



LUNDS
UNIVERSITET

Lund University
Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies
Masters Programme in Asian Studies
China Track
Fall Semester, 2007

WHERE INDIVIDUALISM GROWS AND HIERARCHIES CRUMBLE
- A case study on the One-Child Policy's influence on the workplace

Author: Caroline Fründt
Supervisor: Anne Jerneck

ABSTRACT

In contemporary urban China the younger generations in the white-collar sector are constantly striving to obtain a better employment in order to attain an improved career. The purpose of this case study was to show how the One-Child Policy has influenced the Chinese society, by indicating that there is an undergoing change within the workplace, as the Chinese singletons are starting to enter the labour market. By using information gathered from interviews, presented in a narrative, with urban, white-collar managers and employees born in the 1980s, two theories from the 1980s, Hofstede's *Culture's Consequences* and Bond and Hwang's *harmony-within-hierarchy*, were used to show that the former perceptions of the Chinese mindset are in need of revision, since the singletons in China are making the workplace more individualistic with hierarchies becoming more flat, due to the unique traits of the single child. In contemporary China the singletons are obtaining a lot of pressure to get well educated in order to secure a good career, with the aim of being able to provide for their parents when they retire as well as for their own family. This pressure is creating an even more individualistic and less hierarchical setting, as the singletons are changing jobs in order to reach the top of the workplace to guarantee a good future for themselves, as well as for their parents.

Keywords: One-Child Policy, individualism, collectivism, power distance, *harmony-within-hierarchy*, single child behaviour

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. METHODOLOGY	5
2.1 Methodology, research design and research questions	5
2.2 Theories	6
2.3 Primary sources: Interviews	7
2.4 Secondary sources	11
3. THE SINGLETON GENERATION	12
3.1 The One-Child Policy	12
3.2 Single child characteristics	13
3.3 Other factors influencing contemporary Chinese youth	14
4. DATA COLLECTION	14
4.1. The singletons' opinion	15
4.1.1. On being a single child	15
4.1.2. Family influence	16
4.1.3. About the workplace	18
4.1.4. Job-switching	21
4.2. Having a sibling	22
4.3. What managers think	23
4.3.1. The western managers	23
4.3.2. The managers with ethnic Chinese origin	24
5. ANALYSIS	25
5.1. The One-Child Policy and its influences on the singletons and their families	25
5.2. The workplace, a greenhouse where individualism grows and hierarchies crumble	27
6. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH	29
7. REFERENCES	32
<i>ANNEX 1: Position of the 40 Countries on the Power Distance and Individualism Scale</i>	34
<i>ANNEX 2: Interview questions</i>	35

1. INTRODUCTION

The One-Child Policy was introduced in China in 1979. This means that a generation of singletons started entering the labour market in the mid-2000s. The phenomenon of children growing up as an only child has been acknowledged during the past decades¹, singletons assumed to be individualistic, spoiled, and lacking the ability to solve conflicts, as an affect of not having a sibling to argue with during childhood². How have the personality traits of singletons influenced the Chinese society and the Chinese workplace in particular? In 1980 the Dutch sociologist Geert Hofstede made a study on differences in thinking and social action of 40 different modern nations, where he compared the four variables individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, masculinity vs. femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. China was not included in the graphs from this study; however, locations with a high density of population of Chinese origin e.g., Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as Singapore, were included in the research and will therefore be used as a guideline to where China would have been placed. In terms of the variable power distance, Hofstede also mentions that China would *score somewhere in the middle of the scale – not very far from Taiwan and Japan*.³ In Hofstede's study Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong were all put in the corner of collectivism and a high power distance (Annex 1). Since singletons are known to be individualistic⁴ it would be logical to assume that the entering of the generation growing up without siblings would have an effect on the Chinese workplace and thus making it more individualistic. It should therefore not be unreasonable to argue that the study made by Hofstede in the 1980s should be revised in terms of the predictions on where China would be situated in the graph. Furthermore, in 1986 the chapter *The Social Psychology of the Chinese People* was published, where Michael Harris Bond and Kwang-Kuo Hwang put forward the theory of *harmony-within-hierarchy* and how it explains Chinese social behaviour. My intention in this thesis is to describe how the singleton generation in China has contributed to undermine the traditional Chinese foundation with their individualistic personalities and career searching mindset.

Being a single child, as well as an only grandchild, myself, I have grown up in an environment of great expectations, hence my interest for the Chinese case where children

¹ Wang et al 1998:50

² Blom:2003: <http://www.sund.nu/docs/printArtikel.asp?art=46&tem=0&und=0>

³ Hofstede 1980:128-9

⁴ Blom:2003: <http://www.sund.nu/docs/printArtikel.asp?art=46&tem=0&und=0>, Hendersson 1991, Wang et al 2000:93

grow up without siblings. Although most individuals born in China in the 1980s have cousins, there are huge expectations⁵ on this generation as their parents are relying on them that they will provide for their elderly in the future⁶. The term *little emperors* is a concept that has become known to the Chinese society, as well as worldwide⁷. This refers to a situation where parents are spoiling their children in the same manner as the imperial court formerly spoiled its emperors. At the same time the parents demand discipline, requests, and expectations from their *little emperors*, just like the emperors were supposed to fulfil their duties.⁸

Also other influences contributed to create changes in China. Globalisation and modernisation forces are affecting the Chinese daily life and not the least within the workplace. The end of the *iron rice bowl*⁹ has contributed to a more open labour market, where it has become easier to switch jobs, something that was previously impossible but has now become more and more popular among the younger employees, as often mentioned in the media. Going from one job to another in order to acquire a better position within the workplace and also an improved salary is today a dilemma for managers, as it has become a struggle to improve working conditions in order to keep well-educated and talented staff. It could be argued that this phenomenon is due to foreign influence and a result of China opening its borders and getting increasingly affected by globalisation and modernisation forces. However, the reason for this situation could also be that singletons in contemporary China feel more and more pressure from their parents to get a good education in order to obtain an improved work status including higher wages and better working conditions¹⁰. In the past, workers were delegated a job after finishing their education and usually stayed faithful to their superiors until retirement¹¹. Today the situation is somewhat different¹¹, as it is often discussed that the newer generations that are entering the labour market have a more individualistic attitude. They are told from an early stage by their parents that they have the ability to excel¹² and should therefore not be stuck at one place just to serve their superiors.

⁵ Fong 2004:128

⁶ Tsui and Rich 2002:75

⁷ Lee:2007:www.msnbc.msn.com/id/20165004/ ,

Malesevic:2007: www.st.nu/noje/kultur.php?action=visa_artikel&id=643833

⁸ Fong 2004:30

⁹ *Iron rice bowl*: Iron rice bowl of state employment meant secure, if modest, retirement pensions and health benefits. (White 2003:183)

¹⁰ Fong 2004:87

¹¹ White 2003:183

¹² Fong 2004:53

In short, this thesis describes some aspects on single child behaviour and how the Chinese One-Child Policy has influenced the workplace in terms of the generation born in the 1980s. A generation that grew up as singletons has taken a path away from the traditional Confucian values within the workplace tending to be less hierarchical and more individualistic in comparison with their counterparts from older generations.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Methods, research design and research questions

Since the singletons' influence on the workplace is so far a rather unexplored research area, I have decided to use the case study format for my study, as it allows the researcher to investigate a contemporary phenomenon¹³ with a small amount of empirical material. The case study format allows me to use information I have gathered from interviews conducted in China. Although it will not be possible to generalise the outcomes of my study on a whole generation, I will have the ability to draw theoretical conclusions from the information gathered¹⁴ from interviews in China during September and October 2007.

For the analysis of the materials gathered from the interviews I am going to test theories¹⁵. The point of departure for this study will be based on two theories from the 1980s on the traditional position of Chinese workers in terms of hierarchical measures and individualism versus collectivism. Since China, by many observers, is known to be a collectivistic and hierarchical nation, the theories should without difficulty be able to endure my empirical data and show that they are still accurate¹⁶. However, by using primary and secondary sources my aim is to show that the situation in contemporary China is undergoing a change and that the One-Child Policy may be the causal mechanism¹⁷ for this process. In the conclusion I will thereafter argue that the theories used for this study are outdated and are in need of revision. I have therefore worked closely with the theories that are going to be used for this, when carrying out the interviews for my research, and asked questions strongly related to the theories in order to test whether or not they are still accurate.

¹³ Yin 2003:13

¹⁴ *ibid.*:16

¹⁵ Ragin 1994:193

¹⁶ Esaiasson et al 2007

¹⁷ *ibid.*:125

2.2. Theories

The starting point for this paper will be two theories taken from Hofstede (1980) on individualism-collectivism and power distance¹⁸ and Bond and Hwang (1986) on *harmony-within-hierarchy*¹⁹. These two theories have been chosen as they were published in the 1980s, when the One-Child Policy was brand new and researchers had not yet started to study how the policy would come to influence the Chinese society. The two theories both involve concepts on how Chinese culture influence Chinese traditional behaviour, in the sense that Chinese people used to be looked upon as collectivistic and living in a hierarchical society.

Even though China is not included in Hofstede's research, the Chinese traditions, e.g. being strongly hierarchical²⁰ and having a collectivistic mindset²¹, are mentioned at several occasions in the study, especially when it comes to individualism. According to Hofstede the *western concept of "personality" does not exist in Chinese tradition (...) people have a sense of collective identity*²², and thereby leads us into the argument that collectivism comes more natural to individuals with Chinese origin with reference to the outcome of his study where Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore (Annex 1) all attained a relatively low level compared to western countries. Hofstede estimates China to be somewhere close to Taiwan and Japan in terms of power distance²³, which implies that he predicts China to be one of the most hierarchical countries in his study. He further discusses how Japan imported Confucianism and vertical hierarchy from China²⁴ and thereby sets up a foundation for my discussion on whether or not modern China is changing and making Hofstede's study outdated.

Bond and Hwang argue that *harmony-within-hierarchy* is a concept that could be used to explain Chinese social behaviour²⁵. The hierarchical structures of Chinese family life as well as between friends are due to the Confucian tradition²⁶. Arguably this would also be the reason for hierarchical structures within the workplace. According to Bond and Hwang, the Chinese tradition supports an individual to *maintain hierarchical order and harmonious*

¹⁸ Hofstede (1980)

¹⁹ Bond and Hwang (1986)

²⁰ Hofstede 1980:128

²¹ *ibid*:215

²² *ibid*:215

²³ *ibid*:128-9

²⁴ *ibid*:132

²⁵ Bond and Hwang 1986:213-214

²⁶ *ibid*:215

*interpersonal relationships*²⁷. The term ‘individualistic’ in Chinese has a negative undertone²⁸ and the Chinese therefore have a collectivist interest to prevent interpersonal disharmony²⁹. However, a change in Chinese behaviour is mentioned, as it is claimed that *more modern Chinese* are more like westerners in valuing their personal standards when making behavioural decisions³⁰, an argument that creates an opening for my study.

With reference to the above-mentioned theories, interviews conducted in China, as well as secondary material, I will try to answer the following questions in my study:

- Has there been a change within the workplace, regarding individualism, hierarchies, and power distance, due to the entrance of the single-child generation born in the 1980s? And if so in what way?
- What are the singletons’ perspectives of the single child phenomenon?
- What is the biggest difference when comparing older generations to the singleton generation in the workplace?

2.3. Primary sources: Interviews

A total sum of fifteen interviews was carried out during fieldwork in China from September to October 2007. The interviews were of semi-structured³¹ nature, which refers to that the subject and what was to be included in the interview was decided beforehand (Annex 2), although the order and wording of questions was not fixed during the interview. What is positive with this method is that, since the interview is not strictly structured in advance, the dialogue becomes more relaxed and creates a more friendly atmosphere between the interviewer and the interviewee as it at the same time is more open to follow-up questions related to what has been said by the interviewee. Among the negative parts is, for instance, the circumstance of having differently phrased questions results in a risk of getting incomparable answers. For my research, however, the downsides did not appear to be overly negative, as I was not aiming at comparing answers but preferably gather the information the informers were willing to share, rather than to compare how they responded to my questions.

²⁷ Bond and Hwang 1986:223

²⁸ *ibid*:222

²⁹ *ibid*:256

³⁰ *ibid*:221

³¹ Kvale 1996:124

In total three different groups of informants were selected: singletons born in the 1980s, people born in the 1980s who grew up with one sibling, and managers in China who are working with older generations as well as the younger generations, which would be included in the first group mentioned. (Table 2.1) Other groups could also have been valuable to interview, as, for instance, it was suggested that I should have interviewed parents. However, as the time for fieldwork was rather limited and I wanted to focus on the workplace, the three groups that have been presented were of main importance for this study. For the first two groups there were a number of criteria that needed to be met. Firstly, that they were born in the 1980s, for the reason that the One-Child Policy was introduced in 1979 and the majority of children born thereafter would then naturally be singletons. Thus, the reason for not choosing individuals born in the 1990s would be that they have not yet entered the labour market and therefore do not fit my study. The second criterion was that they had grown up in a large Chinese city and were now also living in a large city, although not necessarily the one where they had grown up. There is a considerable difference between urban and rural life in China³² and also, the implementation of the One-Child Policy has not been as successful in the rural areas³³. To make a limitation regarding the interviewees' location origin and current home was therefore necessary. Thirdly, the interviewees needed to have a college education, due to the reason of narrowing down the sample. The struggle for high school students to get into the right university, or to get into any university at all is very tough in China today, as they are the ones who are predicted to be successful later on in their careers³⁴. This criterion was decided upon as I expected college graduates to be the most individualistic and career-motivated and would therefore be a suitable target group for this study. Since only college-graduates were chosen for my study, it resulted in only white-collar employees being selected for the interviews. This should be taken into consideration when reading this paper, as employees in other areas might have answered differently to my questions. The last criteria set for both groups was that they needed to be employed or between jobs. Since this is a study on how the single-child policy has influenced the workplace it was of importance that the interviewees had at least some experience of the working field. In order to not create a gender bias and to get a general opinion among the people growing up in the 1980s in my empirical material, there was an effort made to try to keep a balance between male and female interviewees within the group.

³² White 2003:185

³³ Tsui and Rich 2002:75

³⁴ Fong 2004:53

The interviewees in this group were all selected through snowballing, which means that I found the interviewees through previously established contacts in China who introduced me to people who corresponded with the preset requirements. However, twice I was introduced to people who in the middle of the interview it turned out actually had a sibling. Instead of discarding these interviews I instead decided on using them for comparison and thereby making them valuable³⁵.

For the managers there were only a few, but valuable, criteria. First of all they needed to be a manager of a workplace with people from different generations, where the difference between older and younger generations would be noticeable. Secondly, the managers needed to have their workplace located in a large Chinese city, since the target group for this study is people born in the 1980s who are have grown up and are living in cities. There was also an attempt to include both managers working for state-owned companies and privately owned companies. However, finding managers willing to be interviewed turned out to be more difficult than was predicted and I therefore ended up with only one manager in a state-owned company. Like the employees, the managers were all working at white-collar workplaces, to make sure that there would be no divergence between the answers given during the employee and manager interviews. The managers were selected using different strategies. Two of them were approached in cafés, whereas the other three were found through mutual acquaintances. Three interviews took place at a café and the other two took place in the managers' homes. In addition, I managed to get a balance between western and ethnic Chinese managers, as two were western and three were Chinese, of which one was Taiwanese.

The interviews took place in Beijing, Shanghai, and Nanjing and were mainly carried out at cafés with the anticipation that this kind of informal setting would create a more comfortable environment for the interviewees. The idea was that having a conversation over a cup of coffee would be more natural, rather than just sitting at a table with my MP3-player between the interviewee and me. This became obvious when doing interviews at a workplace in Nanjing, as the interviewees were not as relaxed as those with a coffee cup in their hands.

³⁵ Ragin 1994

However, the interviews in Nanjing were either carried out at the workplace of the interviewees or at their homes. Doing interviews at the workplace might have caused the interviewees to be more careful with their answers when it comes to, for instance, the question of whether or not they would change jobs in order to earn more money and reach a higher social position. For example, there was a higher rate of interviewees in Nanjing answering that they thought that job switching was immoral and that they would never consider doing such a thing. However, when answering non-work related questions the interviewees appeared to talk more freely and during the entire interview no one was nearby to overhear our conversations.

Some of the thoughts and ideas raised by my tutors in Shanghai, professor Yu Hai and professor Peng Xizhe, will also be included to give a voice to what they think about the current situation in China.

Most of the interviews were recorded using an MP3-player with consent from the interviewees, and all interviewees were informed about that the interviews were going to be used in this study. They were also offered anonymity, although only one insisted on not being revealed by either first or last name. In order to identify the interviewees I have chosen to use the Chinese interviewees' last name and the western interviewees' first name when mentioned in this study. The interviews were carried out in either English or Chinese, depending on which language felt most comfortable for the interviewee. For the interviews held in Chinese, I have done my utmost to make sure that the translations of the answers are as close to the original Chinese wording as possible.

Table 2.1. List of interviewees

Name	City	Age	Gender
Single-child			
1. Sun	Beijing	24	F
2. Liu	Beijing	23	F
3. Qin	Beijing	24	M
4. Luo	Shanghai	25	M
5. Shu	Nanjing	26	F
6. Zhan	Nanjing	26	M
7. Lu	Nanjing	25	F
8. Bao	Nanjing	26	F
One sibling			
9. Lau	Beijing	23	M
10. Yan	Nanjing	27	F
Manager			
11. Betty	Beijing	-	F
12. James	Beijing	-	M
13. Frank	Shanghai	-	M
14. Tang	Nanjing	-	M
15. Hu	Nanjing	-	F

2.4. Secondary sources

Books and articles will be used for my argumentation, in order to show indications that a generation, who grew up as an only child in urban China and has recently entered the labour market, has influenced the working place to become more individualistic and less hierarchical. To show indications of my argument I will mainly use *Only Hope: Coming of age under China's One-Child Policy* by Vanessa Fong. It was recommended to me by professor Pan Tianshu and turned out to be very helpful for my research. This book contains vast research on daily life for children who have grown up as singletons and were at the time for the study in the process of getting in to higher education in the city of Dalian in northeast China. Since this study also includes the parents' perspectives, which my research lacks, it completes the aspect of family influence on the 1980s generation. The study by Vanessa Fong also consists of anecdotes from singletons and parents, which are also valuable for my research and will therefore be used to support my argumentation.

Elisabeth Schönbeck is a Swedish behavioural scientist, who has done extensive research on certain traits carried by siblings at different positions in the family as well as singletons, and how their family status is affecting their personal characteristics. At this point no book has yet

been published by Elisabeth Schönbeck and articles about her research will therefore be referenced when discussing how a childhood without siblings affect a singletons life and persona.

To the extent of my knowledge, there has not yet been any research made on how the singletons are affecting the workplace. I am therefore mainly going to use secondary sources on single child behaviour and how singletons are having an impact on other parts of Chinese society along with sources on Chinese culture and management.

3. THE SINGLETON GENERATION

3.1. The One-Child Policy

After a long-stretched introduction of the One-Child Policy, as it was first presented in 1979 with official recommendations for married couples to wait before they had a second or third child, the policy was finally put into practice in September 1980³⁶. With the fear of getting stuck in a Malthusian trap³⁷ and with the effort to more rapidly develop the nation, with an improved living standard, higher consumptions and an increased number of the population with better education³⁸, the policy was established to meet the government's aspirations of a faster development. With a population growing rapidly in the 1970s³⁹ and new influences from abroad due to the Open Door Policy when China opened up to foreign countries, there was a need for China to recover after the destructive years of the Cultural Revolution⁴⁰. With the vast population, China had to come up with a quick solution to decrease population growth in order to increase economic growth⁴¹. And so the One-Child Policy was born.

Although the One-Child Policy has sometimes been used as a symbol for Chinese cruelty in efforts to limit the childbirths, due to reports on forced abortions and sterilisations, as well as other harsh practices⁴², the one child-policy has also had its contributions. For instance, the girls growing up in large cities have been given an increased opportunity to better education⁴³. In the past, the money and time has mainly been spent on boys. However, with the limitation to only have one child the focal point of parents in contemporary urban China has been

³⁶Naughton 2007:168

³⁷Fong 2004:70

³⁸ibid:28

³⁹Deutsch 2006:367

⁴⁰Fong 2004

⁴¹ibid:14

⁴²Naughton 2007:169

⁴³Tsui and Rich 2002:74

changed⁴⁴, and today not only boys get adequate schooling, but also girls get a better chance to excel in academia.

Recently the Chinese government introduced an exception to the One-Child Policy, which states that if two singletons get married they are allowed to have two children⁴⁵. Nevertheless, it appears as if the Party has succeeded with its propaganda to invoke couples to have only one child, as there are reports on couples not wanting more than one child, since it is too expensive to raise an extra child⁴⁶.

3.2. Single child characteristics

According to the Swedish behavioural scientist Elisabeth Schönbeck, individuals who have grown up without any siblings tend to be the focal point of their parents and are often put on a pedestal.⁴⁷ Since the singletons tend to get more attention from their parents, than those who have grown up with siblings, they are more used to spending time with adults and authorities⁴⁸. They usually receive encouragement and support from their parents and are often ahead intellectually. Singletons like to acquire attention and do not hesitate to try new things⁴⁹. However, on the downside, since they grow up without siblings and competition, singletons do not have as much practice in handling conflicts, compared to those who have siblings⁵⁰.

From a sociological perspective Professor Yu Hai, professor in urban sociology at Fudan University in Shanghai⁵¹, claims that being a single child has an impact on personality. Most of the family resources are spent on the child, which leads to shortcomings in personality, e.g. selfishness. From early on, the singletons learn that they are the centre, and according to Professor Yu, this makes the singletons become only concerned about themselves and disregarding others' feelings. The singletons' strongpoint, on the other hand, is that they become independent and attain the ability to handle problems they are facing. In addition this independence makes the singletons more likely to become individualistic⁵², which is very

⁴⁴ Deutsch 2006:368

⁴⁵ Saywell: 2000:98

⁴⁶ Saywell 2000:98, Fong 2004:51

⁴⁷ Blom:2003:<http://www.sund.nu/docs/printArtikel.asp?art=46&tem=0&und=0>

⁴⁸ ibid.

⁴⁹ ibid.

⁵⁰ ibid.

⁵¹ Professor Yu Hai, 2007-10-04

⁵² Professor Yu Hai, 2007-10-04

different from traditional Chinese personality. Professor Yu sees a problem with people growing up without siblings, as he wants to emphasise that children need a partner during childhood. For a greater possibility to what Professor Yu Hai calls *positive interaction*, which means that a child spends time with someone around your own age and with the same socio-economic background, a child needs a sibling. An individual's personality is developed through interaction with others and expectations are created within society. Expectations transform into a person's personality as well as interaction with others⁵³. The One-Child Policy has thus had a major impact when forming the singletons' personalities.

3.3. Other factors influencing contemporary Chinese youth

There are a lot of influences from various directions affecting contemporary China potentially undermining former collectivist mindsets. After opening up the country in 1978 with the Open Door Policy, the affects of globalisation and modernisation forces became more apparent. With an increased number of foreign companies moving to China, western values within the white-collar workplace, such as work ethics and working conditions, have become more and more common.

*There are other options today. When our parents were young they did not have McDonalds and Starbucks. Life looks differently for young Chinese now. And it is all having an impact on how we lead our lives.*⁵⁴

The rapid development of the Chinese economy has had its share in what China has become today, and the lives of the urban singleton generations have also had its fair share of this influence.

Another aspect is the fact that the parents of the single-child generation of the 1980s who grew up under the Cultural Revolution, which have an influence on the singletons' upbringing, potentially also fostering a more individualistic mindset. The generations growing up in the 1960s and 1950s were highly affected by the reforms introduced by Mao. Universities were closed down and the students were sent out to the countryside to help the peasants with their labour. Due to this reason, the parents of the generation born in the 1980s could have a greater incentive to motivate their children to get a good education leading to a

⁵³ Professor Yu Hai, 2007-10-04

⁵⁴ Interview: Sun

better working career, as the children would fulfil the dreams their parents never had the possibility to accomplish⁵⁵.

4. DATA COLLECTION

As I during my fieldwork managed to obtain valuable interviews, with phrases that expressed so much that I did not want to discarded or alter, I decided to use a narrative analysis⁵⁶ when presenting my empirical material. A narrative *of a group contribute to constituting the group's identity and to holding the group together*⁵⁷, since my aim was to create a picture to show an indication of how the situation is changing for singletons and managers in the white-collar workplace in contemporary China, the narrative approach was used to present my collected data.

4.1. The singletons' opinions

The interviews with the singletons in China were mainly focusing on their personal views on how being a single child had contributed to their personal development, how parents and relatives were influencing decisions taken in their daily lives, as well as what they think of the workplace, including how they perceived colleagues and managers and what they thought about their own position in the workplace.

4.1.1. On being a single child

It is the younger generations that are assumed to lead the way to improved livelihoods as a result from thorough schooling from a young age. Some of the older singleton generations claim that this could be a problem in the future.

There is a difference between the single children in China. Single children who were born in the 1990s are really spoiled. I'm a bit worried about the people born in the 90s. When I was young there were not so many toys and not so many attractions, but today it is huge. It's a lot different from when I was young. The parents of the children born in the 90s have better education than previous generations and have more demands on the education given to their children.

⁵⁵ Professor Peng Xizhe 2007-10-11, Tsui and Rich 2002: 84

⁵⁶ Kvale 1996:199

⁵⁷ Kvale 1996:200

*These children will probably want to be liberated one day. They are getting too much education and too much pressure, it is not going to last*⁵⁸.

While others consider that the possibilities have increased for the future generations.

*Parents today have big hope in their children. A lot of parents force their kids to learn a foreign language or play the piano when they are very young and when they get older they have a greater capability. It's capacity it's a good thing. In the future people will have a greater capacity*⁵⁹.

Being an only child puts a singleton in the family limelight. They are not only acquiring good education they are also expected to achieve all those wants and wishes that their parents have placed upon them.

*All my parents' concentration is on me.*⁶⁰

When asked what the biggest difference between singletons and those with siblings were, the answer was most of the time that the singletons feel alone.

*I was very lonely as a child. What I lack is how to be around people in harmony. I tend to be alone. I'm quite comfortable with being alone. I try to make friends and get used to be around people, but it's difficult. I don't think I would've had that problem if I had siblings*⁶¹.

Another difference was that, since they do not have any siblings, they felt that they are not as used to interacting with other people and also that they are accustomed to getting to lead the way without any argumentation.

*My parents have siblings; they learned how to get along with people. I don't know how to get along with people. When I went to university I lived in a dormitory with six other people. I didn't know how to interact with them. I have some friends who have siblings. I see a difference between them and me. They always have plans they always make the decisions; they have younger brothers and are used to lead the way. They take care of us single child as if we are their younger brothers. But we don't like it; we want to decide for ourselves*⁶².

When being forced to cooperate with others, as for instance at school or within the workplace, it could result in a crash between the single child and the other singletons who are accustomed

⁵⁸ Interview: Sun

⁵⁹ Interview: Qin

⁶⁰ Interview: Sun

⁶¹ Interview: Luo

⁶² Interview: Qin

to being in the centre. All of the singletons interviewed agreed on that they had a tendency to be more spoiled, than they would be if they did not have a sibling.

You don't want to share with others. If you bring oranges back to the office, you don't want to share them with your colleagues⁶³.

4.1.2. Family influence

Regarding family life, parents still have a tight grip on their only child even when they have left home⁶⁴. They are in close contact and discuss anything from work⁶⁵ to when it is time to find and who would be suitable as a future spouse⁶⁶.

My boyfriend's parents already bought an apartment for us when we get married. It's very convenient to know that they will be close. And they probably want to know that we won't leave them behind.⁶⁷

Even though most of them claim that there is not much pressure from the parents to excel within the workplace⁶⁸, the fact that the parents are in constant contact with their only offspring could be some sort of confirmation to the claim that there is pressure, although it is perhaps not as noticeable as it would be if the parents told them out loud that they needed to get a good career in order to provide for them later on.

The welfare system in China is not working very well; we have to take care of our parents when they get old. It gives us children a lot of pressure⁶⁹.

Being a single child has an impact on the child as well as on the parents. Even though the urban, well-educated singletons often find good and relatively well-paid jobs, it takes them some time to reach the salary where they can provide for both themselves and their parents.

If I had an older sister, perhaps my parents would have already retired. It is much easier for two children to take care of two parents. But since I am the only one, they are bearing in mind that I not yet earn enough money to provide for them both, so they keep on working for a couple of more years⁷⁰.

In addition, there appeared to be a considerable difference between what the parents expect from themselves, compared to what is expected from their children.

⁶³ Interview: Luo

⁶⁴ Interview: Sun, Luo, Liu

⁶⁵ Interview: Luo

⁶⁶ Interview: Sun

⁶⁷ Interview: Liu

⁶⁸ Interview: Luo, Qin, Zhan, Lu, Bao

⁶⁹ Interview: Qin

⁷⁰ Interview: Shu

*My parents are normal Chinese guys, with normal jobs, with normal lives. They would never have quit their jobs to get a better one. My parents did not have the same opportunities like I do.*⁷¹

Parents are putting a great deal of money and effort in their up-bringing of the only offspring, with the result that the singleton feels compelled to do extremely well both at school and within the workplace.

*I was top one in my class during my last year of university. My parents were very proud. If I didn't succeed in my studies I would feel ashamed when facing my parents. They have spent so much on me. I can't let them down.*⁷²

4.1.3. About the workplace

As the singletons are gradually entering the working sphere, the expectations that have been raised when growing up begin to develop into the singletons having expectations on their work.

*My parents have confidence in me. They have spent a lot on me so that I can have a better life in the future. I am competitive and I am very confident about myself, sometimes too confident. I have big hope about myself. I sometimes think I'm better than others. I succeed in some areas, and in others I don't. I can handle failure I'm still young*⁷³.

The singletons felt that they did not have much pressure from their family to get a good career. However, they have great expectations on themselves to be successful in the workplace in order to earn a better living, to provide for both themselves and their parents in the future.

*The social security system is not that good, and if you are a single child you should spend more effort. You can call it pressure, but I would say it is more responsibility*⁷⁴.

The traits mentioned by the singletons, when interviewed, e.g. selfishness, not be willing to share, and having problems interacting with other people⁷⁵, are also affecting the workplace. It can be assumed that most of the people born in the 1980s are now finishing university and are finding their way into the working field. Since the singleton characteristics are different from Chinese traditional behaviour when it comes to being collectivistic and existing in a

⁷¹ Interview: Liu

⁷² Interview: Luo

⁷³ Interview: Qin

⁷⁴ Interview: Luo

⁷⁵ Interview: Luo, Qin, Sun, Liu

harmonious hierarchy, it could be argued that these new behavioural norms are starting to disrupt the order that was formerly known within the workplace.

People in my generation expect everyone else to do them a favour. Anything that goes wrong is always someone else's fault⁷⁶.

When discussing teamwork several of the interviewees responded that they preferred to work alone, rather than being in a group. Some claimed that, being a single child, they were not used to cooperate and listen to others' ideas and carrying out work assignments alone would speed up the work process, whereas others responded that working in a group could at times be more fruitful, although it was difficult to make decisions as a group, since it usually consisted of resolute singletons.

I think the One-Child Policy has a lot of influence on China become more and more individualistic. Since we don't have any siblings we learn how to cope on our own and we no longer have the concept of acting together as a group. This is also noticeable at work. Although we have lunch together and often have fun together as colleagues, we usually stick to ourselves when working and tend to not work as a team when dealing with our work assignments⁷⁷.

A recurring topic during the interviews was the issue of being able to speak their mind and having a chance to express their opinions to the superiors, with the aim of influencing their own working conditions.

In my workplace the managers have an open mind, taking suggestions and opinions from employees⁷⁸.

Being able to make their voice heard appeared to be one of the most important issues for the singletons. To have the capability to influence the workplace in order to make an improvement for themselves and their colleagues was central for most interviewees. Furthermore, most of them felt that they needed to gain something from their work assignments.

I quit my previous job, because I couldn't learn anymore there. They promised me that I would learn better English if I took the job, but it didn't really happen. It was better for me to quit it, because I wasn't satisfied with not learning anything from that job⁷⁹.

⁷⁶ Interview: Luo

⁷⁷ Interview: Bao

⁷⁸ Interview: Qin

⁷⁹ Interview: Luo

When asked what was most important for them when looking for a job, all of the interviewees responded that they wanted to gain something from the working experience, and if they did no longer feel that they were learning anything within one work position they would not hesitate to look for another.

When I applied for my job, I knew that it would include training for one year. I can have good use of that training in the future. It will look good on my resume. I have to work for my company for another year, but then I'll start looking for a better-paid job⁸⁰.

To reach the top is perhaps a goal that not only Chinese singletons want to achieve. However, this was one of the few occasions where old traditions were mentioned. To respect superiors and elders and show them gratitude was a repeatedly used method in order to climb to an elevated status on the employment ladder.

We always respect people in higher position. We have to do that to get a higher position ourselves⁸¹

From an early stage in life, some of the singleton interviewees responded, they are introduced to how to treat and respect people who are senior and superior to them. To pay a visit at teachers' homes and to bring gifts from travels for instance are not uncommon in order to guarantee a better position at school or at work.

I'm a single child and my parents would do their best to guarantee that I would get good grades and have a good relationship with my teachers. It is important to keep good relationships with your teachers. I would do the same to my boss. It's the Chinese proper way.⁸²

Even though the competition on the Chinese labour market is tough, as a vast number of students are graduating from college each year, no singleton interviewed uttered any worry about getting unemployed. The interviewees appeared to be confident about finding a new one, and were more concerned about moving upward on the hierarchy steps within the working field rather than to not have a job at all. Since all the singletons interviewed were in their twenties, their parents had not yet retired and some of them responded that the parents would help them out if they would lose a job while looking for a new one.

⁸⁰ Interview: Liu

⁸¹ Interview: Qin

⁸² Interview: Luo

4.1.4. Job-switching

From my own experience, people switching jobs, in order to find a better one has become a more frequent issue in China today.

China is developing and people deserve to earn more and fulfil their ambitions and succeed in their field. That's why they change their job. It is different from traditional Chinese working habits⁸³.

To have a chance for a better life than their parents' generation is an ambition that drives the generation born in the 1980s to strive for better living-conditions and to get their fair share of the economic development.

To earn money is really important in China today. That's why I need a good job. That's why I need to change jobs. I want a better life⁸⁴.

The singleton generation has become used to getting the best parts of life. Their parents have been struggling to get them into the best possible higher education and helped them out in all possible ways to get their children on the right track⁸⁵. When entering the workplace, this part of the Chinese population does no longer agree to the hierarchical structures that have been followed in the past.

My supervisor is good, because he likes to listen to the opinions of the employees. It's against Chinese culture to take suggestions from employees⁸⁶.

They expect more from life at the same time as they insist on being respected for who they are.

I just quit my recent job. They didn't treat us as equals. They just expected us to do what they told us to do. It is really important to me to be treated as an equal. I don't want someone to talk to me like I was not worth anything.⁸⁷

According to the interviewees, large companies and workplaces with western influenced managers are considered to be a better place to enable a career and have a more common practice regarding employee influence⁸⁸.

Most interviewees seemed to be positive or at least understanding to the new trend of changing jobs, as it provides a possibility to reach a better position in the workplace at the same time as it makes it easier to leave a job if the employee does not feel contented at the current job. In addition, to have practice in the working field is a desirable qualification when

⁸³ Interview: Qin

⁸⁴ Interview: Luo

⁸⁵ Fong 2004:39

⁸⁶ Interview: Qin

⁸⁷ Interview Liu

⁸⁸ Interview: Luo, Shu, Liu

applying for a job. Changing jobs is therefore a method to get more knowledge about the working field for the new white-collar workers.

Job switching has become more and more common with the economic development in China. It's about getting experience. Experience is becoming more and more important in working life today⁸⁹.

Some concerns were, however, raised concerning people changing jobs in an overly rapid pace.

Career is important, experience is also important. If you switch jobs you will get more experience and an improved career. If you switch jobs too fast, you never find out what that job was like, and you never get the experience and knowledge you could have gained. Then job switching is no good⁹⁰.

4.2. Having a sibling

The two interviewees who has one sibling both claimed that there was no difference in money and time invested in them compared with their sibling. The penalty fees induced on families that chose to have more than one child are fairly high for Chinese standards. It could therefore be argued that these two-child families, in which my two interviewees grew up, have a better economic standard, and therefore have the possibility to put equal efforts into both children.

My parents wanted my brother to have a sibling, someone to keep him company. They had to spend a lot of money on fines. I don't have much pressure, according to Chinese tradition, it is the oldest child who has to take care of the parents, and since I'm the younger sibling I don't feel much pressure⁹¹.

As a result of the One-Child Policy, there are today more female students entering university as parents only have one child to invest in⁹². The only female non-singleton did, however, not agree with this argument.

I think it's because of the development China is undergoing that I got the opportunity to go to college. It doesn't matter that I have an older brother. My parents think it's very important to have a university degree, it gives me more opportunities for the future. It is really important to have good education. It gives you a shortcut in life⁹³.

⁸⁹ Interview: Zhan

⁹⁰ Interview: Lu

⁹¹ Interview: Yan

⁹² Tsui and Rich 2002:74

⁹³ Interview: Yan

When asked what they considered the biggest difference between them and the singletons, they both answered that they believe that they are less lonely, and that their burden is not as heavy as for the singletons to help out their parents in the future. They considered themselves to have more freedom to do what they want in life, rather than focusing on being ready to taking care of their parents when they get older.

Single child probably has more pressure. They need to take care of their parents. I will be the one taking care of my parents since I am the older brother, but I will always have my younger brother around. He can help out too. I don't want to work really hard to get more money and better status. I want to achieve something. I want to do my best in my work. I want to make a difference⁹⁴.

4.3. What managers think

4.3.1. Western managers

The two western managers interviewed for my study were both of the same opinion that there is a change in the Chinese mindset within the workplace.

There is a gold rush in China at the moment, and they know it. It's about money. They try to make as much money as they probably can, rather than to look long term. There is a lot of change around here; they are looking for more prestige and more money⁹⁵.

One of the greatest dilemmas is to hold on to good employees and in order to keep the well-educated and talented staff; incentives are offered to make them stay.

We try to take them out to meetings and show them the products and involve them in the research to give them ownership of the job, good grants, and of course encouragement. Encouragement is a difficult one. If you give them too much encouragement it is an incentive to make them go, because they get so good. You make sure that they are still rooted to the ground and you don't give them too many compliments because then that goes over their head as well⁹⁶.

Opposed to the singleton interviewees' claim that they wanted to have the ability to discuss their opinions and be heard by the management, the western managers did not agree.

⁹⁴ Interview: Lau

⁹⁵ Interview: Frank

⁹⁶ Interview: Frank

They are not interested in getting influence. It's just about money. I don't think they really care. Actually it is really difficult to find someone to take on responsibility. "It wasn't me it was someone else."⁹⁷

The issue of teamwork was also discussed with the managers, to see if they had noticed any single child characteristics among their employees in the workplace.

Their communication skills are still limited you need a listener to gel it all together. To work in a group and actually solve a problem is really difficult for them to do.⁹⁸

Also the topic of family pressure had been acknowledged among the western managers, as the singletons are making an effort to show their relatives that they have been worth the money spent on them for a good education.

Their parents have spent a lot of money on good education, and when they come out they have a lot of pressure to show what they can do. They want to show off to their parents and grandparents.⁹⁹

The singletons have great confidence in themselves, being the centre of the family from early childhood onwards. When entering the workplace they still have the conviction that they are the best.

If you do find someone that is good you try to keep them as long as you can. It is not uncommon that people ask for a 100 percent raise. You wouldn't think of that in the west, that someone would walk up to you and ask for a doubled salary¹⁰⁰.

4.3.2. Managers with ethnic Chinese origin

The remaining three managers were all ethnic Chinese, where two of them were from the Mainland, whereas the third grew up on Taiwan. To learn about the one child situation in a Chinese workplace from a Taiwanese perspective was very valuable, as the differences between a China with and without a generation of singletons became apparent.

I see a lot of difference between Taiwan and Mainland China, on Taiwan they all have brothers and sisters and they know how to share their lives with others. But here on the Mainland, they are more concentrated on themselves. In my workplace, the employees know how to work as a team, but there is always competition. Their parents tell them from when they are very young that they are

⁹⁷ Interview: Frank

⁹⁸ Interview: James

⁹⁹ Interview: James

¹⁰⁰ Interview: Frank

*the best. So when they work they also want to be the best and not share sources and information with others.*¹⁰¹

The two interviewees from Mainland China were both parents to singletons and emphasised the importance to understand the one child situation that managers are facing in contemporary China. Worth noticing was also that the singletons never leave their parents' minds, as in the middle of an interview that was supposed to be about the manager's workplace she started to discuss the concerns about her daughter, before shifting back to the original topic again.

*My child is my future. I only have her and I need to make sure that she will be all right in the future, because if she is not doing well me and my husband will not be doing well either. The children growing up today have a very different situation from when I grew up; they have to stand a lot of stress. If they are not among the best in their class they will not have a future. I can see how it is affecting them at work. My employees are all very competitive. They need to be the best at work at all times. Sometimes it gets very stressful.*¹⁰²

With all the pressure and stress of being a single child in China lies also another dilemma.

*The children growing up today have not been used to free time. During school they always had to study. It's difficult to teach someone how to relax and have fun. The employees at my workplace who are singletons and don't yet have a family are always working, because they don't really know what else to do*¹⁰³.

5. ANALYSIS

5.1. The One-Child Policy and its influences on the singletons and their families

The phenomena of having a whole generation, with more to come, reaching working age at the same time is secluded to China only. The One-Child Policy has had an impact on the workplace. As has been presented in the data collection, both managers and the singletons themselves agree on that work has become more competitive, making it a more individualistic place with smaller distances between the hierarchical levels. With a history of Confucian traditions, the individualistic tendencies of the singletons is creating a personality previously unknown within the Chinese culture, thus establishing a clash between older and younger generations¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰¹ Interview: Betty

¹⁰² Interview: Hu

¹⁰³ Interview: Tang

¹⁰⁴ Professor Yu 2007-10-04

The singleton characteristics are creating a solid foundation for China turning into an individualistic culture¹⁰⁵ within the workplace. A very remarkable movement, since the traditional Confucian perspective of individualism is hostile, proclaiming it to be an unnatural and illogical concept¹⁰⁶. As China is modernising in a rapid tempo, the culture and traditions are left behind. In the past it was always the son's duty to look after and take care of the aging parents, while the daughters became part of her husband's family. Today the tradition has been altered as a result of the One-Child Policy¹⁰⁷, after having survived the Maoist era. Chinese singletons, regardless if they are boys or girls, have to take care of their old ones. Which results in that when a singleton marries another singleton two people have to provide for four people, which explains the rush for well-paid jobs.

One of the aims of the One-Child Policy was to make a shortcut when introducing China to First World modernity¹⁰⁸. This goal could be considered on a good way to be reached when bearing in mind the urban, white-collar singletons interviewed for this study. Being an only child, the singletons have sacrificed the benefits of having siblings to get more money and time invested into them, with a greater possibility of reaching a higher position, as they have no one to compete with in the family. As a result of the one-child policy the gender equality within the generations born after 1980 have become a better underpinning due to equal educational entitlements¹⁰⁹. Since the parents only have one child to invest in, girls have become just as important as boys on the subject of attaining first-rate education and thus joining the competition of the top jobs.

Both the singletons interviewed and scholars argue that children are at an advantage being a single child¹¹⁰, as they get more money invested in education and more motivation to do well. There are also studies claiming that singletons are more likely to be advanced in intelligence and achievement than children with siblings¹¹¹. Several studies of Western children have been made with the outcome of finding singletons doing better than non-singletons¹¹². It is difficult

¹⁰⁵ *Individualistic culture: ties between people are loose, and task concerns prevail over relationship concerns. People tend to think or act independently and are largely unconnected with others.* (Zhang, Lowry, Zhou and Fu 2007:59)

¹⁰⁶ Tang and Ward 2003:13

¹⁰⁷ Deutsch:2006:368

¹⁰⁸ Fong 2004:79

¹⁰⁹ Tsui and Rich 2002

¹¹⁰ *ibid*:86, Interview: Luo, Qin,

¹¹¹ Wang et al 1998:50, Henderson 1991

¹¹² Henderson 1991

to predict how this is going to predict China in the future, when the labour market will only consist of elitist singletons, who are getting the best education their parents can afford at the same time as they are the family's focal point and enduring the pressure to perform well. Even though singletons today are allowed to have two children if they marry another single child, not many singletons appear to be wanting this offer as they want to have the ability to spend as much money on their child as their parents did on them¹¹³.

The expectations singletons have on their workplace in terms of experience, salary, and influence are, naturally, to a certain degree individual. But it cannot be excluded that their upbringing as an only child and being the focal point of the family contributes to their personality traits as adults. In addition, although not many of the singletons interviewed were prepared to admit it out loud, it has been acknowledged in other studies¹¹⁴. Pressure concerning school and later work from the parents is placed on the single child, and is considered to be a future retirement plan¹¹⁵. Arguably, the traits associated with the single child (see chapter 2.2.) are even more noticeable in China, due to the lack of a social security net. As the singletons' parents are relying on them to succeed, after having spent money and effort on their only offspring in order for them to deal out some profit in the future, the pressure on the Chinese singletons should be considered exceptionally demanding. This stress gives rise to an even more individualistic environment, where everyone has to strive to reach the top and cannot afford sharing his or her support with others.

There is a strong correlation between parents' expectations on their children and the children's own educational ambitions¹¹⁶. Debatably, this could also be the case when the singletons start working. Perhaps it is not only the singleton traits of being individualistic; the parents could possibly also have influence on their children's undertaking within the workplace regarding aiming higher up in the hierarchy. Another concern regarding parental influence is that the majority of Chinese parents do not want their children to work during college, as they are concerned about that it will interfere with their studies¹¹⁷. Without any previous experience about working, when the singletons enter the workplace with their high ambitions together with their special traits of being single child will influence the workplace.

¹¹³ Saywell 2000, Interview: Qin

¹¹⁴ Fong 2004:28

¹¹⁵ *ibid*:128

¹¹⁶ Tsui and Rich 2002: 81

¹¹⁷ *ibid*:86

5.2. The workplace, a greenhouse where individualism grows and hierarchies crumble

China has in the past been regarded as a collectivistic and hierarchical society, and this is changing as a result of the well-educated, urban singletons gushing into the white-collar workplaces with the intention to make a career. Since they have not been accustomed to sharing during their childhood, they continue their work in solitaire. This is, of course, not unproblematic as they lack social skills, e.g. solving conflicts, sharing information with other colleagues, etc. that are often essential for a good working environment.

A concern should be raised towards the western managers' attitude towards Chinese group work, as there are cultural diversities involved and people with different cultural backgrounds are not at all times sensitive towards these dissimilarities¹¹⁸. There was a slight difference in what was mentioned by the western and the Chinese managers as the most noticeable difference between singletons and older generations. The ethnic Chinese managers recognised to a greater extent a lack of collectivistic traits among the singletons. Such as not sharing and not showing emotion, whereas the western managers more acknowledged external attributes, as for example wanting more money and opportunities to travel. There could be various reasons for the answers being diverse; including cultural differences, and it can only be stated that the managers complemented each other as a broader view of the singleton traits was reached.

As argued by Professor Yu, individualism is not equal to selfishness¹¹⁹. There is a need to connect rights and obligation. However, after opening up to the world in the 1970s there has been a loss of traditional Chinese values through the influence of the west, leading to a loss of balance between individual rights and individual morality¹²⁰. The One-Child Policy has turned urban China into a success apparatus for the singletons. As a great deal of the family money is spent on the youngsters' education for a presumable triumph in the future. But it is not only the factor of more money spent on education, being an only child has its advantages, as they tend to have a stronger intellectual development when it comes to, for instance, verbal tests¹²¹. Even though lacking a partner during childhood to learn about interaction skills¹²²,

¹¹⁸ Zhang, Lowry, Zhou and Fu 2007:55

¹¹⁹ Professor Yu Hai 2007-10-04

¹²⁰ Professor Yu Hai, 2007-10-04

¹²¹ Tsui and Rich 2002:77

¹²² Professor Yu Hai, 2007-10-04

thus not gaining the problem skills a non-singleton often develops in early years, the singleton generation employed at white-collar workplaces in urban China has a benefit when it comes to reaching the top jobs. A majority of the singleton interviewees claimed that they would not treat a manager their own age in the same way they would with an older one. When a manager leaves a position to someone else, the authority of that person is left behind to the following person¹²³. However, if it were a manager from the singleton generation, the authority that comes with the manager position would be lost, considering the singletons' response. The hierarchies are therefore, arguably, flattening out as a result of the singleton generation.

Individualism and less distance within the hierarchies has become a new situation at the Chinese workplace. In modern China, the younger generations are more likely to change jobs¹²⁴ when they find that the situation within a particular workplace is not suitable for them, something that would have been impossible a couple of decades ago. However, the courage taken by the singleton generation in order to reach higher positions is a step to achieve their parents' wish. Thus decreasing the gap between the hierarchical levels, as the higher levels are no longer restricted for the old and prestigious, as more and more singletons are entering the workplace with highly qualified education and a desire to reach the top.

In the 1970s the Chinese population was the largest in the world, two major historical events took place in China, the Open-Door Policy and the One-Child Policy. With its booming economy, there are more forces than the consequences of the One-Child Policy to bear in mind when discussing an ongoing change within the Chinese workplace. The liberalisation of the economy has established an *institutionalised individualisation*¹²⁵, as also the government institutions have adjusted to the new individualistic current.

6. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

In urban China today, there is a transformation where the old meets the new. The opening up of the country to the outside world in the 1970s has allowed foreign companies to enter the Chinese market with the consequence of influencing a whole nation. In the 1970s another policy was also introduced, the One-Child Policy with its strict regulations on that parents

¹²³ Hatch 2002: 194

¹²⁴ Interview: Frank, James, Betty

¹²⁵ Hansen and Pang forthcoming:2

could only have one child has now, almost thirty years later started to display its results. The people who are starting to work today in China belong to the singleton generation where the pressure has been tough to get in to the finest schools in order to find a good job after graduating. The parents' demands on their one and only offspring, to ensure a good life after retirement, have made the singletons even more competitive and individualistic in their strive to reach a higher position within the workplace. A new phenomenon of changing jobs with the aim of attaining a better salary and reaching further up in the workplace hierarchy has almost become common practice for the new arrivals on the work scene. A trend that results in less collectivism, as it is difficult to establish relations to co-workers when they often do not stay long at one job, and where people are turning more and more individualistic as they feel the pressure of success, from their parents and also from themselves, and therefore do not share work experience and other information related to work. Furthermore, as the singletons are reaching higher up in the workplace hierarchies, the organisation structure becomes more flat, since the singletons interviewed for this study claimed that they do not feel as much respect for a superior the same age as themselves, as they would have with an older manager. The *harmony-within-hierarchy* has thus been distorted, which also explains the fall of collectivism at the workplace. Since people today freely change jobs and work for their own gain and experience, the traditional Chinese work ethic is gone. Although there is still respect for the people on the top-levels and people still need to cooperate in order to complete their work assignments, the studies on the Chinese workplace from the 1980s are today outdated as the singleton generation has altered the former work traditions. There are tendencies that, spending their childhoods to become the best has erupted the singletons sense of collectivism and turned them into individualistic career-hunters. Although some of the singletons claim that family is more important than career, to have a good job also connotes that the single child is taking care of the family.

A question regarding the future of China's One-Child Policy must, however, be raised. As the singletons are pouring into the labour market, most of them with the aim of establishing a good foundation for both themselves and their families for the future, how will this turn out in a couple of decades? How is the Chinese education system going to cope with all these well-educated, urban singletons who only want the very best schooling for their own single child? And how will the workplace function with people constantly switching jobs in the long run? This study is only a small case study with few interviewees, but nevertheless all stating that

the up and coming Chinese singleton generation are more individualistic and less inferior to the hierarchical system than their parents' generations.

The major theoretical conclusion to be drawn from this study is therefore that there are changes within the Chinese workplace, as a result of the One-Child Policy. The singletons are contributing to a more individualistic and less hierarchical setting, this is not only caused by the single child characteristics, but also through pressure and expectations of success, both from themselves and their parents, as they are responsible for the well-being of their parents in the future, at the same as they are aiming for an improved life-style.

Since my study is rather focused, I have a few suggestions on how to expand this study with further research. A quantitative study with surveys and more interviewees, would be useful in order to gain more knowledge about the singleton situation in the workplace and to obtain a broader perspective with more evidence of that there is a change going on in China, to show that this was not a unique case for the people interviewed for my study. Another research alternative would be to use grounded theory, as an approach in this or a similar study in order to generate new concepts and a new understanding on contemporary China. An additional option would be to consume theory, for the purpose of explaining my case via the use of existing theories that are better suited to increase our understanding of the changing situation.

7. REFERENCES

Bond, Michael Harris and Kwang-Kuo Hwang (1986) *The Social Psychology of Chinese People. The Psychology of the Chinese People.* Michael Harris Bond (ed), Oxford University Press

Esaiasson, Peter, Mikael Gilljam, Henrik Oscarsson and Lena Wägnerud. (2007) *Metodpraktikan.* Norstedts Juridik, Stockholm

Deutsch, Francine M. Filial Piety, Patrilineality, and China's One-Child Policy. *Journal of Family Issues*, 2006, Vol. 27, No 3

Fong, Vanessa (2004) *Only Hope: Coming of Age Under China's One-Child Policy.* Stanford University Press, California

Hansen, Mette Halskov and Cuiming Pang. *Idealizing Choice: Individual and Family in the Eyes of Rural Chinese Youth.* *Forthcoming*

Hatch, Mary Jo. (2002) *Organisationsteori: Moderna, symboliska, postmoderna perspektiv.* Studentlitteratur, Lund

Henderson, Zorica Petic. The only child isn't necessarily a terror. *Human Ecology Forum*, Winter 1991.

Hofstede, Geert (1980) *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values.* Sage Publications, California

Kvale, Steinar. (1996) *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative and quantitative research interviewing.* Sage Publications, California

Naughton, Barry. (2007) *The Chinese economy: transitions and growth.* Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Ragin, Charles. C. (1994) *Constructing Social Research.* Pine Forge Press, California

Saywell, Trish. Two for One. *Far Eastern Economic Review*; November 23, 2000;163,47

Tang, Jie and Anthony Ward (2003) *The Changing Face of Chinese Management.* Routledge, London

Tsui, Ming and Lynne Rich. The Only Child and Educational Opportunity for Girls in Urban China. *Gender Society* 2002:16

Wang, D, N Kato, Y Inaba, T Tango, Y Yoshida, Y Kusaka, Y Deguchi, F Tomita and Q Wang. Physical and personality traits of preschool children in Fuzhou, China: only child vs. sibling. *Child: Care, Health and Development* 2000, Volume 26, Number 1

White, Tyrene. (2003) *Domination resistance and accommodation in China's one child campaign.* Chinese Society, 2nd edition: Change, conflict and resistance. Elisabeth Perry and Mark Selden (eds), Routledge,

Yin, Robert. K. (2003) Case study research: design and methods. Sage Publications, California

Zhang, Dongsong, Paul Benjamin Lowry, Lina Zhou and Xiaolan Fu. The Impact of Individualism – Collectivism, Social Presence and Group Diversity on Group Decision Making Under Majority Influence. *Journal of Management Information Systems* 2007, Vol. 23, No. 4

Internet sources

Blom, Kicki. (2003) Duktig storebror eller olydig lillasyster. *Sund.nu*. Available online at <http://www.sund.nu/docs/printArtikel.asp?art=46&tem=0&und=0>

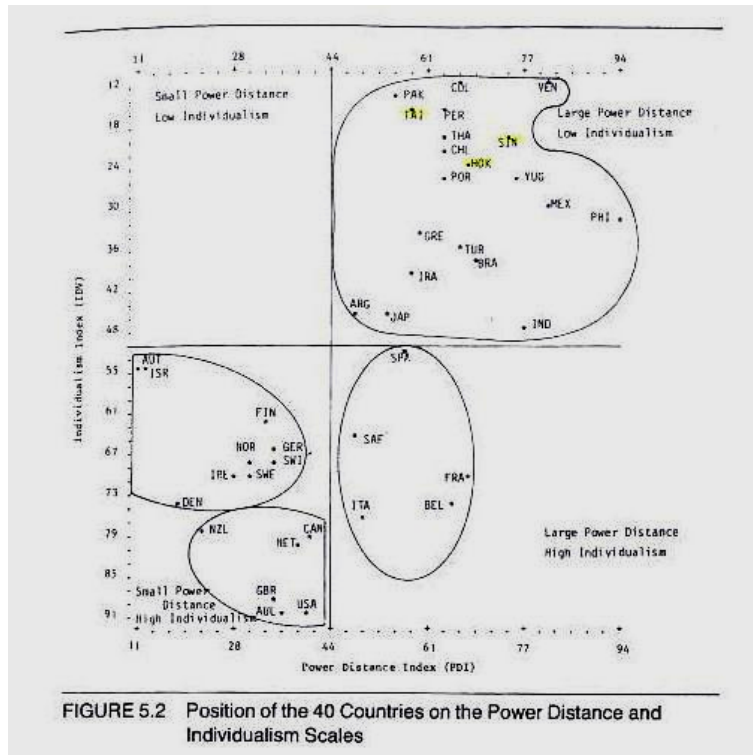
Lee, Melissa. (2007) Luxury retailers court China's 'little emperors' *CNBC*, available online at www.msnbc.msn.com/id/20165004/

Malesevic, Gordana. (2007) Kollektivets barn fostrar små kejsare. *Sundsvalls Tidning*. Available online at www.st.nu/noje/kultur.php?action=visa_artikel&id=643833

Interviews

Peng, Xizhe, Professor of population studies at Fudan University, Shanghai, 2007-10-11

Yu, Hai, Professor in urban sociology at Fudan University, Shanghai, 2007-10-04



126

HOK = HONG KONG

JAP = JAPAN

SIN = SINGAPORE

TAI = TAIWAN

¹²⁶ Hofstede 1980: 223

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interviewees born in the 1980s

(The questions specifically directed towards singletons were adjusted during the interviews with those who had one sibling)

Name?

Age?

Are you a single child?

Do you have a college degree and in what?

What is your current occupation?

Are you worried about becoming unemployed?

Do you prefer to work in groups or individually?

Have you been taught during childhood and onwards to treat kindergarten teachers and schoolteachers in a certain respectful way?

Has this upbringing influenced your life today? Are you respecting your managers in the same way as you were taught when growing up?

How do you feel that not having a sibling has influenced your life?

Do you feel lonely because you do not have a sibling?

What are the positive sides of being an only child?

For girls: Do you think you got a better education, since you don not have any brother?

Do you have any friends with siblings? Do you see any difference between that friend and yourself?

How is your relationship with your parents?

Do you feel any pressure from them, being an only child and being expected to provide for them when they are old?

If so, how do you deal with that pressure?

Do you feel that you have an obligation towards your parents to get a good job in order to provide for them later on?

What are your main criteria(s) for a good job?

How do you look upon the ongoing trend of people switching jobs in order to get a better one? Would/have you do/done it yourself?

What is most important for you, family or career?

Managers

What kind of company are you managing?

Do you see any difference between employees born in the 1980s and those who were born earlier?

Is it difficult for the employees born in the 1980s to cooperate with colleagues?

What are the main characteristics of the employees born in the 1980s?

Are there any special considerations that need to be taken into account when dealing with the employees born in the 1980s?

Do you feel that you are getting as much respect from the singletons as you do from the employees from the older generations?

During this ongoing trend of people switching jobs, how do you prevent valuable employees from leaving the workplace?

What is your main concern with the younger generations of employees?

What do you think is of main importance for the younger generations within a workplace?