generations of women, I can clearly see these three aspects: hard worker, independent and strong will.

“Flat and light” (“平平淡淡”) has been used many times when she described her life experiences, although, in a way, she has lived a very exciting life! I wonder if this is a simply modest attitude to a stranger when talking about one’s life; or, because I have asked her to talk about childrearing experiences in the beginning which made her feel incapable. Or, is this an impact of her working environment and requirement, for example, surrounded by men, and having had confidential jobs? Or, is it a self-protection mechanism for anyone who has lived through social
turbulences as well as supporting her whole family? There is a saying in China -
Tuck one’s tail to be a human. (夹着尾巴做人). This can be regarded as a life
wisdom for living modestly in China?

Related to the particular environment and historical period she has lived through, I
wondered, at a relatively high position at work when there were very few female
leaders, demonstrating little emotion may be another protective mechanism. Is this
the reason that I feel a bit of distance from the first interview and her emotionless
description of her life stories? From this point of view, she is ‘flat and light’ in
telling others about her life. Maybe, being flat and light, is a reflection of her current
feeling when she reviews her whole life? Maybe, at the end of her life, she wants to
be distant from herself.

A Note on Her Narrative style:

This GG does not like to tell stories with details. Furthermore, there are many
unfinished sentences in her narrations. Sometime, she used “that” (那个) to finish
her “unfinished sentences.” These “that” are very vague. In daily conversation in
China, people do tend to use lots of “that” or “this” to express something that need
not be explained due to shared common knowledge or something being too
sensitive. Or, sometimes, people like to use it as a way to give themselves time to
think, such as “you know” is used in verbal English conversations. Sometime, the
GG just left the unfinished sentence there and moved on to different things.

To know what these “that” or unfinished sentences mean in different places is not
easy. I consider, there are definitely times when she said “that, that”, she was
actually in the process of thinking/searching her memories. However, there are other
times, I think she left her sentence unfinished for a purpose. For example, when she
narrated her childrearing experiences at the first place, she said:

“We would punish them, but I seldom …. So my children seldom got into any
trouble with other children. The most outgoing one would be ZWD (the oldest
daughter). She is the only outgoing one. We did not spend too much time with her. She was brought up by the nurse. Hmm, so, she has been very direct, with a ready tongue. Only occasionally, (pause), we hardly beat her. Only once… when my next door neighbour was a…. We were allotted a dormitory after the first baby was born. Before that we all lived in collective dorms. I used to work in the Inspection Office in the Police Bureau.” Then, she moved on to talk about her job at that time. After several minutes, she came back to the topic of punishing her children, “Hmm, in the past, when they were too much, I might beat them as a punishment at the most. Only ZWD was ever beaten. Some other children were never beaten (said with a smile). The second child was never beaten. The third child was beaten only once for swimming to cross a river.” Here, the GG skipped the story of beating her oldest daughter to move on talking about her jobs and then, about how she did not beat others. Only during the second interview when similar topics were brought up, she finished this untold story of beating her daughter (see the story I illustrated previously).

Does that mean, during the second interview, she built more trust in me so that she was more willing to say something about beating her daughter? Or, as she had already done her job in telling me a story that she wanted to tell (the one mainly focused about work); so that, during the second interview, she was happy to tell more of less important ones? I think the unfinished sentences mean a lot in her narrations.
Appendix VIII  DARNE Textsorts with an Example

Table 19 Example of DARNE Textsort Analysis

| G: In terms of my two children, Mmm..., I think a child’s personality is important. | Argumentation |
| I: Mmm | |
| G: His/her personality decides her academic performance and his/her ability to deal with emergencies or adapt to new situations. | Argumentation |
| I: Mmm | |
| G: Family is only one factor. See... Mmm... My first child is a boy and was not doing well in his study. Never doing well in study. No matter how you educate him, he was in | Description |

D=Description, namely the assertion of certain properties, but in a timeless and non-historical way. No attempt is made at story-telling/narration. There is a sort of timeless ‘anthropological presence’ about the described person, situation, whatever.

A=Argumentation, namely the development of an argument and theorizing and position-taking usually forming a present-time perspective, often from a past-perspective, often a blend of the two. It is generally in a stand-alone form (not explicitly connected to the content of a particular narrative). Only sometimes is it in the form of an explicit ‘disagreement’ with an explicit counter-position, though one is usually implicit.

R=Report. This is a form in which a sequence of events, experiences and actions is recounted, but in a relatively experience-thin fashion, such that it appears to be recounted from some distance.
such an environment, and as a boy, he wanted to play.

But the second child, a girl, was quite different. We didn’t teach her much in kindergarten. Then she went into the primary school, grade one. When she was doing homework, and when she was taking dictations, you said the first line and she remembered the next and had written it down already. She could remember! As for the elder, he couldn’t remember even after you told him 10 times!

Therefore, family environment can help them cultivate a good habitat in moral perspective. They can only rely on themselves in study. We didn’t have the ability to teach them.

I’ve only read ten times dictations in total, and no more. At that time, we lived with my father, their grandpa. Sometimes, my father read to them. Due to busy work, the girl stayed with my parents for a period of time in grade one and two.

We had no time to take care of them. That’s why the girl did good in study but the boy not.

This part of the interview materials consists of quite a bit of argumentation and evaluation with a relatively thin narrative to support her argumentation. This demonstrates the interviewee (the grandmother from family Zhao) feels strongly about the children’s education issue, particularly, arguing a different view from the popular one today: parents are responsible for their children’s education results. This strong argumentation and evaluation needs to be understood alongside her overall life story: an untypical woman who devoted her time to run a business instead of being a ‘virtuous wife and good mother’. Even though she is very successful in raising the whole family’s living standards, she still felt the pressure to argue for herself.
Appendix IX Ethics Approval Letter

Ethics Approval

Hazel Croft <MPhil/PhD programme administrator>
To: Xin Guo
Cc: Julia Brannen

17 April 2015 at 14:56

Dear Xin Guo

I am writing to confirm that ethics approval has been granted by the Institute of Education for your doctoral research project entitled: ‘Shifting Traditions for Childrearing: narrative from three generations of women in China’.

This ethics approval has been granted from 14 April 2015.

I wish you all the best for your forthcoming research.

Best wishes, Hazel

Hazel Croft
MPhil/PhD programme administrator
UCL Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way
London WC1H 0AL
Appendix X Information Sheet

Shifting Traditions for Childrearing: Narratives from Three Generations of Women in China

Information about the research

What is the research about?

Parenting has become a heated topic in China. This research aims to explore three generations of women’s experiences of childrearing. Specifically, I like to understand mothers’ subjective experiences and how the changing historical context, Chinese family structure and relationship, the international relationships and transmissions shape mothers’ experiences.

Who is carrying out the study?

This is a PhD research project by Xin Guo, one of the doctoral students in University College London (Institute of EducationOE). This means the project will be conducted solely by herself. However, her supervisors, Professor Julia Brannen and Dr Rebecca O’Connell will direct and support her during the PhD process.

This project is funded by the China Scholarship Council who are supporting Xin to conduct this research from 2014 – 2018.

Xin Guo is studying at the Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU), UCL (IOE). The UCL Institute of Education (IOE), located in London, United Kingdom, is judged to be the world's leading centre for education and applied social science. UCL as a whole has performed outstandingly, and on the key measure of research power tops the table ahead of Oxford, Cambridge, King's College London and Imperial College. TCRU is independent of any government departments or political parties and carries out a wide range of research projects with a focus on families, children and health.

What does the research involve?

After the participants have agreed to take part in this research, there will be two phases of the research: first is the main phase, which includes individual interviews with different family members. Each interview will be conducted separately and will take between 1 to 3 hours. The venue for the interview will be discussed and agreed with participants.
The first phase is followed by a possible second phase of observations. This phase involves direct observation of childrearing practices at home or at other places that participants agree to. The specific time and format of observation will be discussed and agreed with participants, but will consist of 2-3 observations at different times of the day (such as different meal’s times).

What happens to the information you collect?

Any information collected is confidential. This means it will not be attributed personally to research participants and will be kept anonymous.

What will you do with the study findings?

The findings will be written up in a PhD thesis which will be reviewed by other researchers as well as being published. To be able to inform the work of policy makers and practitioners, findings may also be presented at events such as conferences, and published in journals, books, websites and other places including the popular press and the newsletters of interested organisations.

If you have any questions after reading this information letter, please contact the researcher directly via email or wechat:

Xin Guo email address: [REDACTED]

Xin Guo’s wechat account: [REDACTED]

Thank you very much!

Some relevant websites:
Xin Guo’s page at UCL(IOE):
http://research.ioe.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/xin-guo(5ccc1aa4-8989-4946-a834-ce07fd751546).html

Xin Guo’s supervisors’ pages:
Professor Julia Brannen:
http://research.ioe.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/julia-brannen(b51e0d4a-8b20-46a8-9117-a218286b8d07).html

Dr Rebecca O’Connell:
http://research.ioe.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/rebecca-oconnell(ac1de580-14cf-45ac-8ed8-7bcb1fda1b6c).html

TCRU website: http://www.ioe.ac.uk/research/54490.html

UCL(IOE) website: http://www.ioe.ac.uk/

CSC website: http://www.csc.edu.cn/
中国育儿传统的变迁：三代母亲的叙事

关于本研究

这个研究是关于什么的？

近几年，家庭教育在中国成为一个热门话题。本研究希望通过叙事研究的方法，深入地探讨中国三代母亲的育儿经历与感受。母亲在育儿实践中的主体经验，中国特有的家庭模式和代际育儿现状对母亲经验的影响，以及三代母亲背后的巨大社会变迁对她们的生活和育儿行为的影响这三方面会作为本研究的重点。

谁是研究者？

这是郭歆个人的博士学位研究项目。郭歆目前在伦敦大学学院（教育学院）就读博士学位。她的导师，Julia Brannen 教授，是英国家庭社会学和儿童社会学的著名专家。她会在整个研究过程中承担指导者的角色。

本博士研究得到中国国家留学基金委员会的支持，博士学习期间为 2014 年-2018 年。

郭歆所在的伦敦大学学院（UCL）的教育学院（IOE）在 2014 年世界大学排名中名列教育类的第一。而伦敦大学学院自身在大学排名的多项指标中已经超过牛津、剑桥、国王学院和帝国理工。郭歆具体所在的系所——Thomas Coram 研究中心专门研究家庭、儿童和健康问题，拥有一支优秀的研究人员（包括博士生和访问学者）队伍。

参加这一研究，我需要做什么？

如果您表示愿意参加这一研究，那么将可能参加研究的两个阶段，其中第一阶段是主要阶段，第二阶段可以在第一阶段完成后，由参与者自行决定是否继续参加。

第一阶段是对不同家庭成员（理想状态下是三代母亲）的访谈。每一个家庭成员将单独进行访谈，访谈可能会进行 1-2 次，每一次的时间一般在 1-3 个小时左右。访谈地点可以根据被访谈者的需要来安排。第二阶段为观察和访谈阶段。主要是对参与者与幼儿的互动进行直接观察。地点可以由参与者和研究者商量决定。观察根据一定的主题来安排时间和内容，比如观察家庭中的用餐情景或大人与儿童的游戏时间。一般而言可能是观察 1-2 次，每次 30 分钟左右。
观察结束后，研究者可能会对被观察的家庭成员进行一个访谈，时间在 30 分钟之内。

项目将如何处理收集到的数据和信息？

本研究项目所收集到的所有信息都属于保密信息。这意味着，所有可以辨识出参与者个人身份的信息将会予以替换，以保证完全的匿名状态。

研究的结果将如何处理？

本研究结果将会写进本人的博士论文中（英文）。这一论文将得到其他研究人员的评审，并会以英文出版。为了能够更好的将论文发现用于实际，本研究的结果还会以英文和中文的形式在各种会议，学术出版物，网站等公共场合予以展示和讨论。

如果您在读完此信之后，仍然对本研究有疑问，请和研究者直接联系:

郭歆： 邮件 13381282328@189.cn
电话： 13381282328
微信 ID： 郭歆

非常感谢！

一些相关网站
伦敦大学教育学院有关郭歆的信息
http://research.ioe.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/xin-guo(563c61ad-8989-4946-9d8d-17e469ce0a52).html
郭歆的导师
Julia Brannen:
http://research.ioe.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/julia-brannen(b51e0d4a-8b20-46a8-9117-a218286b8d07).html
TCRU 网站:
http://www.ioe.ac.uk/research/54490.html
伦敦大学教育学院网站:
http://www.ioe.ac.uk/
国家留学基金委员会:
http://www.csc.edu.cn/
Appendix XI Consent Form

Please tick yes or no for each statement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The research has been explained to me and I have read the information sheet which has been given to me</td>
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<tr>
<td>I understand that the information I provide will be treated as confidential</td>
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<td>I agree to be interviewed but understand that I may withdraw from the research at any time</td>
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<td>I understand that the interview will be recorded and typed out and that these notes may be shared with other researchers in data-analysis process but that my details will be kept confidential</td>
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This part of the form is about archiving data

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tr>
<td>I have read and understood the information leaflet that outlines how my interviews from Phases 1 will be archived, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I understand that the researcher will change any identifying details in my interviews to protect me.</td>
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<td>I agree that my contribution can also be made available to other researchers in a public archive for use in the following ways:</td>
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<td>In research reports and other publications</td>
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<td>In lectures and talks</td>
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<td>For broadcasting purposes</td>
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<td>If there are any further restrictions you wish to place on the material, please indicate here and describe overleaf if necessary</td>
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Signed (Participant)  
Name (Print)  
Date

Signed (Researcher)  
Name (Print)  
Date
同意书：中国育儿传统的变迁：三代母亲的叙事

请在“是”或“否”中打勾

<table>
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<th>是</th>
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<tr>
<td>研究者已经向我解释了研究的基本信息，我已经阅读了介绍研究的文本。</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>我同意参加这项研究，并且理解我可以在研究的任何阶段退出。</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>我了解访谈会被录音，部分访谈记录可能会与其他研究者分享。</td>
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以下是对调研信息的保存问题

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<tr>
<td>我阅读并懂得项目是如何处理调研来的信息的，并且，研究者给我就此问题进一步提问和解释的机会。</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>我理解项目会对任何可能暴露我个人身份的信息予以处理，以保护我的隐私。</td>
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<tr>
<td>我同意我的访谈信息可以保存在公共档案馆或图书馆中，并仅以下面的方式供更多的研究人员使用：</td>
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<tr>
<td>出现在研究报告和其他相关出版物中</td>
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<tr>
<td>在教学中使用</td>
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<tr>
<td>在研究成果的转化中使用</td>
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<tr>
<td>如果您希望对自己的信息的使用权限进行更多地限定，请向研究者说明，必要时，可以单独列出一个文本予以解释。</td>
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签名 (参与者)

姓名

日期

签名 (研究者)

姓名

日期
Appendix XII Education System in China

The nine years of education in red is compulsory education in China and the green blocks are academic qualifications.

Primary level:
- Primary School: 6 years

Secondary level:
- Junior Middle School: 3 years
- Senior Middle School: 3 years
- Secondary Vocational School: 3-5 years
- University: 4 years
- Post-secondary: 2-3 years

Tertiary level:
- Bachelor: 3 years
- College: 3-4 years
- Secondary Vocational: 3-5 years
- Work: 3 years
Appendix XIII Women’s Work Trajectories

Table 20 The great-grandmothers’ work trajectories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GG’s Name and Birth Year</th>
<th>Age of starting to work and getting married</th>
<th>Occupation and Major Transition in work</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Total years of work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhao Xue 1931</td>
<td>Started working at 17</td>
<td>1949 (18): She started to work for the Public Security Bureau, where she worked for about 17 years before the political turmoil started in 1966.</td>
<td>Senior Cadre</td>
<td>40, retired at 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married at 21</td>
<td>1966 – 1971 (35-40): She was moved to the Finance and Tax Bureau (FTB) as the revolutionary army took control of the Public Security Bureau (PSB).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Around 1972 – 1976: (41-45) She was moved to the Chemistry Industry Bureau.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1986-1988 (55-57): She moved back to Bengbu in a SOE belong to the Commercial Bureau, as it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

120 Here, ‘work’ specifically denotes employment/contracted jobs outside the home. However, as women’s work very often became ‘blurred’ with other family work, when a woman spent a long time (years) to help a family business, but was not regarded as a ‘proper’ worker by themselves or their family, I will still list on this table with an explanation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Rui found herself a job - helping build a new military hospital.</td>
<td>1950 (19 years old): Rui found herself a job - helping build a new military hospital. 1951 (20 years old): The family moved to HF. Rui started to work for a medicine company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>The family moved to HF. Rui started to work for a medicine company.</td>
<td>1951 (20 years old): The family moved to HF. Rui started to work for a medicine company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>Rui and her family moved to HS twice. When they were there, she worked in the hospital designed specifically to provide a care for senior officers. She had two roles, one working in the pharmacy, the other was in charge of creating entertainment programmes for the leaders and officials who were cared for there.</td>
<td>1960s (30 -34): Rui and her family moved to HS twice. When they were there, she worked in the hospital designed specifically to provide a care for senior officers. She had two roles, one working in the pharmacy, the other was in charge of creating entertainment programmes for the leaders and officials who were cared for there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>The family moved to Bengbu and did not move again. Rui worked at the Culture Bureau.</td>
<td>1965 (34): The family moved to Bengbu and did not move again. Rui worked at the Culture Bureau.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-1968</td>
<td>Rui was sent to work in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution.</td>
<td>1966-1968 (35 -37 years old): Rui was sent to work in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qian Rui was close to home. Married several months later in the same year. 1931
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Started work</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun Feng</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Started at 16</td>
<td></td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>16 years old: The first cadre training school was established in Bengbu and Feng volunteered to join. There was about one month of training where the focus was political awareness, instead of training in any specific knowledge or skills. One month later, she was allocated to work for the Office to Support the Front-line of the war. Around the same year, after the Office to Support the Front-Line was abolished and Feng was moved to work in the Civil Affairs Bureau.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1950?</td>
<td>17? – 50: She worked as an accountant for three different secondary schools. She complained that her hard work was never valued high enough by her bosses and in the end, her achievement and qualifications were stolen by one of her colleagues who had a much better relationship with the leaders. She retired from school at 50 years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>or 70? (from 21 – 40 years old): Yang had more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wu Fang</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Started at 21</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>21 years old: Yang had her first child (son). During the same year, she was elected as one of the women community committee members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>– 1969 or 70? (from 21 – 40 years old): Yang had more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Date of Birth</td>
<td>Work History</td>
<td>Status at 55</td>
<td>Age at 55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li Bei</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Started work at 16, Married at 21, 1970? – 1985 (40 - 55): She became a full-time worker for BCO, and retired at 55.</td>
<td>Advanced Worker</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen Juan</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Started to work in a factory around 16/7 alongside her schooling, Married at 20, 1938 -1941 (16 -19): The whole family ran away from the Japanese army all the way from their village to Hubei, Hunan, and Guizhou. During the journey, she went to schools established particularly for young people who were regarded as ‘refugees’ at that time, and spent half her timeworking and half studying.</td>
<td>Cadre</td>
<td>Around 37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Chu Hua

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1942 – 1951 (20 - 29):</td>
<td></td>
<td>She worked for her husband’s family’s hotel, which was not regarded as proper work by either herself or her husband’s family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952 – 1979 (30 -57):</td>
<td></td>
<td>She came to the city (Bengbu) and passed the examination to become a teacher for a local primary school. She became an advanced teacher at 34 years old. She retired at 57 as she wanted her youngest son can replace her at the work place, which resulted in a much lower pension than her husband as it was a year later that the government levelled up the salary of teachers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Starting work at?**

Married at 16.

**She lives in the rural area for her whole life and she had never done any job apart from farm work except for the ‘Great Leaping’ period to make steel for the local village.**

**Farmer**

### Zhu Yu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949 -1954 (16 -21):</td>
<td></td>
<td>She moved from the rural area to the city (Bengbu), working as a cleaner, cooking and making clothes for her neighbours. Most of this was not paid but earned her a good reputation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955 (22):</td>
<td></td>
<td>She went back to the rural area to work on other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Starting work at 16**

Married at 21.

**Worker**

<p>| 34 years, retired at 50 years old |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Range</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1956 -1961 (23 -28):</td>
<td>She did temporary jobs just to make a living.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975 -1983 (42 -50):</td>
<td>She co-operated with the other women to make clothes and established their SCOE. Later, their work was recognised and changed into a BCOE.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Jiang Ke**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Range</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Started to work at farm at 18; Married at 24.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947 -1953 (18 - 24):</td>
<td>Ke’s husband’s family decided to bring her back to their home when she was about 18/19 years old even though nobody knew when her husband would come back home. She lived with her mother-in-law and her husband’s brothers, working on the farm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956 -1958 (27 – 29):</td>
<td>Her husband was given a job monitoring and managing the prison in another city LA (more than 800 kms from home). Ke and her daughters moved to live with him. In LA, she learned the skills involved in making clothes and started to work for one of the local clothes shops there.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Worker**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>About</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958 - 1979</td>
<td>She moved to Bengbu with her husband as his job changed again. She started to work for a SCOE making clothes. She retired at 50 years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979 - 1989</td>
<td>She worked for private companies for ten years to earn extra money to pay for her sons’ marriages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955 – 1964</td>
<td>Married and moved to Bengbu from Nanjing with her husband. The same year, Ai started to work for the Residents’ Committee. In 1964 she was affected by the ‘Four Clearances’ (see the brief history in Chapter One). She was interrogated about her family’s background and was removed from Residents’ Committee’s work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968 – 1978</td>
<td>Ai and her four children were forced to go to the ‘Countryside’ whereas her husband had to stay in Worker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shen Ai

1938

Started to work in the same year she married, at 17 years old.

---

121 “Residents’ Committees” emerged in the 1950s, initially as a way of managing the residents who did not work in state-owned organisations. In 1954, "Regulations on the Work of Urban Residents’ Committee" (城市居民委员会组织条例) was issued which legitimatised the Residents’ Committee as an effective organisation of residents’ “self-government”. In 1989, the first law about Residents’ Committees was issued which set its goal as facilitating residents to “self-manage, self-educate, self-service and self-monitor”. One Residents’ Committee manages about 100 – 700 households (but has been expanded to thousands in large cities today) and consists of 5-9 members. All the members worked for free or were paid very little until about 10 years ago when the government increased the salaries and project fees for the Residents’ Committees.

121 In the Chinese political system, county is the next level down from municipal (city) and township (town) is a lower level than county. Both county and township are levels in rural areas. The political administration system, from the level of highest power to the lowest, is National – Provincial – Municipal - County and Township.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Hu Jun</strong></th>
<th><strong>She married in 1957, the same year she started to work, at 22 years old</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1966 -1976 (31-41): Her family moved from WH to Bengbu as her husband’s section of the army moved again. She taught in a primary school. 10 years later, she retired from her work due to poor health</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1978 – 1988 (40 - 50): the government apologised to Ai’s family for its ‘mistakes’ and took Ai and her seven children back to the city – Bengbu. Ai was allocated to a small factory run specifically for “workers attached to family members” (SCOE). Ai was valued by the head of this factory and was promoted to work as the head of workshops (车间主任), responsible for the quality monitoring of four workshops. She retired from this factory in 1988, at the age of 50.

1978 – 2015 (40 - 77) Ai started her work in the Residents’ Committee again and she was still doing it when I interviewed her in 2015.
Table 21 The grandmothers’ work trajectories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GM’s Name/ Birth Year</th>
<th>Years of Country-side</th>
<th>Age of starting to work</th>
<th>Danwei and Position at Danwei (Major Transition in Work)</th>
<th>Status retired from</th>
<th>Total years of work 122</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhao Dong 1954</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14 years old</td>
<td>“Worker associated with family members” for several years at the railway station; Temporary worker for 1 year at Gold and Silver Factory than transferred to become a formal worker. In 1980 (26 years old), she transferred to a BCOE (Machine Tool and Electric Appliance Factory), working as a worker-cadre (?). In 1985 -1992, she became the manager of a sales department that was responsible for its own costs and profit. 1992 – 2013, she started her individual business, selling electric appliances. Retired at 59 years old.</td>
<td>Individual business owner</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qian Jie 1952</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18 years old</td>
<td>Formal worker for a SOE (?) in heavy industry, electroplating products for three years. She went to university to study for</td>
<td>Cadre</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

122 I Include the work these women did in rural areas when sent ‘Down to the Countryside’. However, officially, many of them were denied their time in countryside as official ‘work’ time which meant they received less pension.
three years and then back to the same factory.

1976 – 1989 (21-37) she worked as an administrator in the same factory.

1989 – mid 1990 (37 – 40 years old), she gave up her job in the factory and decided to work for a company under the management of the Discipline Inspection Commission as she wanted to have more time to look after her daughter.

Mid1990s? to 2007 (40 – 55 years old): in the late 1980s new governmental reforms forbade any governmental departments from running their own companies, therefore, Jian’s company was merged with an Energy company where she started to work. It was unclear how long Jian worked there. In the end, she changed to work in the Commercial Department of the municipal government and retired from there at the age of 55.

1975/6 -1979 (23/4 – 27 years old): she taught in a secondary school in a remote area.


1952 (16 years old): Min initially

Since the introduction of elements of marketization into China’s economy, more and more governmental departments started to run their own businesses as a way to earn extra money. In 1984 the Central Government issued a regulation to forbid such behaviour which was regarded as a kind of corruption. However, in 1986 the Central Government had to issue another regulation to emphasis this principle again – anyone who worked for the government and any governmental department was not allowed to run any business or to open a company. Such policies/regulations are still effective but have never been able to totally stop the corruption resulting from officials involved in business.
Min
1956
worked as a “worker attached to family member” in the state-owned construction company where her older brother worked. She became a proper worker in November 1972 in the dental surgery department of a local hospital, starting from a ‘learner-level’.

Between the late 1970s to 1992 (20s – 36 years old): To improve the family’s financial situation, Min started to run all kinds of little street businesses alongside her full-time job as a dentist, selling eggs, shawls/scarves, hats, hot water bottles, seaweed, roasted peanuts, flowers and ice-cream.

1993 (37 years old) - present: the hospital she worked for wanted to sub-contract the dental surgery. Min regarded this as a great opportunity for her while most of her colleagues regarded it a risk. Min started to run her own contracted dental surgery independently.

Li Mahua
1954
6 (16 - 22) Worked on a farm for 3 years, then 16/23

1995 - 1997 (41-43): She applied to work in the Shanghai branch of her factory and was approved.

---

124 ‘Learner-level worker’ (学员) is similar to apprentice. Min actually described herself as being treated badly (being asked to do all the dirty and trivial jobs but was taught nothing), just like the apprentices in olden times.

125 In the early 1990s, many state-owned factories and organisations started a marketization process. The most used mechanism was to contract some department/division/branches to individual staff to get rid of what were seen as financial burdens. Once the department/branch was contracted out, it became financially independent.
Wang Xia 1965

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1982-1983 (17-18): | She worked as “worker associated with family members”;
| 1985-2003 (20-38): | Xia’s mother retired from a factory so Xia was employed formally as a worker there\(^{127}\), a SCOE. In the following year, this SCOE was merged with another factory and became a BCOE.
| 2003 (38):     | Xia was **laid off** by her employer.

\(^{126}\) *Neitui* (‘in-house retirement’ or ‘internal retirement’): This applied to workers who would have reached their legal retirement age within five or ten years but were made redundant. Internal retirees retained a connection with their workplace and received a proportion of their former wage (depending on the industry and financial situation of the enterprise) but no bonus or wage rise until they became eligible for state pension (Liu, 2007, p.87). There were women like Li Mahua who took advantage of such an arrangement so she could start her own family business; however, there were many other women, as analyzed in Liu’s (ibid) research, who were made redundant by such an arrangement.

\(^{127}\) ‘Replacing policy’: this a temporary employment policy taking place between the 1950s and 1980s. To solve the unemployment problem, the government allowed employees’ children to be employed by the same state-owned factory/companies when this employee retired. Initially, this policy was only applied in factories and companies and only one of the children who achieved the selection criteria was allowed to ‘replace’ their parents’ working place. However, by the 1980s, this policy extended to civil workers and some employers cheated on their health situation or age to be able to help their children find a good job. Also, many children were less qualified than their parents but were still employed as a result of special connections that their parents possessed. All these problems caused by this policy made the central government abandon the ‘replacing policy’ by 1986.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Age of Retirement</th>
<th>Career Path</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(16 - 21)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2000 – 2015: Changed status from worker to cadre worker at the lowest level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1985-2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(18 - 23)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2004 – 2015: Female inspectors were removed, so moved to work at village.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1994 -2004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

128 The main purpose of the work of inspectors was to monitor the number of children that each woman gave birth to. In the local rural area, the government allowed families having one daughter to have another child.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>to work in a Textile Factory (SCOE).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>She broke her leg and stopped work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978-1980</td>
<td>19-21</td>
<td>She worked temporarily for a tobacco Factory (BCOE) for more than a year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1997</td>
<td>21-38</td>
<td>She worked for the same factory where her mother worked. This factory was then merged with the Electronic Appliances Factory, a BCOE, and she worked there until she was laid off at 38 years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-1978</td>
<td>21-23</td>
<td>She came back to the city Bengbu to work in a colour textile factory, a SCOE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978-1997</td>
<td>23-42</td>
<td>Her father used some personal connections to transfer her to a BCOE – Electronic Appliances Factory. She also changed from worker status to an administrator in the office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-2004</td>
<td>42-49</td>
<td>Her factory was becoming insecure and she decided to quit her job and start her own business – running a restaurant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2014</td>
<td>49-59</td>
<td>She had an accident in her restaurant and nearly lost her hand. After that, she stopped the business and worked for her husband’s friend for about 10 years doing a part-time job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Her daughter wanted to try again having her own business. This time, she rented a Family business owner 41+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jiang Ping
1955
3 (19 – 21) She worked on a farm for about 1 year and was transferred to teach in a rural primary school for another year and a half.
place in the canteen of the best secondary school. Ping and her husband were fully involved in establishing and running this business with her daughter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Birth Year</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Time Span</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shen Hong</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1978 – early 1990s</td>
<td>She went back to the City Bengbu with her mother and siblings and was assigned a job as a warehouse keeper for a factory producing agricultural machines and tools (?). Early 1990s (35-37?): She was laid off by her factory. From early 1990s to 2006 (37 - 50): She worked in a local supermarket as a temporary worker before she retired at the age of 50. Worker 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han Xu</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1981 – 2013</td>
<td>There was an opportunity offered by the university her father worked for to select youths in the countryside to come back and work in the university. Xu passed the examination to be selected and finally came back to the city from the countryside and started to Cadre 40+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
work in this university. Her status was cadre.

2013 -2015 (52 -55): She retired from work. But soon after, she was re-hired by the university and she started to do some part-time work.

Table 22 The mothers’ work trajectories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GM’s Name/ Birth Year</th>
<th>Age of starting to work</th>
<th>Major Transition in Work</th>
<th>Total years of work (till 2015)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhao Jia 1977</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Worked for a foreign medicine company, personal assistant to the company’s director</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qian Hua 1981</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Worked as a lecturer for a local university</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun Lei 1980</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Worked for an insurance company in human resources</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wu Juan 1975</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Worked as a driver, then helped her mum in her dental clinic, then worked for a community clinic</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li Wei 1982</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Worked in a bank for 5 years, then helped in the family business for 2 years, stopped after having her son</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang Cheng 1989</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Worked as a sale girl for clothes shops for half a year, then helped the family business as an accountant</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen Tian 1985</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Worked as a teacher for a private school, stopped for four months maternity leave</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chu Xin 1990</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Worked as a rural migrant worker in a factory for about 5 years, stopped after having children, but started to establish a local restaurant in 2015</td>
<td>5-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhu Kun 1984</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Worked for a local company producing electric appliances</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiang Yuan 1981</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Worked as restaurant manager for about 4 years; Was pulled back to her hometown (Bengbu)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
by her mother and started to run a restaurant with her family, but it failed; Worked as restaurant manager again for about 7 years; Stopped after having her daughter for about 1 year; Started to establish her own restaurant/canteen with her parents again.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shen Meng</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Worked as an English teacher for a private school for 5 years; Stopped to have her daughter for 1 year; Worked as an English teacher for a public school for 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han Ting</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Worked as a nurse for a local university and studied alongside her work for different qualifications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix XIV Women’s Education Years and Levels

### Table 23 The women’s education years and levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Women’s Education Experiences across Three Generations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01 Zhao</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Junior middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02 Qian</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 Sun</td>
<td>5-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Training Secondary School (didn’t finish)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Started junior middle school in 1968, finished after 2 years. Then, later she went on to the Secondary Vocational School and studied for 2 more years and received her Diploma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 Wu</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 year primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 Li</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>years primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06 Wang</td>
<td>0-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07 Chen</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Junior middle school, did not finish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chu</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhu</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiang</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shen</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix XV Women’s Marriage and Motherhood Experiences

Table 24 Marriage and motherhood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of getting married</th>
<th>Age and gender of first child</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GG</td>
<td>GM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>07</td>
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<td>08</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>09</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----</td>
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<tr>
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<td>22</td>
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