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## Single Child Daughters and Gender

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper was to evaluate how the single child daughters born under the one-child policy perceive gender equality and their experience of gender equality or inequality in their everyday lives. China, despite today having the world largest population, implemented the one-child policy in 1979 in order to curb the exploding population. As the one-child policy implied, each couple is only allow to have one child. Under the nature law of selection, this child could be either a girl or a boy. As a result, the daughter is no longer treated secondary to her brother when there were limited resources as her parents would cater to the only child they have. In-depth interviews were conducted with a panel of the first generation single daughters now in their 20s. Despite living in patriarchal society, analysis of the interviews shows little of gender inequality felt or experienced by these first generation single daughters so far. However, it is still too early to tell if these daughters would defend their rights when they were challenge later in work or in their families. Nonetheless, I would like to argue that the position of these daughters would eventually help to elevate the status of women and gender equality in China.

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## **Foreword**

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“No man is an island” (Thomas Merton, 1955).

## **1. Introduction**

### *1.1. Big Country, Huge Population*

In 1949, China's population was a mere 542 million and by the year 2000, the population has raised to 1.29 billion according to the National Bureau of Statistics People's Republic of China in the year 2000 Population Census. Initially, the new government was ideologically disposed to view a large population as an asset, later the burden of the rapid growing population soon became apparent (Population Control Programs, 2005). During the 1950s, the Chinese government encouraged people to have as many children as possible – babies were regarded as future workers and soldiers. However, by the 1960s, some politicians became aware of the increasing problem of overpopulation (Hall 1997: 15). The large population was seen as an obstacle to development.

### *1.2. Birth Control Campaigns*

Prior to the implementation of the one-child policy, there were births control campaigns in the 1960s and 1970s (Population Control Programs, 2005). However, they were all not so successful due to the political environment at the time. After the implementation of the one-child policy in 1979 (Zhu Peili 2001: 1), the policy was better control in the urban areas than in the rural areas for the obvious reasons. Under the one-child policy, couples with only one child were entitled to benefits such as cash bonuses, longer maternity leave, better child care and preferential housing arrangements (Population Control Programs, 2005). There are incentives to conform to the policy and of course, there are penalties for ignoring it (Delia Davin 2002: 378), such as fines. On top of that, in the urban areas couples tend to have only one child as the cost of raising a child is higher in the cities. As most of the city dwellers were employed under the state enterprise, they are taken care by the state with pensions after retirement, and thus the gender of the child is less important for them as compared to the rural areas (Population Control Program, 2005). To highlight the 'effectiveness' of the one child policy, it was estimated that in the last three decades, roughly 300 million births were avoided (Peng Xizhe 2004: 135). The first generation born under the one-child policy after 1979 is now in their marriageable age. The first generation alone consists of 6.1 million of these single child (Xinwen

chenbao 23 Aug 2005, Sufan 2004: 31) and it is estimated there are about 100 millions single child by the year 2000 (Yuanxin 2004: 49).

### *1.3. The New Government & Gender Equality*

When the CCP (China Communist Party) came into power in 1949, it has always been formally committed to gender equality (Young 2003: 47). In 1995, during the United Nation Forth World Conference on Women, President Jiang Zemin specifically stated that, gender equality helps in social development and is part of the basic national policy (Zhu Jiafeng 2004:27). Also, in the year 2003, Hu Jintao then Party General Secretary during a meeting with the All China's Women Federation stressed gender equality as a basic national policy (Zhu Jiafeng 2004:27). However, after so many years, gender inequality still exists in China, especially in poverty-stricken rural areas, according to a recent national study on gender assessment (Wang Ying 2005). The leader of the study group, Professor Li Xiaoyun of the College of Humanities and Development at China Agriculture University said that although the status of Chinese women has improved greatly in the past two decades, gender inequality still commonly exists in almost all social aspects including political power, education, health, employment and assets possession. Of its total population of 1.3 billion, women account for about half. Therefore, the promotion of gender equality and the overall development of women is not only of great significance for China's development, it also has a special influence on the efforts for the advancement of mankind (White Paper 2005: 1).

### *1.4. Sex Ratios*

Traditionally, the Chinese has valued boys more than girls for many reasons. Boys are needed to carry the ancestry line and they are required to work in the farms. Today, China has more men than women and the sex ratio was 106.74 according to the year 2000 census survey. The situation was worse with a higher gender ratio for the new born. According to the news on May 9, 2002 from China News Service (CNS) in Beijing, the fifth census in China indicated that the sex proportion of the newborn boys and girls in the country was 116.86 percent in 2000 (China Population Information and Research

Center, 2002). The ratios were even higher for rural than urban areas and for poor or densely populated provinces (Croll 1995: 164). Recently, the chairwoman of the China All Women Federation, Ku Xiulian announced in a new conference that the newborn ratio has risen to 119.86 to 100 between boys and girls (Ye Pengfei 2005). Under normal range, the ratio should be between 103:100 and 107:100 according to the article. The serious imbalance ratio of more boys than girls reflects gender inequality and at the same time it threatens female survival and the opportunity for development (Ye Pengfei 2005). Ms. Ku attribute the imbalance ratio to three main reasons; firstly, in China, people still value boys more than girls, and secondly due to the lower productivity in the agriculture farmlands and the imperfections of the social security, people still feel the needs for sons to take care of them during old-aged. Thirdly, with the medical advancement of identifying the gender of the baby before birth, people with more traditional thinking have the possibility of choosing a boy. Despite the existence of a patriarchy society, Ms. Ku presented numerous statistical evidences to show that women in China have made vast improvement in areas of law, economic successes, social status, education level, and health care. In the year 2004, there were 337 million female employees and they account for 44.8 percent of the total employees; in the higher institutions, there were 6 million female students and they account for 45.7 percent of the total number. Female masters' students account for 44.2 percent and female PhDs students account for 31.4 percent respectively (Ye Pengfei 2005). All these figures have improved tremendously as compared to 10 years ago. In addition, field investigations by Cecilia Milwertz and Elisabeth Croll in rich provincial cities in 1998 also suggested that there was a growing acceptance of daughter-only families (Croll 2000: 85).

### *1.5. Changing Society*

With the economic reform since 1978, China is now a booming market. This can be attributed to the globalization of the world economy, which puts China on a track for growth that is already fast and increasingly moving faster (Xie Chen 2005: 8). The one-child policy is also evolving with the changing society. Take Shanghai for example, the Shanghai People's Congress is debating changes to the city's rules of the "one-child

policy” that would allow some couples to have a second child without waiting for four years between births and divorced parents more opportunity to have a child in a second marriage (Eastday.com 2003). The possibility of having a second child is allowed when both the husband and wife come from a single-child family, or when a couple’s first born has a non-hereditary handicap. As according to Xia Xiurong, a member of the Standing Committee of the Shanghai People’s Congress, this move is prompted by the city’s fast growing aging population and to avoid a massive baby boom in the city’s foreseeable future (Eastday.com 2003).

## **2. Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to look at how the single child daughters born under the one-child policy perceive gender equality and their experience of gender equality or inequality in their everyday life. In the cities, it was said that parents invested in their child regardless of whether it is a boy or a girl (Croll 1995: 169). Due to widespread availability of pension and other factors, there are fewer tendencies for them to rely on their sons for economic reasons (Croll 1995: 168). Thus, daughters are provided with better education with resources from both parents. Now, 25 years later, equipped with better qualifications, these women have more preference for work as compared to one or two generation before. Now, we have a new breed of young and well-educated women ready to take on the task of nation building. They are a group of women intellectuals (Lǚ Meiyi 2005: 81 and Zheng Guizhen *et al.* 2003: 1), whom maybe able to shape the future of women’s movement in China. On matrimonial issue, recently the government has lifted the 50-year ban on college student marriages (China Daily 31 March 2005). Previously, women pursuing higher education would normally delay marriage and child-bearing altogether.

It is necessary to note that this paper is not about the comparison between the single child and non-single child. Rather it looks more specifically into the single child daughters in relation to gender. Significantly, with the female gender constituting half of the country’s population (which has the world biggest population), we need to evaluate the role they



play as daughters today as it would affect their future roles as daughter-in-laws, wives and mothers (Zheng Guizhen 2003: 226).

### **3. Disposition**

In the first part of this paper, introduction was given on China's historical background since 1949 in relation to the birth campaigns, the new government's commitment to gender equality and the changing society. Second part of the paper describes the purpose of this study on why the focus is on the single child daughters. In part four, the framework for the theoretical concepts were set for subsequent discussions. In part five, procedures on primary and secondary data collection were discussed. Next, analysis was done on the interviews conducted. In section seven, observations were made on gender equality or inequality based on the opinions gathered and secondary data collected. Finally, in the concluding part, I tried to suggest the single child daughters as another driving force for gender equality, and discussions were also made on some of the detrimental factors that could have direct impact on the women's status.

### **4. Theoretical Framework**

#### *4.1. The Difference between Sex and Gender*

Before I elaborate further, we need to distinguish between the two fundamental concepts of 'sex' and 'gender' (Dong Xin 2005: 2). Here, 'sex' is refer to the biological difference between men and women. In gender, culture is act as a base and with the use of symbols to distinguish between the different sexes; these are express through language, different forms of communications, education and so on, in order to construct a person's gender using the society's guideline (Dong Xin 2005: 3). Hence, gender is not only about women but about men as well. Men are also being restrained and restricted in the society and thus liberation of the female gender would also mean the liberation of the male gender (Shen Yifei 2005: 15). For the purpose of this study, I would be concentrating on the female gender and more specifically the single daughters.

#### *4.2. Feminism and Qualitative Research*

It is said that feminism began the moment women started talking to each other about their experiences (Skeggs 1997: 25). Feminism means essentially that a women's or gender perspective is applied to a variety of social phenomena and exploration for the sake of promoting the interests of women (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000: 209). With this paper devoted to the first generation of the single child daughters, it would be unlikely for us not to touch on feminism. Combining feminism and qualitative research, feminist research is "qualitative research by women 'on' women with a desire to make sense of women's lives and experiences; it "must take women's oppression as one of its basic assumptions"; it is research informed at every stage by an acknowledged political commitment (Scott 1985: 69-70). In this form of research, gender is a basic organizing principle that profoundly shapes the concrete conditions of our lives (Kvale 1996: 73).

Very simply, to do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the center of one's inquiry....The overt ideological goal of feminist research in the human science is to correct both the *invisibility* and *distortion* of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position (Lather 1991:71).

#### *4.3. Patriarchy and Gender Equality*

In our contemporary society, patriarchy has often been conveniently blamed for all inequalities in the social system (Dong Xin 2005:5). In gender studies research, it view patriarchy as inequitable form of social system and anticipate changes through political agenda, intellectual reassessment and actual movements in order to achieve the realization of gender equality (Dong Xin 2005: 5). Gender equality in turn refers to the establishment of equality between the two sexes, by creating equal opportunity in everyday lives and achieving equal outcome in ideology (Dong Xin 2005: 5). According to Dong Xin, these include equal opportunity in areas of laws, politic and economy; equal wages and equal chances in achieving human capital and other resources; equal opportunity to 'voice out' as this has direct influence on policy making and the degree of contributions. It is important to note that in achieving equal outcome, we have to

acknowledge that there are fundamental differences between the two sexes and equality is pursued in the name of practicality.

Gender equality can be discussed through various aspects; the paper shall discuss five aspects of these equalities in relation to the single daughters. These five aspects are household status, education opportunity, economic status, employment opportunity and social status. In household status, as most of my interviewees are not married, questions are asked about their relationship with their parents, whether they provide opinions to their parents pertaining to family issues. In education opportunity, information is collected on their highest educational qualification attained and their perception of the importance of qualifications. In economic status, women and not only single daughters are participating in the work force and they account for almost half of the total employees in the whole of China. Employment opportunity is somewhat different from economic status above; here we deal with issues such as employment discrimination in Shanghai, if not other parts of China. In social status, opinions are gathered about their perception of men and women's social status and women's social status as impacted by globalization and China's open-up policy.

## **5. Method & Selection**

I would be using a non-experimental design for the purpose of this study as I have conducted one-to-one interviews with my target group of respondents. The aim of the study is to form a hypothesis between single daughters and gender equality. Thus, the method used for forming the hypothesis is a qualitative and explorative one.

### *5.1. Primary Data Collection*

In this paper, I have collected both primary data and secondary data. For the empirical research, I have conducted twenty-one interviews with single daughters born under the one-child policy. Except for one interviewee who was born in 1978, the rest of them were all born after the year 1979. All my interviewees are female and they are the only child in their families. Even though all my interviewees are studying or working in Shanghai,

they come from different parts of China. Other than Shanghai, my respondents come from Beijing, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Fujian, Hubei, Sichuan and Heilongjiang. On the whole, nine of them are from Shanghai, three from Beijing, three from Zhejiang, two from Jiangsu and one respondent each from Jiangxi, Fujian, Hubei, Sichuan and Heilongjiang. Some of them have stayed many years in Shanghai and some have just arrived in Shanghai to pursue their studies. Out of these twenty-one respondents, majority of them are between the age ranges of 22 to 24 years old (four at the age of 22, nine at the age of 23 and six at the age of 24). There is one respondent at the age of 25 and the other at the age of 27. Almost all of the respondents are single with the exception of one who got married recently. A number of them are single with boyfriends and one of them is currently cohabiting with her partner.

Primary data collection is done through one-to-one interview during my field trip in Shanghai. This method is chosen for the privacy that it provides for the interviewer conducting interview with a single respondent. The interviewee is open to reply to the interviewer and personal values and opinions are gathered during the session. The interviews took place in all different locations such as the student's dormitory, Nordic Center class room, Nordic Center hallway, hotel lobby and café. The student's dormitory is the best location for conducting interviews as it permits the interviewer to make clear voice recording and allows the interviewees to answer the questions especially personal ones without much hesitation or disturbances. Public places like the Nordic Center hallway (it was used due to unavailability of class rooms and other constraints), the hotel lobby and café, are not as ideal locations due to the reasons that it hamper clear voice recording with the background noise and sometimes the interviewees may not be comfortable in answering the questions if they think someone is listening.

During the face-to-face interview, an interview guide was used to collect qualitative information and the methods of recording the interviews include audiotape recording and note taking at the same time (Kvale 1996: 160). An interview guide indicates the topics and their sequence in the interview (Kvale 1996: 129). The use of the voice recorder allows the interviewer to listen attentively to the interviewee and record information not

written during the interview. In the usage of the interview guide, all the questions were asked and in the specific order laid out in the paper used during the interview (see Enclosure: Interview guide). The interviews were semi-structured meaning my respondents were free to reply to the questions asked and I would only prompt them leading questions if the answers were too brief or too short. This would aid in better understanding and see from my respondents' perspectives. I consider my respondents as 'interesting person per se – a person's life world and 'the subject herself' (Jerneck, Lecture notes dated 9 Feb 05).

Primary data collection was done in Shanghai for the apparent reasons. Shanghai is the largest city in China and it is a mega urban city. The one-child policy would have been more successfully implemented here than many parts of China. I was told before my field trip that finding a female single child would be as easy as falling off a log. Despite the initial optimism, the search for the first generation single child daughters seems to come to a halt during the first week when we were unable to contact anyone that fits the criteria. Fortunately after the initial hurdle, with much assistance from the staffs at the Nordic Center in Fudan University, I was given some contacts and started making calls straight away.

### *5.2. Methods of selection*

In relation to the thesis topic, the criteria for the choice of respondents are female individuals born under the one-child policy. The selection principles include; first, the respondent should be born after the year 1979 (the one-child policy was implemented around this year but the actual date varies depending on the provincial government). Second, they have to come from a one child family with no other siblings. The reason for this selection criterion is to evaluate the impact of the one-child policy on the single child daughters. Preferably, they should be the "first generation" single child as today they would be in their adulthood and would have made considerations for their own future in term of career and marriage in particular. They can now 'speak for themselves' so as to say.

I found my interviewees mainly through the connection with the Nordic Center in Fudan University in a non-randomized selection. They are students at the university currently pursuing their Master degrees or PhD programs. There is a snowballing effect when my interviewees recommended their friends and roommates to me. I also had recommendation from friends, classmates and teachers in Shanghai. When establishing initial contacts with my potential interviewees, the success rate was about 50 percent. Reasons for rejecting the interview are either they do not belong to the criteria (such as, they are not single child or they are born before 1979) or they are too busy to be interviewed.

The potential weakness in the collected data would be since most of my interviewees are highly educated students in the university, the comments they made might be somewhat ideological as they have not 'step into' the society. They have specific ideas about their dream jobs and the type of family relationship they would like to have in the future with their potential in-laws for example. In addition, the discussion is restricted to the urban areas as my interviewees come from different cities in China and more specifically Shanghai. Another reason for this selection is also due to the fact that the one-child policy is more successful in the urban areas (cities) than rural areas.

### *5.3. Secondary Data Collection*

Secondary Data Collection was done in Sweden, China and Singapore. The Asia library at the Lund University has a good collection of titles on China topics and the electronic library system – ELIN@Lund has a vast collection of up-to-date articles from scholars around the world. The field work in Shanghai allows me to look into titles written by local scholars and collect information from the source. At the National University of Singapore, the East Asian Institute has a specialized library with good collection of English and Chinese materials on China and East Asia.

In secondary data collection, I managed to collect a number of titles during my stay in Shanghai. In addition, I managed to collect many articles from newspaper, journals, periodicals and research reports. Secondary data was done to research on previous studies made on the single child generation and on women in China. Statistics were also collected using this method. In addition, scholars' opinions could be gathered through their reports and articles. The initial intention was to interview scholars whom have done studies among the single child or women. However, several attempts to interview scholars have proven unsuccessful. I have concentrate my search on titles and articles published in more recent years (mainly the last 5 years) as anything written beyond that would mean that my primary target group would be in their teens or younger. Interestingly, studies done on single child normally do not separate between the two sexes; they are being studied as a group. Though, single-child daughters are being mentioned in women studies, my empirical study offer an insight to the present insights of single-child daughters as an adult and this social phenomenon is studied directly in relation to gender.

## **6. Analysis of the interviews**

Among the approaches to interview analysis, I have mainly used meaning condensation for the following analysis. Meaning condensation entails an abridgement of the meanings expressed by the interviewees into shorter formulations (Kvale 1996: 192). Meaning condensation thus involves a reduction of large interview texts into briefer, more succinct formulations (Kvale 1996: 192).

### *6.1. Education*

As mentioned earlier, most of my respondents are students currently pursuing their Master degree or PhD programs (see Appendix: List of interviewees). When asked about the importance of qualification, all of them agreed that qualification is important and one needs at least a basic degree. In our current society, good education is important and qualification is the first criteria in seeking employment. Education will affects one's thinking, increases personal qualities and enhances the social status of the individual.

Some of my respondents felt that it is important to be in good universities and they credit that to several reasons. As China is a big country, the resources are not evenly distributed. A good school will mean that they have more resources to create a better environment for the students and thus better development. Naturally, this will have direct impact on the job application as well. According to some of my respondents, higher education means higher income and better future. However, they did state that they do not feel that there is much difference between Masters and PhD. It depends on the kind of career one wants to be in, but they did stress the importance of a basic degree. When come to seeking companionship, predictably with the higher the education, the more difficulty one would have in looking for partner. For most of their preference is that the man's education level should be on par or higher than the women.

### *6.2. Employment*

With regards to working experience, most of my respondents do not have any working experience (although majority of them have worked as an intern in companies). The rest of the respondents have working experience of one to two years. There is only one respondent who have worked for eight to nine years. When asked their preferences, majority stated that they prefer to work for foreign-owned enterprises due to the corporate culture, better organizational structure and perceived opportunities. Their second preference was to work for stated-owned enterprises, presumably with better fringe benefits. Some of them even have thoughts of striking out on their own but stated that they should gain some working experience first and accumulate some capitals. They have least preference to work for private enterprises due to poor organizational structure and low fringe benefits. Even though they prefer to work for foreign-owned enterprises, many of them are inspired to be teachers or work as a civil servant. This could be due to the amount of education they have. Majority of my respondents are highly educated, thus possibility is high that they would continue in the academic field. In the private sectors, the types of jobs they select tend to be those that are related to their current field of studies. For instance, one of my respondents would like to be a lawyer as she is presently in the law faculty.



During the interviews, opinions are gathered on employment discrimination in Shanghai. Generally, they felt that employment discrimination exist when the company chooses between certain genders when the job itself has no requirement for that specific gender. Employment discrimination exists not only in term of gender but also in other forms such as education (which school you come from) and locality (whether you are a local or from other provinces). They do agree that certain jobs are more suitable for men and vice versa. Examples of these would be those that require extended period of traveling such as construction jobs where the men are required on stay on site for a period of one to two years. Women seem to have a more straightforward situation when seeking employment in the education industry, human resource industry and in civil services as accordingly to my respondents. Other industries like engineering and information technology seems to have more preference for men. A number of my respondents are concern about on-job traveling as they cited that family and child-bearing would be affected if they are required to travel extensively. Some other comments made are; there seems to be a glass ceiling for women in term of promotion and female have to perform harder than their male counterpart in order to receive the same recognition. Not all companies practice employment discrimination and it really depends on the individual company and the management in-charge. Despite all that have been said, in China sometimes to have excellent career prospects is to have good connection (or *guanxi*) in the first place. According to news report, employment discrimination against women is still strong in Shanghai and the situation could become worse if no effective measures are taken, experts said (China Daily, 12 Sep 2005). By the end of 2004, women employees accounted for only 38.3 percent of the city total working population, down from 42.3 percent in 2000 (China Daily, 12 Sep 2005). This is apparently lower than the national figure where female employees account for 44.8 percent of the total employees mentioned earlier.

### *6.3. Marriage*

Of the total of 21 respondents, 20 of them are single and one got married recently. For the single women, all have the intention to get married except for one who has no intention to get married at all. This particular respondent viewed career more important than marriage, detest the idea that wife always have to give in to family and that motherhood would mean giving up her own goals and dreams. For those who have the intention to get married, the ideal age to get married would be before the age 30. The specific time would depend on several factors such as when they graduate and when they find a stable job. In spouse selection, my respondents are concern with mostly matter of the heart, the person's character, educational level, family background and financial stability. Almost all do not mind earning more than their spouse, but they think the men would mind if their partner earns more than them. One respondent specifically said that if she earns more than her husband, the range should not be more than 20%. There is also the implication that when a women earns more than the men, other than income level, it might means that she would have a larger work load and they would have different social status altogether. In a patriarchy society, this would put pressure on the men as they usually prefer to 'take care' of the women.

In recent years, changes to the one-child policy have allowed couples to have more than one child under certain conditions. When given the options, half of my respondents still prefer to have only one child. Reason for this option is mainly consideration for economic reasons such as the cost of bringing up a child and own income level. Other reasons would be career planning and the availability of childcare options. As my respondents are single child themselves, they have the primary responsibility of taking care of their old-aged parents. Some of them have given thought to this when considering family planning. Out of these 10 respondents who prefer one child, four of them prefer girl, two of them prefer boy and the rest are not particular about the gender of the baby. Of the two respondents who prefer boys, one says that her partner prefers boy and the other one think that boys are easier to take care and that they are more independent. For the other half of the respondents who choose to have two children, four of them prefer to have one boy and one girl and the rest said that they have no preference for any specific

gender. In my group of respondents, there seems to be no specific pattern in the selection of a particular gender. Studies in East Asia show that there is no evidence of a direct correlation between female education or employment and reduced discrimination against daughters (Croll 2000: 151). At least, among my highly educated respondents there is no clear indication of preference for certain gender. In term of care-giving, most of them are willing to take care of the children themselves with the addition help from parents or childcare facilities. Some of them are even willing to give up their jobs for the initial period in order to concentrate on taking care of the baby. Grandparents seem to be able to play a significant role as parents are willing to engage their parents' help in taking care of their own child. However, there are respondents who are concern that their parents may spoil their grandchildren and are not willing to engage their parents' help.

Fortunately, in my panel of interviewees, there was no preference for DINK (double income and no kids) family (Zheng Guizhen et al. 2003: 3). According to the family survey of Shanghai Women's Federation in 2002 (with 1,200 effective samples), the proportion of DINK families who would choose not to have children reached 12.41% of all Shanghai families (Gu Wentong 2005: 9). Sun Zhongxin, professor of the Social Sciences Department of Fudan University stressed that the proportion of DINK families would be even higher if the sample couples were confined to those between 20 and 40 years old.

A scenario was created in the case where the husband makes good earnings, and the female respondents were asked their view of becoming a full-time housewife. In recent years, there is a saying, '*gandihao buru jiadihao*' (to be a woman successful in career is not as good as to be a woman successful in marriage) (Li Minhuan 2004: 25). Only five of them accept the idea of a full-time housewife and the rest were not receptive to the idea. The reasons they give were; parents have spent a lot of resources on them and they should make full use of the education they have, they have certain goals and they would like to have their own jobs to feel the sense of achievement, women should not totally relied on husbands and should be economically independent, plus women should have their own social life as well. For some of them, they do not want to become a full-time

housewife but they do not mind becoming a part-time housewife. They are willing to take up some part-time jobs, work freelance or do some voluntary jobs so as not to lose the ties with the society.

When asked if they think husband should help in taking care of the children or help with housework, their reactions were mixed. Majority of them think that the family unit belongs to both parties and both husband and wife should share the workload. Nevertheless, some of them feel that care-giving and household chores are still primarily the responsibility of the woman and the man can help if he wants to. They did emphasize that the husband has to play the role model of the father when come to taking care of the child.

#### *6.4. As Single Daughters*

Being born in a family of single child, all the respondents felt that they have the primary responsibility to take care of their old-aged parents. For vast majority of the respondents, the considerations and worries that they may have are mainly associated with their parents. For some of the respondents whom are not originally from Shanghai, very few have plans to go back to their hometown after graduation. They are worried in the situation where their parents have to live by themselves. Problems would occur when their parents are sick and if they work away from home. It is possible for these parents to come to the cities but in the cities, living expenses are higher and housing is more expensive. In other situation, the women may be married to another province and they may not be located near to their parents as they would like to be.

Others are concern with situation where their future spouse is also a single child, and then the couple would have to take care of both sets of parents plus their own child. This is what demographers described as “4-2-1 families” which is predicted to define the mainstream of Chinese families in the next 10 years (Gu Wentong 2005: 4). Their burden would increase as there will be no other siblings to share the load. Some however have

not much worry for their parents living into the old age as their parents work for the government and they are well covered with pensions and other health insurance schemes.

The concern my respondents have for their parents is not unfounded and is justifiable by statistics when a quarter of them categorized the relationship with their parents as very good, half of them said is good with the remaining said is normal. Often they will seek their parents' opinions or even discuss together with regards to matters pertaining to themselves. On the other hand, parents seldom seek their opinions pertaining to family issues at least not till they are much older. One respondent specifically said that her opinions in the household was only valued after 15 years of age. When asked if they think they have more power (or resistance) as a single child, their reactions were mixed. One thinks that as a single child, she has more decision-making power and freedom as compared to family with few children. Their parents' financial resources are spending on one child alone and thus there are more options available. Nonetheless, with power it also comes with more duties and responsibilities. Furthermore, as one respondent point out this only exist in the household unit and not in the society since among the same generation, they receive the same treatment as they are all single child. When they enter the society, they would still have to learn to work with others. For those who viewed differently, one respondent think that non-single child have more power instead, as the single child would have too much love and attentions from grandparents to parents and most of the things would be arranged by their parents.

In one similar survey conducted by Huatong Shifan Daixue (or East China Normal University), among 93 Shanghai single child aged between 20 to 25 years old, 90% of the single child would get involved with family issues but they felt that it is not effective enough. 15% of the interviewees felt that they almost have no influence on the decision making process, and even when they offer suggestions their parents do not accept them. Only 10% of them felt that their suggestions would have great impact in the family affairs. Summary of the survey was published on *Xinwen chenbao* (Morning News) dated 23 Aug 2005.

Perceptions of the single daughters were gathered on their opinions about women in different generation, they were asked to compare themselves to their mother's generation. The many differences could be traced back to different historical background which affects the level of education and family structure. A number of the respondents' parents were affected by the forced rural migration (Mallee, 2000) during the 60's and 70's. This had direct impact of the level of education received. Most of the respondents have received more education than their parents (most of my respondents are Masters and PhD students) and they think this influence the thoughts, values and opinions between the different generations. On top of this, in the new era, the information edge and technology advancement also drift the two generations further apart. For the earlier generation, the women would normally have siblings and in their daughters' opinion, they are more considerate and take care of the family. Mothers are thought to be more traditional, conservative and more frugal.

My interviewees were also asked to compare themselves with their cousins, those of the same generation and similar age group. Similarity could be found as most were born under the one child policy and have equal family structure. In fact, some of them are so close to their cousins that they have a kind of symbolic sibling's relationship by addressing each other directly as brothers or sisters. This seems to ameliorate the conditions of not having any siblings and help built a closer relationship with their cousins. Differences are only found when they have wider age gap, different family background or upbringing from rural or urban environment.

These daughters were then asked to contrast the difference they felt between single daughters and single sons. Respondents whom felt there are not much difference between them says that since they are the only child, parents would invest in them regardless of gender. Thus, the responsibility of taking care of the old-aged parents in due time to come is also that of the single child regardless of whether you are a boy or girl. On the other hand, for those who felt that there are differences, many reasons were given to justify their claims. For a start, China is a patriarchy society and traditionally sons are preferred more than daughters. As daughters, more pressure is put on them and they have

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to perform better than sons in order to gain recognition. Since the men and women are not equal, they do not enjoy the same status and even though the expectation maybe the same, women would still have to perform harder. In matrimony, daughters are “married out” and may not be able to take care of her parents; conversely sons would remain with their parents even after marriage. One of my respondents felt that the older generation such as their grandparents may prefer sons; one says that it was the situation more than 10 years ago but not today, and another says that it only happens in rural areas and not in urban areas.

Having born under the one child policy and within this ‘two plus one’ family structure, the respondents were asked to evaluate how it has affected their character development over the years and in turn they were asked to describe themselves. In their response, a number of the respondents have the tendency to compare themselves with families that have more than one child. As the only child, they often felt lonely due to the lack of companionship, as there are no other siblings to grow up with. One respondent thought that if she has siblings to grow up with, she would be more cheerful today. Often they described themselves as self-centered, not so sociable, not so considerate and do not know how to take care of others. Another respondent says that if she has siblings, she would have the opportunity to learn to take care of others better as her parents take care of her all the time. For another respondent, her realization came when she came in contact with peers who have siblings, she think they know how to take care of others and are more considerate. The tendency for being self-centered as a single child is due to well-protected environment, everything is being catered for just one child and he or she does not need to consider for other siblings. Owing to the tight control at home since young, some say they are not so sociable in term of building relationships with friends.

On the more positive note, they think that single child is more independent as they have to settle things by themselves since there are no brothers or sisters to refer to. The sense of responsibility would also increase as the single child has the prime duty in taking care of their parents. No doubt family structure has direct impact on the character development of the single child; some families try to overcome the effect of it by having

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extended family members like relatives in their upbringing. Like in the case of one of my respondents, she has close ties with her relatives such as her cousins and it sort of balance out the absence of siblings relationship. Their grandmother insists that they address each other directly as brothers and sisters and treat each other like their own siblings.

During this part of the interview, observation was made that these daughters described much of the weaknesses in their character development rather than their strengths. The other expressions stumbled across the data are words like stubbornness, proud, not so mature, selfishness and etc. I would like to suggest that the outcome of this could be due to several factors. First, having aware that they were born under the one-child policy, these daughters could relate their character shortcoming directly to the policy. The one-child policy has directly influence their family structure by restricting their parents to have only one child and thus all the love and attention from the grandparents to their parents are showered on this child. This phenomenon of the ‘little emperor’ (meaning children were pampered and as a result of it cultivate unfavorable behaviors) has lead to specific studies on single child’s character development in China by scholars such as Professor. Feng Xiaotian (see Feng Xiaotian 2002). Second, the humble nature of the Chinese people may have led them to talk more about their weaknesses than to boast about their strengths.

### *6.5. Gender Equality*

In the last part of the interview, my respondents were asked to comment on issues about gender equality. The questions on gender equality were asked in relation to the situation in China and in particular Shanghai. For a start, their opinions were gathered on the Shanghai men and women’s equality. By and large, one would have expected to be told about the inequality experienced in their everyday lives, but instead I was introduced to the idea of the ‘little Shanghai man’. Here, my respondents are referring to men in Shanghai whom are capable of cooking, doing household chores and taking care of the family. As explained by one of my respondents, these men do not necessary have to be born in Shanghai, as it is a kind of local culture where even men from other provinces



could also be influenced once they reside long enough in Shanghai. In her opinion, this phenomenon could only happen when the men have higher level of education and as the household status of both husband and wife become more equal. During my field trip in Shanghai, an article was published in the newspaper title ‘Shanghai women hold more than half the sky’ (China Daily, 12 Sep 2005), a survey released by the Shanghai Municipal Women and Children Committee. The article indicated that women in this city are spending lesser time on household chores and slightly more time on leisure time. “Apart from the improvement in living conditions and the growth of the house-keeping service industry, the fact that Shanghai men are increasingly sharing the housework is also an important factor behind the change,” said Shi Qiuqin, vice-director of the Shanghai Women’s Federation at a press conference during the second working meeting on Shanghai women and children’s development (China Daily, 12 Sep 2005).

The existence of the above phenomena helps to explain how my respondents felt about the men and women’s equality in Shanghai. During the interviews, they were asked to comment on the above newspaper article title ‘Shanghai women hold more than half the sky’ (China Daily 12 Sep 2005). Most of my respondents agreed with the article and felt that there is much equality between men and women in Shanghai and in some situation women are more equal than men. They credit these to several factors; first, due to economic reason Shanghai is a mega urban city and so the situation is much better. Second, historically Shanghai comes in contact with foreign culture much earlier and is more open. Third, education plays a part too in improving the status of women. One of my respondents felt that under normal circumstances, the education could increase the rate of success and could demand more respect at the same time. According to statistic, Shanghai had a total of 415,700 students in universities and colleges in 2004, 50.1 percent of whom were women (China Daily 12 Sep 2005). Nevertheless, this discussion has to be directed into two directions, namely employment and household. In the household, most respondents agreed that Shanghai women position in the family is higher compared with their peers in other parts of China. In term of employment hiring, there seems to be more equality in the civil service sectors verse that of the private sectors. All agreed that between men and women there are biological differences, and this sometimes

set the ground for gender discrimination. For those that see inequality, they cited few examples why they think that is the case. The political and business arenas are still much dominated by men especially those in the higher hierarchy; on the whole there is much inequality in the country especially in the rural areas; China is a patriarchy society and men are still pretty much in control.

While few have doubt or are uncertain about gender equality development over the years, majority of the respondents felt that the situation is better now than before. At least, the gap has been narrowed. Today, the living condition is much better and women have more opportunity for education. Perception has also changed with the society being more open especially in big cities like Shanghai. Media is more willing to embrace the topic than before. With technology improvement, the employment industry has shift certain jobs from using physical strength to the use of machinery and human intellectual and this has undoubtedly created more job opportunities for women workers. Job evaluation is based on performance rather than on gender. Nonetheless, as one of the respondents correctly points out, the situation for gender equality in China after 1949 seems to have put more pressure on women as women are expected to be the same as men.

Historically, men have a higher social status than women in a society like China. Even though this is still a reality in China today, it contradicts with modernization and this needs to be changed. In view of this, my respondents felt that this is a long term issue and to change or to improve the status of women takes time. Values of the women should change as they are responsible for their own position if they want their social position to improve. For those that do not agree, they think that it depends on the individuals and in some fields women do hold high positions such as the role of a minister. There are also women who felt that it is only normal that the men should be in the higher position due to biological and psychological differences and that the men should lead and be responsible. Women are followers and due to childbearing and motherhood, they are unlikely to perform equally like men.

In order to improve women's social status, almost all respondents list education as the most fundamental mechanism and say that women should be given the rights and opportunity to education. In China, the law calls for all children to have 9 years of compulsory education (China Education and Research Network website, Compulsory Education Law Article 2). Education could improve intellectual capabilities and thus higher chances of landing on better jobs. Women should also be active in social and economic activities. Family values have to be change to allow more rooms for further development. On another level, policies such as social policies and companies policies also need improvement. Social system and institutions should provide more childcare services and old-aged homes, so as to free up more time for economic activities to improve their financial position. In order to change perception, mass media has a role to play too as they constitute to the development of today women's image.

During the discussion of independency, my respondents emphasize on two aspects of how women can achieve this. First, economic consideration is most important. It is only when a woman has gained financial independency that she is able to have a choice to select. Second, women should have their own opinions, thinking and values especially for matters pertaining to themselves. Again, the development of education to elevate the status of women is reemphasized here. Others also suggest to free-up women's time on household chores.

Next, opinions were gathered on how China's open-up policy has impacted on women's status. According to my respondents, the open-up policy has definitely impacted on the women in both the rural and urban settings. Even though foreign companies are putting up their present more in the cities, rural women are moving into the cities to work as factory workers. There are more job opportunities and employment for women especially in areas like foreign languages, human resource and administration. Today, more women are in their own businesses and both men and women have equal opportunities. Women are now more involved in the society but however, one of my respondents felt that this social reform is not adjusted immediately to be on par with the political reform. Other than economics, the open-up policy has vast effect on politics, culture and etc. For

instance, in education it has brought in western values and now students can develop according to own strengths and there are more varieties in subjects for selection. Closely related to the open-up policy is globalization. With the availability of satellite TV and accessibility to internet and other foreign media, women in China are shown how their counterparts live in western countries. To code my respondent's words, "they would then unconsciously move towards that direction." Instead of globalization, another respondent prefers to discuss about westernization which she think is more widely spoken of in China. The realization was dawning that women in China have a lower position as compared to women in the West. With more opportunity to come in contact with feminist values and discussion on equality, all these have irreversible effects on women in term of thoughts and ideals.

### **7. Revelation of Gender Equality and/or Inequality**

Undoubtedly, the socialist society is developing towards a direction of more equality. As suggested by Dong Xin, there are two forms of gender inequality; one explicit and the other implicit. The explicit form of gender inequality can be read through statistical data such as the gender birth ratio, level of education between both sexes, differences in term of income level, and career development (Dong Xin 2005: 6). Comparison can be done through statistical records to reflect the actual problem. As mentioned earlier, China has serious imbalance sex ratios and the situation seems to be deteriorating especially in the more remote areas. Already in 1990 it was estimated by the Economy Nobel prize laureate Amartya Sen that one hundred million women were "missing" in the world, most of them concentrated to South Asia and China (Amartya Sen 1990). International and Chinese media have devoted a number of reports to the plight of the "surplus" of 50 million young men who cannot find a wife in years to come (Thorborg 2005: 2). Social problems like prostitutions and abduction would increase due to shortage of the female gender. In term of education, we do see some figures that show the number of students for both gender are quite on par in enrollment. However, this may not be the case in some rural areas. One study was done to evaluate how different in gender would affect the income for university graduates (Lu Jianmin and Wan Renxiao 2005: 29). Indeed there is

a different in term of income but the study says that gender discrimination is not the only reason for the difference in income. It is said that which school one comes from has a greater impact than gender. In another article, a survey of women scientists found that 82.9% of them had not been promoted in the previous five years (China Daily dated 3 March 2004).

The implicit form is more complicated and intangible form of gender inequality (Dong Xin 2005: 7). We may not be able to make measurement through statistical data but we are aware of its existence and this is something that would require longer time and effort to overcome. For instance, people's different expectations of men and women would have impact their career development between the two sexes (Dong Xin 2005:7). To the feminists, gender roles and gender identity have both caused the imbalance of power between the two sexes (Dong Xin 2005: 25). The result is that we would find more women in certain industries and vice versa. One example is in the education industry, where there is more ladies teacher than men in the nursery education for instance. In another example, as mentioned by my interviewees, there seems to be a glass ceiling for women in term of promotion and female workers have to perform harder than their male counterpart in order to receive the same recognition.

Another author suggested the third form of discrimination as 'reverse discrimination' (Shen Yifei, 2005: 52). One such example is describing the 'perfect' women as gentle, understanding, thrifty, hardworking and having high endurance. Over-emphasizes on these qualities would create unnecessary pressure and create imbalance in the women's life as the author suggests. In China, the promotion of gender equality after 1949 seems to have put undue pressure on women when they were expected to share the equal half of 'the sky'. Women were expected to perform like the men in many areas.

## **8. Conclusion**

### *8.1. The Driving Force?*

Coming to ten years now, Christine Hall has written in her concluding chapter that “with no strong driving force behind women’s emancipation, there will probably be no major advance over the next decade” (Hall, 1997: 178). The 1949 revolution acknowledged women’s equality and gave women equal rights in theory and to a large extent in practice. This enormous jump from ‘no worth’ to ‘equal worth’ has probably not been equaled by any other event in history worldwide (Hall, 1997: 177). In Hall’s statement, she clearly identified two elements that are essential to women’s emancipation, the driving force and time. Are we looking at the potential group of individuals that could be the driving force identify in this paper? Only time will tell.

Due to the implementation of the one child policy and the circumstances in China, the single daughters have become a group of individuals (especially those in the urban areas, I am reluctant to use the word ‘privilege’) that could hold the key to the future development of women status. As children and teenagers, they were used to the attention and affection of parents and grandparents, who encourage their individuality. They would almost certainly offer fierce resistance should anyone – be it government or husband – try to reduce their freedom and self-worth (Hall, 1997: 179). These efforts might be done unconsciously, what consequences would there be if some actions are taken deliberately in the name of gender equality? Or conscious effort is made to promote gender equality? Undoubtedly, these girls have benefited from the one-child policy (Hall 1997: 116). Even though, I am not certain if this was the initial intention of the government when the policy was implemented to control the population. Interestingly, it has also involved two generations of people, namely the girls’ parents whom have and will put all their hopes and ambitions into their daughters. They will fight for their daughter’s rights to equal education and career opportunities and will not accept any discrimination against girls (Hall 1997: 116).

Twenty-one interviewees might not be enough to draw conclusive results of how the future development of women would be; it does provide some insights into the thoughts

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and perception of this special group of individuals first born under the one child policy, during a time when market-oriented economy was introduced in China and when the open economy allows further influence from globalization and the advancement of technology such as internet allows freer flow of information. It was a time when China was welcoming on changes in politics, economy, culture, and new ideology (Wang Yuru 1999: 3).

Evidently, there are other existing and driving forces on gender issues, such as scholars, NGOs, government bodies and media. However, I felt that it is crucial that we get to the 'root' of the problem by addressing the issue with the 'roots' themselves. Women have to help themselves in order to be helped. Recently, in August 2005 the State Council Information Office published a white paper entitled 'Gender Equality and Women's Development in China'. The nine chapters document discuss the progress China has made in promoting gender equality and women's development over the last decade (Xinhua News, 24 Aug 2005). In its concluding remarks, the Chinese government admitted that it is restricted by the country's limited level of economic and social development, especially in the process of economic restructuring and in establishing and improving a socialist market economic system, in its efforts to promote gender equality and women's development. The outmoded conventions and customs of inequality between men and women handed down from China's history and culture have not yet been completely eradicated, and women's rights and interests are still being infringed upon to varying degrees in some areas (White paper 2005: 17).

### *8.2. Empowerment*

One common point in achieving gender equality is empowerment (Shen Yifei 2005: 348 and Li Xiaojiang 2005: 169). It is the process by which women can gain more equality and become aware of the gender issues and as a result elevate the women's status to the next level (Shen Yifei 2005: 348). The actualization of empowerment includes education and training, economy, personal safety, health, involvement and decision-making in social affairs, and etc (Shen Yifei 2005: 349). This is consistent with the suggestions made by our interviewees when they deem that education is the most important and

fundamental aspect to improve women's status. In addition, women should also be involved in social and economic activities as mentioned above.

Cross-cultural studies suggest that one of the single most important determinants of women's empowerment and therefore gender equality is the degree of female self-esteem and that one of the single most important factors underpinning or making for female self-esteem is the value placed on daughters by parents, families and by a culture (Croll 2000: 186). Consequently, any strategy to improve the position of women and redefine gender relations should also begin with changing attitudes towards and of daughters, so contributing to female self-respect and empowerment at all ages (Croll 2000: 186). Thus on two counts the empowerment of daughters is important: for daughters in their own right and for 'tomorrow's women' (Croll 2000: 186). With the one child policy, studies done on urban preferences show an increasing acceptance of a one-daughter family, daughters are now being included in parent-child contract and the expectations and entitlements of these daughters have increased (Croll 2000: 85-129).

### *8.3. Detrimental Factors*

However, we should be aware of factors or developments that would have a detrimental effect on the women's status in the society today. One such as the resurgence of traditional values, and often women are portrayed as a homemaker, decorative accessory, or husband's assistant and supporter (Hall 1997: 15 & 178). This focus on gender difference or unique female qualities, divisions or separation of activities, is an emphasis on complementarity's rather than equality (Croll 2000: 133). Fortunately, our group of young educated interviewees do not seem to be receptive to the ideal of wealthy, genteel idleness as suggested by some authors. On the other hand, gender differences and divisions in labour were rhetorically cancelled out for some decades in the quest for revolutionary androgyny and then re-emphasized as a component of the new economic reforms and as a cultural-specific response to globalization (Croll 2000: 135).



In the contemporary society, the mass media has become the basic tool of communication to the public especially with the invention of the internet – news is online and on-time. For most people, their lives are revolved around the mass media in order to keep in touch with the rest of the world, this is a new form of communication between people and thus we should be cautious about who is behind the media and its propaganda.

Finally, to code from the White Paper and as it has rightfully put it, there is a long way to go and arduous tasks to tackle to achieve gender equality and promote women's development in China to a satisfactory level.

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‘China lifts 50-year ban on student marriages’, *China Daily* dated 31 March 2005.

**Enclosure: Interview guide**

***Background information***

Name:

Year born:

Place of birth:

***Education***

Highest educational qualification attained:

Are qualifications important? Why?

***Employment – Career prospects/ careers advancement***

Years of working experience:

Position held/ job title:

Type of industry:

Do you enjoy your work?

What do you inspire to be?

If given a choice, do you like to work for private enterprises, foreign-owned companies or become your own boss?

Entrepreneurship: Do you want to be your own boss? Industry/service/products

Employment discrimination in Shanghai: Do you have any problem in finding the job you want?

What kind of effects does it have in term of promotion/ position/ income?

***Marriage***

Marital status: Single/Married/Divorced

Do you intend to get married?

If yes, at what age do you intend to get married? Why?

If not, why?

What are your criteria in looking for a spouse? (G.E.)

Do you mind if you earn more than your spouse? (G.E.)

If you are married, how many children do you intend to have? Why? Gender?

Who will take care of your child/children? Parents/Childcare center/Self/Nanny

If your husband earns a lot, do you mind becoming a full-time housewife? Why? (G.E.)

Do you think husband should help to take care of children or help with housework?

### ***Leisure***

Hobbies:

### ***As Single Daughters***

What are the considerations and worries that you may have?

Do you think you have more power (or resistance) as a single child?

Do you provide opinions to your parents pertaining to certain family issues?

How would you categorize your relationship with your parents? Good/bad/normal

Do you think you are different from your mother's generation?

Do you think you are different from cousins?

Is there any different being single daughters and single sons?

How has it affected your character development? How would you describe yourself?

Who will take care of your old aged parents?

### ***Gender Equality***

What is your opinion about Shanghai men and women's equality?

Do you think men and women's equality has improved over the years?

What is your opinion about men's social status higher than women's social status?

How can women's equality be improved? Social perception/Education

What is your opinion about independency?

How can a women gain independency? Own income/ employment

How has China's open-up policy impacted women's status?

How has globalization impacted on women's status?

The newspaper article says "Shanghai women hold more than half the sky", what is your opinion about this?



**Appendix: List of interviewees**

Name	Year Born	Age	Place of Birth	Marital Status	Educational Level
A	1983	22	Beijing	Single	Master student
B	1983	22	Jiangxi	Single	Master student
C	1983	22	Jiangsu	Single	Master student
D	1983	22	Zhejiang	Single	Master student
E	1982	23	Beijing	Single	Master student
F	1982	23	Hubei	Single	Master student
G	1982	23	Shanghai	Single	Master student
H	1982	23	Shanghai	Single	Master student
I	1982	23	Shanghai	Single	Master student
J	1982	23	Sichuan	Single	Master student
K	1982	23	Shanghai	Single	Master student
L	1982	23	Zhejiang	Single	Master student
M	1982	23	Shanghai	Single	Master student
N	1981	24	Shanghai	Married	Master student
O	1981	24	Fujian	Single	Master student
P	1981	24	Shanghai	Single	Master student
Q	1981	24	Zhejiang	Single	Master student
R	1981	24	Heilongjiang	Single	Master student
S	1981	24	Jiangsu	Single	Master student
T	1980	25	Shanghai	Single	PhD student High school graduate
U	1978	27	Shanghai	Single	