

Lund University
Department of Sociology

**A qualitative study of Chinese women's fertility desire
in light of the recent two-child policy**



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Author: Yanlin Zhang
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Supervisor: Lisa Eklund

ABSTRACT

Yanlin Zhang

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Supervisor: Lisa Eklund

The study found that during the period prior to the release of the two-child policy, the decision of whether to have a second child or not had become less affected by the family planning policy. Some wealthy people, or those who were eager to have a second child had already had a second child despite the policy, even at the expense of risking a fine. This 'rigid birth will' greatly reduced the effectiveness of the family planning policy. However, the family planning policy has had a longer lasting impact in that some people still limit their fertility intentions to within the range of 1-2 children, and there is rarely a willingness to go higher. Some people would have determined not to have a second child even if the policy had not existed and as such, this group of people were not affected by the policy. Other people expressed their desire to have a second child, but because of various practical factors such as work, family, economy, or personal pursuits, they have had to prioritize their life choices. At the same time, the study found that intergenerational expectations still have a great influence on the fertility desire of the younger generation.

Key words: *fertility desire, sex preference, generation relations, motherhood, two-child policy*

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1 Introduction

In October 2015, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee put forward the policy of ‘full implementation of two children for each couple’. This comprehensive two child policy began to be implemented on January 1, 2016. Due to a long-term release of pent-up fertility desire, in 2016 and 2017 the annual number of Chinese births was 17.86 million and 17.23 million respectively. The figures released by the National Bureau of Statistics in January 2018 showed they were significantly higher than the level of the ‘twelfth five-year’ period where the annual average was 16.44 million people, and it was the highest two values in history since 2000. According to data from China’s population survey, the number of babies born in 2017 decreased from the previous year, mainly because of the decline in the number of one-child births. However, the number of second children born in 2017 was 8.83 million, an increase of 1.62 million from 2016, which accounted for 51.2 percent of all births, an increase of 11% from 2016.

Xiru Li, director of Population and Employment Division, National Bureau of Statistics confirmed that with the change in the age structure of China’s population, the number of women of childbearing age has shown a declining trend year by year. The number of women of child-bearing age between 15 and 49 in 2017 was 4 million fewer than in 2016, among which the number of women aged 20 to 29 decreased by nearly 6 million. At the same time, with the development of the economy and society, the age at which Chinese women first marry and first decide to have children have been gradually delayed. Their fertility desires have also changed.

1.1 Background: Chinese Population Policies

In the 20th century, the world was rapidly changing with population explosions and demographic transitions (Smil, 1999) which began in developed countries as early as in the period of The Industrial Revolution. After World War II, in the 20th century, 80% of developing countries contributed to the world’s population growth. Why did the human population incur such a big shift? It is what is usually called a population revolution or demographic transition. Since the 1970s, international fertility rates have converged (Dorius, 2008). The world’s population is facing a new situation in that

population growth is turning downwards, while the demographic transition has diversified. The fundamental reason for this is that fertility rates in various countries have declined at different rates. From 1970 to 1990, the global fertility rate (TFR) gradually dropped from 4.8 to about 3.3, then in the period till 2010, it dropped further to about 2.5 (see Fig A1). This transformation in the world's population trend has led to a shift in governments' attitudes towards the birth rate and the adjustment of reproductive policies (Shen et al., 2012). A growing number of countries have introduced policies to encourage fertility, not only in Europe, where fertility has been chronically depressed, but also in east Asia and Oceania, where fertility rates have also fallen sharply. Several east Asian countries (Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan) have moved to an encouragement of fertility and continued to step up their policies, although the effects have not been entirely satisfactory (Shen et al., 2012). China also has a low fertility rate, and was gradually moving in an opposite direction to many other countries in terms of population balance, which has had a negative impact on Chinese society and families (Shen et al., 2012). The Chinese government realized that adjustment of the population policy was highly needed, and that the birth policy was an important factor in affecting China's population change and socio-economic development.

Starting from 1950, and estimated to last for the next one hundred years, there has been a great change in the world's population, with the occurrence of an unprecedented population phenomenon in human history - the fastest population growth rate, and the largest change in population growth and structure. This is the background of the entire population change in the world.

We can find the history of China's demographic transition in Fig.1.

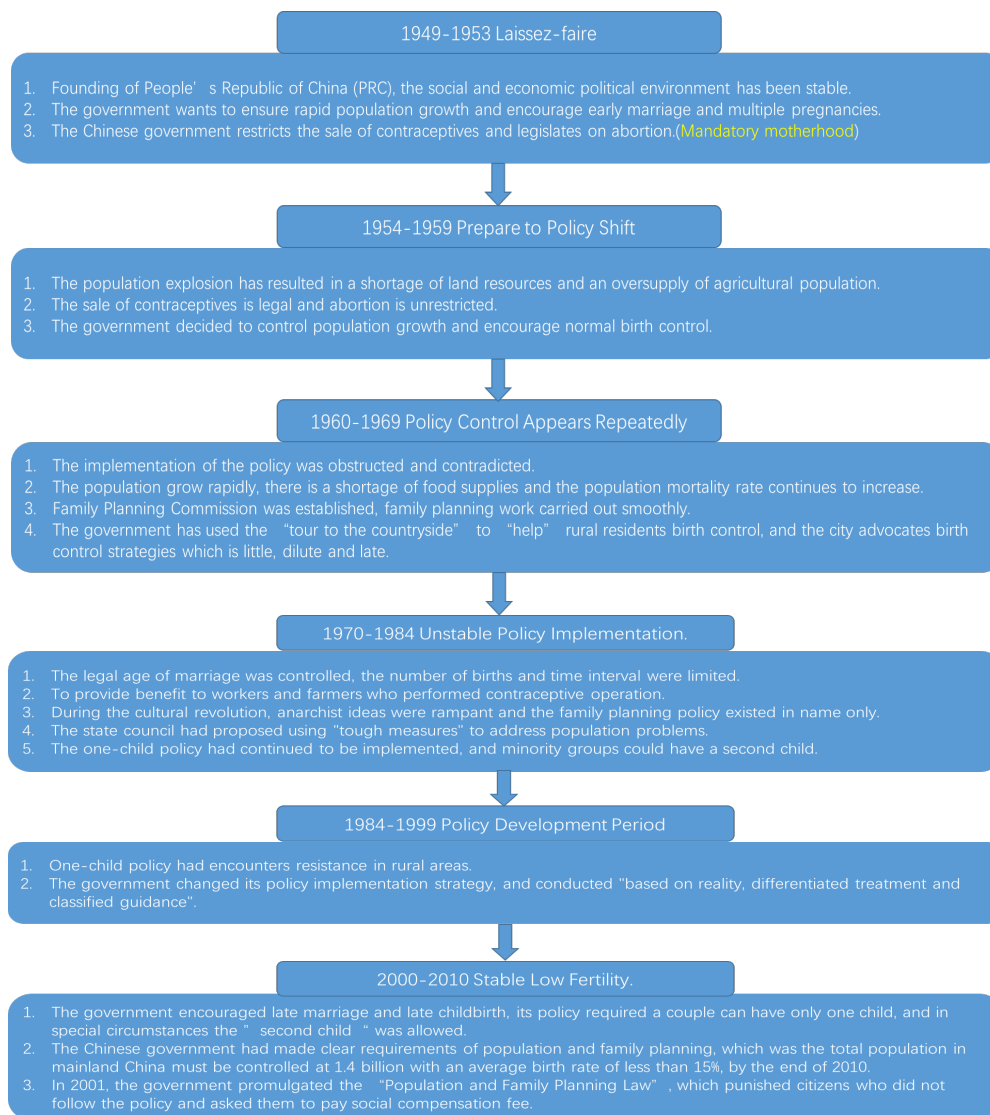


Fig.1 the history of China's demographic transition

Source. Author generated

Since the new Peoples Republic of China was founded in 1949, the Chinese population entered a transition period similar to other developing countries on the path of industrialization and modernization. China's stable social, economic and political environment, and improved living standards undoubtedly created a more favorable environment for the development of China's population. In the 1950s and 1960s, China adopted a 'laissez-faire' (Mandatory motherhood) approach to population growth and fertility. The Chinese government was responsible for the division of rural areas, and the allocation of housing for urban and rural residents was according to the number of people in the family (Hou et al., 2014). Moreover, there were restrictions on abortion and the sale of contraceptive drugs were controlled by the Chinese government by

measures involving legal coercion, which the punishment was used as a powerful deterrent against the masses. It is since then that women lost their freedom of fertility behavior (Shen et al., 2012).

After the 1950s, the health quality of the entire population has greatly improved, except for three difficult years between 1959-1961 (famine). There has been the most rapid decline in death rates since then. Like other countries demographic transitions, there was a 'population explosion' surge in China's population. According to census data, for the first time in 1953, the population of China broke through 'a hundred million mark'. The sharp increase in the population led to the supply of an agricultural population that was greater than the demand, and imposed restrictions on the development of the urban population, with issues such as housing and food shortages.

As the Chinese government recognized the social problems brought upon by population growth, they put forward policy requirements for birth control. In 1954, the family planning department of China issued a notification for the removal of all existing methods of birth control, which included the sale of contraceptives becoming legal. Abortion was no longer restricted and normal birth control was encouraged. Since then, the mighty Chinese birth control program began in the context of a new era (Huang and Sun, 2013). The fertility desires of Chinese couples were constrained, in the physiological sense. Pregnancies that were not 'permitted' were usually subject to forced abortions (Zeng and Hesketh, 2016).

However, the progress of the population policy did not go as 'smoothly' as the Chinese government expected. During the cultural revolution, China's social environment was unstable, the anarchist ideology flooded and birth-control policies existed in name only. In the late 1970s, the Chinese government realized that the population problem was very serious and began to change its birth-control policies. In the late 1970s, China began to implement the one-child policy, which led to the rapid transformation of China's population growth model. The total fertility rate dropped sharply from the late 1970s.

After World War II, New Malthusianism prevailed. The schools of thought with greater

influence were the ‘population crisis theory’ and the ‘depletion theory of natural resources’. They were pessimistic about the development of the world’s population and believed that the world’s population explosion would lead to such things as ‘energy crisis’, ‘ecological crisis’, and ‘food crisis’, and concluded that human growth would exceed the limit (Ehrlich, 1968; Lee and Wang, 2000). Marked by the ‘open letter’ of 1980, this is the watershed of China’s population problem, changing from ‘strength in numbers’ to ‘burden in number’ (Li et al., 2015; Mu, 2016). After 1980, the Chinese government completely accepted the Malthusian view (equilibrium trap) and used it to control the population. They introduced a series of fertility policies that not only deprived people of their right to autonomy but also undermined the law of balanced development of the population itself (Hesketh and Zhu, 1997; Li et al., 2000), all of which were the result of fundamental changes in the government understanding of the population issue in China.

The one-child policy seriously conflicted with people’s desire to have children, making it difficult for family planning in China. In order to achieve the goal of population control, the Chinese government took administrative, economic and other coercive measures, which produced many negative effects that the Chinese government had not anticipated. However, the Chinese government urgently wanted to get rid of the big ‘burden’ of their increasing population and were eager to quickly catch up with the economic development level of other developed countries. Thus, the Chinese government strictly implemented the ‘one-child’ policy.–

In 1992, China’s fertility rate fell below the expected replacement level. Accompanied by a decline in fertility, were the additional issues of long-term unbalanced sex ratio at birth, accelerated aging, the one-child family risk, labor shortages and a series of population problems, which had become limiting factors in China’s social and economic development (Mu, 2016).

By 2000, 55.78 million Chinese families had received a one-child certificate (Mu, 2004). In 2007, China’s Population and Family Planning Commission announced that China had a cumulative birth of 90 million one-child children. However, there was a gap between this number and the relevant research data, due to underreporting of births

and statistical standards, and other issues. In 2013, Wang and Yang (2007), who was a population forecasting expert at the Institute of Population and Labor Economics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, estimated that in 2015, the number of one-child children would reach 176 million using sampled data and computer simulation models. At the beginning of the 21st century, the huge one-child group entered the stage of life where marriage and pregnancy would be considered the norm. In particular, the one-child children born in the 1980s and 1990s, that entered into marriage, could lead to a birth peak in the first two or three decades of this century. An increasing number of families where both parents were only children themselves came into being.

In November of 2011, all provinces (except Henan, which followed shortly after) had started to permit couples who were both only children to have two children (Zeng and Hesketh, 2016). In November 2013, the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China put forward the following policy: ‘allowing couples in which at least one of the marital partners was an only-child to have two children, gradually adjusting and perfecting the reproductive policy and promoting the long-term balanced development of the population.’ However, according to the National Health and Family Planning Commission, as of the end of May 2015, of about 11 million qualifying couples, only 1.45 millions of them (13.2%) had applied for another pregnancy, which was far lower than expected (National Health and Family Planning Commission, 2015). The first step of the family planning policy adjustment did not work well.

The long-term low birth rate has brought about a range of social and economic problems. The proportion of the working-age population in the total population has contracted since 2013 and the impact will last until the middle and later stages of this century. The trend of population aging becomes more and more obvious. The quantity of people in the labor force is rapidly decreasing relative to the number of older people in need of support, and pension costs of the whole society are rising (Chen, 2017; National Health and Family Planning Commission, 2015). Therefore, the transformation of the population policy is imminent.

1.2 Aims and Research questions

This study attempts to provide insights into the way in which women in China navigate their fertility desires, the changes and challenges they face.

What does the process of transition from one child policy to second child policy look like in China and what implications does it have for the fertility desires of women in the context of this study?

- How do women view the spousal relationship, intergenerational expectations and fertility desire, and how do they rationalize them?
- What meanings do women attach to the transition to becoming a mother, and how do they experience motherhood? What challenges and changes do they experience with the role transition, and what kind of strategies do they employ to mitigate the challenges?
- What kind of fertility decisions did married women make after the stimulus of the universal two-child policy? What do they think about other relevant policies?

This thesis will begin by outlining the methodology and methods used in this study, and then continue with an overview of the context of the study, as well as the relevant literature. Thereafter, the theoretical and conceptual framework used will be analyzed to collect empirical data. In the final section, a concluding discussion will be presented.

2 Methodology & Methods

2.1 Qualitative method: talking about sensitive topics

Different from quantitative research, qualitative research not explores problems through statistical data or numbers, but analyzes human behavior and opinions through keen insights (Bryman, 2015). Quantitative research is to solve the ‘what’ question, while qualitative research is to solve the ‘why’ questions. The research may involve sensitive topics, which takes more time as you need to build trust with the respondents. However, this kind of trust-building interaction is not suitable for quantitative research.

Given that the interview method was not face-to-face, it could be difficult to objectively

assess the 'real' interview response, which also tested reliability and validity through the interview scene (includes the clothes, expressions, behaviors and the home conditions) (National Health and Family Planning Commission, 2015). However, there were some advantages of a phone interview. As the focus could be on the verbal rather than on the visual, it was easier for the interviewees to be compliant and honest rather than feel they were being judged or that they needed to suppress their true feelings (Qi, 2010). Also, it can save costs and time, as there were no constraints in terms of geographical coverage (Bryman, 2015). In addition, when it came to sensitive topics, interviewees may prefer telephone interviews (Ward et al., 2015).

Fertility desires are affected by many internal and external factors. The reasons for their decision also incorporate the concept of value which cannot be judged independently. This value concept must take into account the background of the interviewee, their environment and their own ideas in order to understand their values, which are difficult to present through quantitative data. The research on fertility desire is related to the individual's own reproductive values, which is generally more private. Therefore, in the research methods, the in-depth interview method in qualitative research was used, and Semi-Structured Interviews were outlined as the method of data collection and analysis.

This study adopted individual interviews. An important factor, leading to the decision to choose interviews as the main data collection method, was trying to express the interpretation of the women themselves, rather than relying on others to explain their lives. In addition, interviewing was different from observation and ethnography. The topics that might be studied were beyond the content of daily conversations and communication, and there might be a reluctance to reveal the real information (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) particularly concerning sensitive topics such as the relationship with their mother-in-law, family identity, economy, contraception, etc. Although these topics might seem to be all about daily life, they might be unwilling to share their true feelings more publicly.

2.2 Data Collection

Information collection of people living in a specific geographic area and cultural area was the main source of qualitative research information (Bryman, 2015). Due to time and geographical constraints, the only option was to use WeChat for audio and text interviews. According to the interviewee's situation, individual interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 60 minutes. Interviewees were all Chinese, and interviews were conducted entirely in Chinese. This allowed them to feel more comfortable and familiar with the language structure and linguistic context, which greatly facilitated the formulation of the questions and could promote the interviewees' understanding of the problems. During the interviews, the interviewers' encouragement can also enhance the confidence and enthusiasm of the interviewees. Prior to the interview, I provided a brief description of the interview format, and valuable feedback from the interviewees was conducive in facilitating the continuous updating of the interview guide which could be used in subsequent interviews.

2.3 Sampling

There was a need for a high degree of cooperation among the subjects in this study, and also a need to target a specific area (Fenig et al., 1993). In this study, the interviewees were all from urban regions. There is a big difference between urban and rural culture in China, and due to time and resource constraints, it would have been difficult to interview a sufficient sample size (Bryman, 2015) to interpret the influence of different regional cultures. During the collection period, 14 individual interviews were conducted. However, taking into consideration that the Chinese government defines married women of childbearing age as between 20 and 49 years old, women aged from 28 to 42 were chosen for the interviews. In addition, interviewees included women who had had one or two childbearing experiences. Two of them, who gave birth to twins, had conceived them with medical assistance (ovulation injections).

All interviewees were found either through social media tools, or with the help of friends. While searching for interviewees from lower levels of education, one woman asked if compensation was provided for the interview and declined to participate in the absence of a gift or financial compensation. She believed that she was justified to raise

the question. Others, with a similar low level of education did not respond when they were asked to participate.

Women with a bachelor degree or above were more likely to participate in the interview, because they consider it a very interesting discussion topic and experience. After several attempts, 16 respondents were recruited of which 11 had a bachelor degree or above, and 5 were high school graduates. Judging from the occupations of the respondents, and the occupations and income of their spouses, it could be assumed that most of them were urban middle-class people. Of these, Qian and Na were from relatively rich families.

In addition, interviewees tended to complete their interviews independently rather than having their husbands present. In cases where I was unfamiliar with the interviewees, it helped reduce personal interest in the interviews and allowed interviewees to talk freely and truthfully about their thoughts.

2.4 Data analysis

All interviews were recorded, and any meaningful content was transcribed for further analysis (Bryman, 2015). Any unusual events or experiences ascertained through the stories told by the interviewees' when detailing their life history, could be useful in understanding their reflections, decisions and actions in daily life (Bryman, 2015). Defining the meaning of these actors is critical to the analysis of coding.

The aim of coding is to collect useful information from the interview and then analyze it using skills such as classifying, prioritizing, abstracting, etc. (Bryman, 2015). It includes two sections: 1) first cycle coding method; 2) second cycle coding method. I coded the interview data in the first cycle mostly using descriptive coding which provided an inventory of the topics. This was combined with an element of simultaneous coding, which enabled me to assign multiple meanings by applying more than one code to each unit of data, to identify, then investigate relationships within the data (Bryman, 2015). In first cycle coding I started by breaking down the interview record into smaller parts and assigned them representative words. In the second cycle

coding, the coding I obtained from the first cycle were further identified, categorized, conceptualized, and finally assigned a theory or theme (Guion et al., 2001). Some codes were removed in this cycle because they were deemed unnecessary.

2.5 Methodological Considerations

Before starting the interview, it was very important to consider the following questions

- How to reduce the feeling of awkwardness, and how to build better trust?
- How to breakdown the responses of the interviewee's construction of a topic?
Which topics can be discussed?

1. Be trusted

Prior to the interview, it was necessary to give an oral explanation of what records would be made, discuss the confidentiality of the interview and to obtain the consent from the interviewee (Hopen and Rooney, 2017). Given the sensitive nature of some of the topics, it was extremely important to emphasize the confidentiality of their responses, in particular that none of their names would be included in the report, or in the data analysis. Furthermore, interviewees were told that they could decline to answer questions that they felt uncomfortable with or were unwilling to answer (Saldaña, 2009).

2. Talking or not talking?

In order to establish a good rapport and atmosphere during the actual interview, a 'warm-up' was very important. This should avoid direct and straightforward questions (Saldaña, 2009), but instead, ask more open and relevant to them questions. By looking for things in daily life that they may be interested in, such as the history of their relationship or their children, it should provide topics that they should be able to talk openly and easily about. There is no 'right' answer to an interview during the dialogue (Saldaña, 2009).

Usually, after a short while, it could be seen that the interviewees relaxed and opened up. Taking into account that the husband's presence would affect the authenticity of the interviewees' responses, the interviewee would be asked at the beginning if the

interview could be conducted in an independent, comfortable and undisturbed space (Ward et al., 2015). In interviews, it is a relatively common phenomenon to share successful hidden failures (jia chou bu ke wai yang). However, interviewees usually use a more euphemistic approach to express their dissatisfaction about unfavorable circumstances, and leads them to talk about topics more freely. Thus, through analyzing the content of the conversation process, the desires of the interviewees could be identified.

3. Deep inside out: Surface Appearances or the true facts

The true facts, from the perspective of meaning, require firstly to understand its significance to the respondent, and then for the researcher to consider how to maintain the focus of the interview to relevant themes. It is inevitable that researchers will intervene and influence the research process in an in-depth interview (Fenig et al., 1993). In general, researchers obtain relevant data from an observer's perspective through in-depth interviews (Guion et al., 2001). In this process, researchers need to examine whether their involvement in the research process is objective. However, such observation, understanding and interpretation does not necessarily mean that the researcher will be confused with the intended meaning of the interviewee. They should immerse themselves in the interviews and think about it as if part of their daily routine to decipher the emotional message inherent in the speaker (Harvey, 2011).

Although the researcher aims to understand the behaviors of the interviewees and assign them meanings, the researcher is bound to generate a subjective method in the process of receiving and understanding the 'narration' and 'expression' of the interviewees. Such as in creative interviewing where the interview strategy and skills can prompt the respondent to continue to open up their inner world. In addition, from the perspective of feminist research, the in-depth interviews should be conducted in a manner where both the researchers and the interviewees are no longer seen as tools for data production, but are familiar with each other and enter each other's lives as if in a wonderful scene (Bryman, 2015; Guion et al., 2001).

4. Non-repeatability

Given that the interview is context dependent, where interpretation of the meaning is derived from the interaction between the interviewer and the respondent, like a joint production (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004), it cannot be necessarily expected that the same answers would be reproduced on another occasion (Bryman, 2015). There were 4 interviewees who were contacted again so that the interview could be repeated. In the repeat interviews, the interviewees showed significantly less positivity than in their first interviews.

3 Background Literature

Research on fertility desires incorporates have much factors from macro to micro perspectives, from economics, sociology and biology, to understanding of individual or family fertility desires. In this study, background literature mainly focuses on the effect of economy, effect of sex preferences and number of children, and the effect of intergeneration.

3.1 Economy

In developed countries, as per capita income rises, the fertility rate of the population continues to decline, which goes against the phenomenon of Malthusian ‘multiplication principle’, which will be further explained. Fertility desire is considered to be closely linked with socio-economic factors. One of the most notable is Gary Becker’s theory of consumer demand in the 1960s to maximize utility into family fertility analysis; Paul Schultz, discussed the family’s economic-population behavior and demand model, and analyzed the effects of family time allocation and labor force participation on fertility. Based on the child’s benefit-cost analysis, Leibenstein (1970) put forward the theory of reasonable choice of marginal children, and established a theoretical model to determine the number of children willing to have as a decisive factor. The theory holds that a family’s decision-making on childbirth through the costs and benefits of child production to analysis, calculation, comparison and measures for determine whether the family’s socioeconomic status can be maintained (Schoen et al., 1997; Umoh et al., 2012). As the economy and household income continue to rise and grow, the cost of raising children and the utility that children can provide will also change. Specifically, with the continuous increase in income levels, the cost of raising children is also

increasing, and as the utility of childbirth is less than the cost, then fertility desires will decrease (Schoen et al., 1997).

3.2 Sex preference

The relevant empirical studies show that preferences for sons affects the health and welfare status of daughters. In parts of Asia, such as India, Nepal, Bangladesh, China, etc., gender differences in the survival of children are widespread. The higher male to female sex ratio of birth babies, and the high mortality rate of daughters indicate that son preferences affect the survival and development of the female gender (Croll, 2000; Eklund, 2016b; Greenhalgh and Winckler, 2005).

In contemporary China, the topic of gender preference of children is a sensitive issue. In fact, son preference is often described in official and popular discourse as ‘traditional’, ‘backward’ and ‘feudal’ (Eklund, 2011). It also conflicts with the political stance of the ‘Care for Daughters Campaign’. However, some scholars pointed out that based on the background of the birth policy, the preference for sons still exists among rural residents in China. The concept of gender, age, education, family income (Lv, 1998; Mo, 2005), ‘intergenerational expectations’, and ‘raising sons for old age’ all have an impact on sons’ preference. (Croll, 2000; Eklund, 2016). Therefore, the traditional concept of gender preference is considered to have had a greater impact on the newborn sex in rural areas.

In a follow-up study, Eklund (2015) also found that ‘intergenerational contracts’ could be weakened without significant changes in sons’ unsubstitutability. Especially in rural areas of China, where the male labor force has an important position in the rural family’s livelihood, the strategy has weakened but has not been shaken.

Since the 1990s, the urban residents’ fertility desires were dominated by one child, and son preferences were generally weaker than in rural areas, and preferences for daughters appeared (Feng and Zhang, 2015). While, most of the research on fertility desires almost entirely depends on quantitative research, in order to get a better understanding of the problem, Eklund (2016) did a survey of fertility desires among

China's young urban elite using qualitative research. This showed, supported by a large amount of interview data, that the traditional gender preference had been weakened and fertility desires had diversified to either 'daughter preference' or 'sons and daughters'.

Previous studies of daughter preference have found that daughters are more likely to be emotional. The motivation for daughter preferences are centered around daughters being thought of as 'lovely, cute, funny, gentle and soft' (Eklund, 2015). For women, traditional gender role attitudes are more related to daughters than any other type of preference. These traditional attributes associated with daughters has influenced women's final gender choice, not because the status of women has improved, but because these traditional women desire the qualities daughters bring as gender roles have continued to diverge (Fuse, 2013). Since women with traditional ideas may not be as likely to be socially and economically independent, they anticipate that their daughters will provide companionship and support their old age (Fuse, 2013).

In addition, some studies believe that 'sex preference' may affect the decision-making in terms of number of children, which means that couples with an unfavorable child gender structure at any pregnancy may continue to reproduce until the ideal sex of child appears (McClelland, 1979). In China, the situation was quite different because of the family planning policy. There were couples who were compelled to stop having children due to the limitation of the fertility policy laws and regulations, even if they had not yet achieved their ideal child gender structure. This was especially true for rural couples. However, some couples continued to have children even if they violated the government's statutory fertility conditions. This not only shows that they have sex selection, but also that their 'sex preference' was quite strong.

3.3 Intergeneration

In the research of intergenerational relations, more social exchange theories are used to analyze intergenerational exchange relations are as reflected in the family pension as an investment support relationship (Croll, 2000; Eklund, 2013). However, under the influence of Chinese traditional culture, the intergenerational reciprocal relationship cannot be simply based on the intergenerational wealth flow (Croll, 2000). It is

understood as a purely interactive interaction between individuals, the ‘generational solidarity’ between the two generations in terms of emotion and blood is also an important foundation (Croll, 2000). This study aim to understand this kind of inter-generational reciprocal relationship (Croll, 2000) between family (micro-level interest interaction) and the overall social structure (institutions and culture).

- In traditional Chinese society, intergenerational relations are based on the absolute authority of the older. The development of filial piety culture is one of its most typical manifestations (Croll, 2000; Eklund, 2013), as well as one of the social psychological and cultural guarantees. Through building an intergenerational relationship, which is based on the concept of the previous generation as the center (Croll, 2000), this kind of filial piety culture achieves a balance between generations and social stability. In terms of family support for the older, this means that the previous generation placed its own value on the selfless dedication of the next generation as a task to be accomplished. People must do the right thing at each stage, if their children get married and have grandchildren, then they will see the continuation of the bloodline (Xiong, 1998). At the same time, the next generation must have a kind of guilty mentality that must repay or compensate the previous generation through ‘filial piety’ (the main content is to provide for the aged) (Xiong, 1998).
- However, the ‘substantial’ supportive responsibilities of modern Chinese families were gradually replaced by the ‘formal’, where the old people’s demand for their children’s support was greatly reduced, and the children’s support pressure was significantly reduced (Liu, 2016; Xiong, 1998). The weakening of the children’s financial burden on the older has broken the balance between the traditional intergenerational relationship between the older raising children and the back-feeding of the children, and in some cases, even children who are economically independent are still requiring financial support from their parents, the social phenomenon known as ‘live off their parents’ (ken lao) (Liu, 2016).

4 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

4.1 Work–Family Conflict

The study of Work–Family Conflict is based on theories of role stress and intermittent conflict. Kahn et al. (1964) coined the term intermittent conflict to describe when the stress in one role becomes incompatible with stress from another role. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) extended the definition of Work–Family Conflict. Specifically, the family role conflict theory believes that there is a contradiction between work and family life. There are three kinds of uncontrollable contradictions: time conflicts, stress conflicts and behavior conflicts.

- 1) Time conflict means that both work and family require the same time to maintain. The two cannot be managed at the same time. Over-allocation of one party's time will inevitably lead to a relative decrease in the other party's time. There will be competition between the two parties which forms a time conflict.
- 2) Stress conflict occurs because women have many roles throughout their lives (daughter, wife, mother, employee, leader, and other social roles). In certain roles and situations, women will experience depression, happiness, nervousness, excitement, and anxiety. These states, whether good or bad, affect the play of other social actors. The conflicts formed between them are stress conflicts.
- 3) Behavioral conflict occur when women play different roles with differing expectations, and they cannot adjust their own behaviors to satisfy the expectations of the roles, so there will be behavioral conflicts.

In addition, when family and work cannot be coordinated, or there are conflicts between the social roles, coupled with significant negative support from one aspect of work or family, there will be a role conflict. The conflict between work and family roles usually occurs more often in women than in men. Work and family role experiences may be understood through the family development theory (Dore, 2008). The shifting responsibilities of families can be captured in the different processes of work–family

conflict. Especially in terms of female fertility, women have the most significant influence on how to deal with various conflicting social roles.

4.2 **Motherhood**

The first is the motherhood discourse from feminism. Feminist internal assessments of motherhood are not consistent. Some scholars believed that motherhood was a social construction that oppressed women and took a derogatory stance on it. They believed that it played a key role in the process of women's subordination to men. The hidden patriarchy behind them not only restricted the mother's identity and its self-development but also led to women's economic dependence and disadvantage (Rich, 1995). Thurer (1994) proved from a cultural analysis point of view that so-called good mothers are constructed by culture and that each different era has different children culture and good mother standards. The so-called woman born knowing how to be a good mother is a myth.

The role of mothering has been given different concepts. In this article, the following two types are mainly discussed:

- 1) Intensive Mothering (Shoran, 1996), is being self-consciously committed to child rearing. Basically, the ideology conflicts with that of the workplace, and the 'dominant ethos of modern society.' Intensive Mothering is when the mother is child-centered, provides expert guidance, and is emotionally involved. It is labor intensive, and incurs high costs. Mothers have primary responsibility for the growth and development of their children, and their children needs takes precedence over their own.
- 2) Extensive Mothering (Christopher, 2012), is when they ask others to take responsibility for substantial amounts of their day-to-day child care, and reframe good mothering as being 'in charge of' and ultimately responsible for their children's well-being. Mothers in this sample also justify employment in novel ways: They emphasize the benefits of employment not only for themselves but for their children too and they reject the long work hours imposed by an ideal worker model.

How to construct the status of a ‘good mother’? This study attempts to use the concept of motherhood to interpret how women try their best to cope with their roles in the two ideologies of ‘Intensive Mothering’ and ‘Extensive Mothering’ and how to meet the social expectations of motherhood. In other words, how can you be a good mother while also being employed?

4.3 Generations Relationship

Family and intergenerational dynamics are key elements of the social fabric of society. Family intergenerational relationships are the embodiment of vertical relationships within members of a blood relationship (or adoption relationship). The core of family intergenerational relationships is the parent-child relationship (Xiong, 1998). The formation of a parent-child relationship cannot be considered separately from the relationship formed by the marriage of two family members (as only children born within a marriage are legally recognized).

As far as the general situation is concerned, only when the previous generation members are married and have their own children, can the parent-child intergenerational relationships be formed. It should be stated that the parent-child relationship is the bond between generations and the foundation of intergenerational relations. Other forms of intergenerational relationship and family member relations are derived and extended on this basis. Therefore, the parent-child relationship is the basis of the analysis of intergenerational relationships. In the traditional era, parent-child centered family generation relations existed mainly within the family (Croll, 2000; Xiong, 1998).

However, in the contemporary era where fathers and sons generally live separately, intergenerational relationships have become a cross-family type of relationship (Croll, 2006). There are close kinships and intergenerational relationships between two self-contained families. Even so, the inclusion of intergenerational relations has not changed as a result. However, the separate-living between fathers and sons will have an impact on the maintenance of intergenerational relationships (Croll, 2006).

In the intergenerational exchange theory, exchange relationships permeate all aspects of human behavior (Homans, 1958), covering intergenerational relationships within the family. Older parents provide childcare for their married children, while the children provide shelter and food for their parents. In rough terms, the foster-support relationship between generations does indeed have the performance of an exchange relationship. The difference is that the exchange relationship in nurturing-supporting is expressed as vertical exchange (Xiong, 1998), i.e., the parents raise the children through the present pay-out to obtain the support of their children when they become adults.

Different from the general exchange relationship, the exchange relationship between generations does not take place between two actors. The ordinary exchange relationship can only be maintained when the two parties see the real benefit. When a child is born, for more than a decade they rely on parental support. Due to the ages of the two actors and their ability to control one's personal resource (in fact, young children do not have the ability to control personal resources), parents have expectations and provide sustenance for their children, while children may have no awareness of the exchange. It can be seen if vertical intergenerational relations are regarded as exchange relations, both parties do not necessarily see the benefits.

In the traditional Chinese culture, the next generation's support for the previous generation can be described as a time-sequential return on investment. Some scholars have pointed out that there are simultaneous reciprocal exchanges between generations, such as exchange of services for economic security, or exchange of future inheritance services for future heritage (Lee et al., 1994). In his book, Plant made a distinction between economic exchanges and social exchanges. He pointed out that economic exchange is a bilateral or multilateral transfer as a giver or receiver. The result of this process is the equality from an exchange, while social exchange is a means of (resources) redistribution. All individuals or groups involved in the exchange process are, to some extent, givers or recipients, although the result is that one party will give more, and another party will accept more (Pinker, 1979).

In traditional Chinese culture, caring for the older is the responsibility and obligation of the family, especially the children. Filial piety to parents and the older are socially celebrated. However, there are differences between different cultures in the care of the older. Fei (1985) once pointed out that in the family structure relationship in China, the way that children support their parents is different from that of the West. It is a kind of 'refeeding mode'. China's traditional ethics for older care reflects the principle of balanced reciprocity and intergenerational progress in raising children and then receiving support from them as they age. It has become the bond that sustains the continuation of the family economic community.

Different from the older-centered intergenerational relationships in traditional society, the focus of intergenerational relations in modern society has a tendency to move downwards (Croll, 2006). The intergenerational relationship shifts to the next generation as the center. Even in Chinese society in the transition period, the trend is also very clear. This point is reflected in family education, family consumption, family decision-making and even the so-called generation gap phenomenon in China today. Some scholars have summarized the older parents' economic support for their children as a reverse tending relationship, namely the 'counter-back-feeding model' (Che, 1990). For example, in urban middle-aged and older parents preparing wedding supplies and expenses for unmarried children was the outstanding phenomenon of this 'counter-back-feeding pattern.' The traditional family support was more about the result of moral education and cultural tradition. The modern family support is more inclined to a rational intergenerational exchange contract relationship and emotional relationship, while the cultural aspect is weaker.

Based on the above discussion, the social exchange relationship discussed in this paper is limited to the interaction of power and resources within the informal system between the older and children of the family. Here, the researchers have not formalized informal systems such as families and countries and units. The reciprocal benefit relationship between organizations is included in the scope of the study because the purpose of this paper is to examine the features and problems of the care of the older from the perspective of intergenerational relationships.

5 Data Analysis

5.1 Becoming a Mother

After thousands of years, the Confucian culture seems a bit outdated, however, its influence on Chinese family culture is time-honoured. In traditional Chinese culture, pregnancy is called ‘you xi’ (joyous occasion). Where does joyous occasion come from? Mencius commented ‘Un-filial has three types, of which having no descendants is the biggest (Smith et al., 2018). Female infertility, in traditional Chinese society is one reason for divorce, so becoming pregnant and giving birth, is a great thing in a female’s life.

However, in pursuit of a higher level of growth in life, female identity can be acquired through the transformation of their roles. The young generation want to have a family but also show as an individual, they can take responsibility for a child. Different motivations and influencing factors are as follows.

5.1.1 Independent or respondent?

In traditional Chinese family culture, fertility is a kind of family responsibility, which carries the responsibility of family prosperity (Xiong, 1998). However, previous studies have found that the fertility concept of the younger generation has changed compared to the older generation (Liu, 2016; Xiong, 1998). The younger generation believe that the maintenance of family relations should be strong emotional mutual pay, rather than being faced with mandatory ideas and obligations with the division of social roles and family roles (Liu, 2016), and that the traditional family structure innovation lags behind the division of labor in modern society. This is a new value, the younger generation subverts the stereotype of the family pattern, as independent actors who can ‘consciously choose desires’ (Eklund, 2016).

In the interviews, almost all of the interviewees thought that marrying and having children were what one is expected to go through in life, and they could partly be independent from their parents but not totally. Their age could not be used as a valid reason to prevent parents from infiltrating into their lives. Deng decided to have a child

after she had been married for six years because she enjoyed independent family life, and she believed that her parents' interference in their lives would be reduced when they were married: 'My mother has strong desires to control the child. Her control became less when I married.' As Eklund (2016) mentioned the meaning of life and the expansion of self also has a gender dimension, and maternity is felt as 'nature calling'. Such an expansion of the female self to distinguish it from extending the family line was found by Evans (2007). Chan, who got married 100 days after she met her husband, was eager to have children in the year of monkey, explained: "I have strong belief that I want two children, no matter sons or daughters. I am also superstitious and hope that my child will be born in the monkey year." This finding echoes previous studies which identified having children as particularly important to women (Adams, 2016).

In addition, as a continuation of the family and the individual, the younger generation have described the process of 'enjoying' parenting compared to the traditional 'responsibility' of parenting. A new perspective, in terms of children's emotional and financial costs, is that they are no longer considered as the 'investment' for their parents' future pension. They put more emphasis into the care of their child and enjoying the fun elements of their child's growth. As told by Ji:

"When I was pregnant, I would observe the interactions of other parents and their children, and then imagine how my child would be. We have a smaller version of us, and then watch them grow. Don't you think this is a very happy thing?"

5.1.2 The inter-generational contract

However, the intergenerational transmission effect of the concept of fertility cannot be ignored (Croll, 2000). When the younger generation marry, the older generation's longing for grandchildren is also stimulated. By making sure grandchildren are born, the grandparents can fulfill the expectations and obligations of previous generations. The value of the child and the value of the grandchildren are closely related to the fertility desire of the younger generation. (Eklund, 2016).

More than half of the interviewees and their husbands were from one-child families,

what the Chinese call ‘shuang du jia ting’. However, younger generations do not care about the responsibility of the family line being continued. They care more about their own wishes, but inter-generational contract flows and family expectations do have an impact on their fertility intentions (Croll, 2000). At the same time, the availability of support is closely related to generational expectations (Xiong, 1998). While the older generation expects grandchildren, it also takes time and effort to help the younger generation take care of their children. Especially for younger generations, whose lack of parenting skills could be a reason cited for uncertainties regarding whether to enter parenthood. Yi, a mother of two children, explained: “Who helps with the baby? It is a very important influence on whether or not want children, or when want have children. Especially in first time to be a parent, I do not know anything. If I do not have any help from old generation, I must be busy and mixed.”

Nan sees parent support and affordability as equally important guiding principles in the determining preference for the number of children, but for her, having one child was enough.

“I married my husband for 6 years, and I didn’t want children before. I think two people’s life is very good..... I wonder if I have a baby, who will help me to take care of the child? My parents-in-law wanted a grandchild, but they did not mention it to me. They believed they could not affect my decision. But my grandmother and my aunt want me to have a baby, they have been talking about this topic over the years. My grandmother thought she was very old, and she was afraid she would die, before my baby was born. Following their wishes, I have a son now.”

As Nan’s parents divorced when she was a little daughter, she grew up with her grandparents, and so she has a stronger relationship and dependence on her grandparents than her parents. Due to this experience, she is more exclusive of her older (parents, in-laws, etc.) participating in her married life than other respondents. Even so, her fertility choices are still influenced by the intergenerational expectations of her grandparents. Deng also explained that even though her parents-in-law have no particular desire for a grandchild, they still think that as a normal family, one must have

a child after marriage.

5.1.3 Fatherhood and family

Not only is parent support linked to women's fertility desires, but also to their husbands, whose are more pronounced. When we talked about topics related to parenthood and maternity, respondents rated their husbands differently. They usually described them as complaining, helpless, and accustomed to it. Although the younger generation were much more privileged than their mothers, with regard to educational and economic opportunities, the boundaries between 'inner' and 'outer', not to mention the 'double burden' of employment and housework, continue to bedevil male–female relations in the contemporary period (Evans, 2007).

Deng quit her job when her child was about 6 months old to be at home and concentrate on taking care of her daughter. Her husband was responsible for the family's economic source. This cooperation model of internal and external division of labor did not come with Deng's approval. She thought that the division of roles and labor, because fathers are mostly absent, leads to contradictions and regrets between the husband and wife which are difficult to rectify. In Deng's description, it can be found that women had differing expectations of fatherhood:

“My husband is good to our daughter, just good. He doesn't like some dads who would set up a plan to give their children stories every day. My husband is absolutely impossible to do that. Some dads, might take two steps a whip, my husband is a man who has no fear of power. Hahaha, he is the male version of hulan Liu (Rather die than surrender).”

Deng's husband is a salesman who is very busy and rarely at home. Most of the time Deng's parents helped her take care of the children. Deng initially quarreled with her husband, and often complained, but then became used to it. She felt that in Chinese culture, the male going out to work and the female at home was an unreasonable division of labor. Previous studies, used the phrases express mothers and instrumental

fathers to differentiate between the responsibilities of father and mother (Bales and Parsons, 2014). However, attitudes of the younger generation parents are more sympathetic and feel that responsibilities should be co-parented, i.e. there should not be an absolute division of labor. A similar situation was told by Ying:

‘Wife-bearing marriages are very appropriate to describe our marriage status. My husband does basically not have a self-consciousness of dad. We both are parents for the first time, but I have been trying hard to learn how to take care of children, he only occasionally takes care of the children.’

It is noteworthy that due to the meticulous care of the grandchild by the older generation, it has almost replaced the responsibilities of young parents, especially the ‘special care’ for novice fathers. Ying thinks that her husband's ‘laziness’ in taking care of his children is partly because the older take too much responsibility in helping to take care of the grandchildren. The traditional idea of the male outside and the female at home are still popular in the Chinese family. The older generations have done everything that should have been done by the young dads which is in line with previous studies (Evans, 2007). Influenced by traditional Chinese family culture, fathers are still considered to mainly assume the instrumental role of financial supporter and mothers are correspondingly considered to take on emotional roles in providing care to the family (Sylvester and Reich, 2002).

5.1.4 Expectation pressure and experience pressure

Interviewees described the expectation pressure from their parents and other relatives as well as the experience pressure of their friends. The family’s internal pressure comes from the older generation’s expectations of a grandchild (Croll, 2006), and the worry about the physiological health of the younger generation. Some families may have to pay more for their determination to become a mother. Among the women interviewed, there were two women who had tried unsuccessfully for many years to have children, but were unable to because of certain physiological factors that affected their husbands. To improve their chances they needed their wives to cooperate with them (by injecting themselves with ovulation needles). Although the physical problems were not due to

the wives, they were the ones that had to endure the unpleasant treatment process. Their parents' expectations of a grandchild, and the pressure of outside public opinion added to the pressure to become a mother. Yang tried to get pregnant 4 years after she got married. She thinks that the most difficult part of the whole process was not the failed conception, but the pressure from the outside world:

“Our parents were pressing hope we can have children as soon as possible. Since we were married we didn't have baby. I felt embarrassed when our friends and colleagues always talk about babies' things. So, in order to increase the success rate, I got the ovulation needle every month.”

A similar situation existed in the case of Jun. When Jun's husband was in primary school, he was found to have some problems with his genitals for which he underwent multiple surgeries. After they were married, in order to have a child as soon as possible, Jun had to be injected with an ovulation needle almost every month. Fortunately, they eventually succeeded although the process was not pleasant, and the cost was quite high.

In addition, experience pressure from others will bring about a herd effect to some extent. Nan as a novice mother mentioned: “I am not the kind of woman who often has a lot of motherly love. But when I see the interaction between my friends and their children are very sweet and their dependence on each other, it makes me have me an impulse that I want a child.”

It is worth noting that before getting married almost all the interviewees had been questioned about whether they wanted to be a mother or not. According to Chinese law regarding marriages and births, if a child born in an unmarried case wants to become a legitimate Chinese citizen, the couple will be fined by the family planning department, and require more complicated documents. Moreover, the out-of-wedlock birth is in conflict with traditional Chinese culture, so most adults choose to marry first and then have a child. Some of those surveyed had a pre-marital pregnancy experience but chose abortion if they were not sure whether they would get married to their partners rather than being a single mother. If they were to marry their partner, it was necessary to do so before the baby was born. We can find that culture pressure and the psychological

construction of motherhood influences the decision of female fertility:

“I had two abortions when I studied in university. The first time, I was young than the legal age of marriage. The second time, I thought that I hadn’t graduated yet, how humiliating it was to be married and have children.”

(Deng)

To sum up, interviewees did not have a unanimous desire to be mothers, and showed different motivations. Thousands of years of Confucian cultural thoughts that infiltrated into the Chinese family may be broken down by the younger generation, and filial duties no longer completely override the individual’s wishes. Although the intergenerational expectations may have intensified among the one-child generation, as those young adults do not have any siblings to share this obligation. Intergenerational relationships are important factors that shape parental desires, but do not affect everyone (Eklund, 2016). One thing that should not be overlooked is that when women are not pregnant due to physical or social reasons after marriage, women are faced with the struggle against the prescribed gender norms. The gender norms assume that every woman will experience motherhood and desires to be a mother (Li, 2007).

5.2 More children or not?

Interview materials for this study show that among the informants who wanted children, six of them did not want more than one child. Overall, respondents described that the first experience of pregnancy had a direct impact on the fertility desire of a second child. These include the following aspects: the family economy and quality of life, the growth experience, and career development. Previous research has found that family economic conditions were a major factor affecting fertility desires, which this study is concerned with.

5.2.1 For economy and quality of life

Jing, who, as quoted above, views having a child like a task at a stage of life, and believes that the composition of the family requires both parents and a child. The purpose of having a child is to satisfy their own need to experience the emotions of a

mother-child relationship, and to treat the child as a close companion of interaction, and companionship (Evans, 2007). Therefore, the preference for the number of children is 'valued for quality rather than numbers'. Jing mentioned:

“It is not easy to cultivate a child, even if you think you are diligent. We dare not have a second child, we have no energy, and we feel that the economy will be under pressure.”

The increase in the variety of costs for raising a second child was unanimously agreed by the respondents. For most families, raising a second child makes the burden heavier and the economy difficult. Some of the respondents who have had a second child said they have fallen into a state of embarrassment while supporting two children. In particular, many younger people felt even more pressure because many of them have found it necessary to 'live off their parents' in their marriage. Their economic situation was not ideal and they did not want it to control their lives but especially after having a child, the necessity to 'live off their parents' had increased. This is what was mentioned earlier, the balance of reliving relations was broken. Li is 33 years old and she has an 11-year-old daughter. Her husband and her both graduated from secondary school, but the type of work they do is not stable, and their salaries are not good either. She thought there were too many economic costs involved in raising a second child, and she may even lose her job, so she thinks it is irrational to have another child:

“Although both parents will give financial help, we do not dare to have another child. Like my unsteady job, once I go to deliver a child, there is basically no possibility of returning to my former position, and I may even lose my current job.”

There are many types of jobs in China that lack welfare protection. In China, childbearing responsibilities are mainly borne by the traditional parent-child care-family, and the supporting role of the state and the enterprise is quite limited (Zhang, 2014). Families and women with higher socioeconomic status benefit more, and class differentiation is transmitted between generations.

Yao pays more attention to quality of life, but has a different economic situation from Li. Yao and her husband live in Beijing with a steady income. They inherited several of their parents' properties in Beijing, and even though they have rental income and a deposit, they do not want to have more than one child. She explains:

“There are different standards for raising a child. My parents-in-law give our child all the organic food sold by the supermarket, choose the vaccinations and medicines of imported at their own expense, and choose high-quality brands for toys. Before I had my son, we were in good financial, and occasionally we could go to a Michelin restaurant. Now we feel the family economy is tight, so we all agree that one child is enough.”

More and more young parents are pursuing quality of life, expressing their individuality and ideals. For this reason, most young couples agree with the idea that no matter how many children you have, you must ensure that you and your children can lead a high-quality life. Four of the respondents who refused to have a second child said that having a second child would affect the quality of their first child's life, and it would also reduce the time spent by the husband and wife on entertainment, socializing, and learning, and thus affecting the quality of life of the entire family.

5.2.2 For career development

Newborn babies need adults to spend a lot of time and energy looking after them. If the family does not have the support of older, and the husband and wife both need to go to work, then childcare becomes a problem. If the woman is resigned to being a housewife, she will spend more time at home, and will lose out on the benefits of being part of the labor force. This will not only increase the economic pressure on the entire family, but more importantly, the woman will lose her own space and her own life.

Xia, who has a degree in Master of Law from Peking University, believes that by the age of 30, people were on the ascendant in their studies and work. She chose to neglect her studies and career, and instead devoted all her time and energy on her children. According to the experience had with the first child, childbirth has created a female

employment interval and even made some withdraw from the labor market, so having a second child will inevitably increase the negative impact on employment. The impact on career development of women is even more prominent. Another issue is that the 128-day statutory maternity leave is not sufficient to take care of children in China, because public kindergartens do not accept children who are younger than three years old.

In addition, the intervention of the government in the field of childcare has, to a large extent, led to unequal social consequences. The assumption of gendered care responsibility has hindered the realization of equal opportunities for women's employment. Women have received certain restrictions when choosing jobs, and fertility characteristics have also become the biggest reason why women are discriminated against. As Xia describes:

“HR is very concerned about the family situation of the applicant, especially the woman of my age. Who will take care of your children? Can you accept business trips? Can you accept overtime working? Such questions, obviously suggesting that I must choose between accompany my child and career development.”

In short, it is a new challenge for young women to face if they have a second child as it may have a great impact on their career development and put up obstacles to their career advancement. This is especially true for women who want to excel in their favorite areas of work, and have a strong focus on their career development. In the game of second child versus career development, women's career type and aspirations influence ultimate fertility desire the most.

It is worth noting that Qian and Na are from very wealthy families. Among the interviewees, they are the only two who do not show concern about the number of childbirths, or about economic and occupational concerns. They are more concerned about the sex of the child.

5.2.3 For growth experience

The theme of loneliness and lack of companionship is often thought to be the motivation for having more than one child. This stems from social feedback from the life experiences of the one-child generation. They pass on their sense of loneliness from their growth experiences and their desire for siblings to their fertility needs. Hui has a very strong desire for a second child because of her own growth experience. She explains: “When I was a little daughter, one of my neighbors have twins, I was very admiring them. I felt like I was alone through my childhood.” The experience of lack of peers in childhood, often in the family reinforces the desire for two children. In the one-child generation, especially if both parties grew up in an only child environment, together with the expectation of the future pension pressure on the ‘4-2-1’ family structure, the two-child birth craving is more pronounced. Chan has had a similar experience:

“My dad passed away when I studied in university, and mother was critically ill in second year. My closest relative was only my aunt and I were taking care of my mother. So my mother really wanted me to have another child. I also I hope my children have a companion.”

In contrast to other respondents, Xin is a woman who chose to pursue her career, which was progressing well, and so waited until her eldest daughter was 8 years old before deciding to have a second child. At that time, she was over 35 years old, and her obstetrician referred to it as advanced maternal age. Xin is the only child in her family, so she has met the criteria for having a second child for many years, but during that time she did not have the desire to give birth to another child. She thinks that raising a child is too hard, her work is busy and she lacked the time and experience to take care of two children. Her daughter lived with her grandparents for most of the time after she was born. She felt that she and her husband were absent from their daughter’s growth and they did not rely on an emotional connection with their child. Then when her father was ill, and she had to handle everything by herself, she found it very hard: ‘If I have a brother or sister who can negotiate for mutual help, I wouldn’t feel so helpless.’ Hereafter, she decided that she wanted to have a second child, regardless of gender,

because she believes as a 'good mother' her daughter needs a companion.

Intergenerational support has alleviated the stress of young parents to some extent (Croll, 2006), but the ways their grandparents raised their children are not necessarily the same. Grandparents and mothers are the most important early adopters with personal knowledge and personal experience. However, the younger generation are not always satisfied with their method of intergenerational support. The experience of their ancestors was largely based on word of mouth, which is not necessarily conducive to the healthy growth of children. Deng is a very introverted woman. She thinks that she has put up strong social barriers since she was very young due to her mother's negative way of educating her. She explained:

“When I became a mother, I realize that my mother's education has deeply influenced my definition or recognition of my mother's role, which has led to my current problems. For example, my mother is a serious social phobia. When I was a little daughter, my mother taught me that friends are useless. It is better stay home with mom than go outside play with others. This type of education led me to never know how to interact with other people in my adult life. Now she wanted to do the same to my daughter..... I can't accept it. I said how can she make friends? It is not good for her physical and mental health to restrict the friendship between children. I kept reminding myself never to educate my children like my mom.”

Due to the inconsistencies in the way and concepts of parenting adopted by the older compared to her own ideals, she decided to take care of her daughter at home full-time when she was six months old. In order to be a 'qualified mother' (Shoran, 1996), Deng read many books on childcare and set herself stricter requirements in life: “I was afraid that I would influence my children. I used to be very embarrassed. Even if my home is in a mess, I don't care. Now I have to tidy up my house regularly, and if I don't, I will feel very, very depressed afterwards.” From this, we can find that motherhood is the product of women's own construction and the environment in which they are located. Women themselves are molded people and they are also involved in shaping people. Under these structural restrictions, urban women's good motherhood construction

presents as two different types of strategies: First, urban women will adjust their working status to meet the expectation of a 'good mother' for motherhood. This is mainly confirmed by providing two aspects, a 'physical presence' and 'psychological presence' such that they are maximizing the needs of their children (Shoran, 1996). This type of strategy reflects the individual's adaptability and conformity under structural constraints. As a result, it has consolidated existing childcare gender and marketization.

Second, urban women will pass over the norm of maternity and regard motherhood as a kind of teamwork, so that the mother and the workplace can reach a balanced and compatible state. A 'Good mother' needs the support of an 'assisting mother' (Christopher, 2012). There are not only good mothers, but also fathers and other family members. However, only this part of the 'team's motherhood' can be practiced.

For families with different fertility conditions, the costs and functions of having a second child are different. As a result, couples in many families take the cost and function of raising their children into account, and consider the overall situation when ultimately deciding whether to have a second child. In addition, some interviewees complained that they did not want to suffer the pain of pregnancy and childbirth again, or had experienced symptoms during the first birth, which then had a negative impact on their decision of whether to have a second child. Women who 'live for themselves' have a strong desire to de-traditionalize. Although the change in the mother's image is not the development of women's sense of self-interest, society and family place responsibility and risk on women (shen, 2014). However, whether to become a mother once again? Women seem to have the right to speak and make decisions.

Nan is a woman with strong autonomy. She is very resistant to going through childbirth once again. She believes that contemporary women should respect their own desire for 'beauty' regardless of their family roles, and the 'obesity' caused by childbearing, 'Skin relaxation', and 'Stretch marks', she is not willing to accept. Although she thought she would manage to avoid these 'side effects' during her first pregnancy, it was not the case. Told by Nan:

“When I was pregnant for four months, I had already gained 15kg. Every time

my grandmother met me, she said that I would eat less. But this was totally uncontrollable! I am 173cm. I always thought I would be a hot mom. Whoever thought of a pregnancy that would ruin everything. Now, the clothes would never fit in, and the complexion was so ugly. I really don't want to have any more children.”

Yao's son was born with a 'Group B Streptococci' infection and was sent to the emergency room immediately after he was born. This experience has caused her great psychological barriers to going through childbirth again. When she recalled her delivery experience, she was still very emotional, and the worry and sorrow she displayed that she could infect another child was clear to see. As 'Group B Streptococci' may be transmitted to the child by the mother during childbirth and it is difficult to predict whether it will occur, she dared not risk another pregnancy.

Hence, each of the women had their own experiences of family life as well as different desires, and even fantasies about relationships they had not had, so they did not share the same view on their fertility desires.

5.3 Sex Preference

When being asked about ideal family composition, their expectations were dispersive. Three of the them said they did not care about the sex of their children, five of them had daughter preferences, two of them preferred sons, and four of them wanted both a daughter and a son. Comprehensive interviews of all respondents included factors influencing women's preference for children's gender, and of existing children's gender, and children's function or value.

Hui has two daughters, but before she had a child, she did not care about the gender of her child. After her eldest daughter was born, this influenced the gender preference for their second child. This finding is consistent with previous findings that the sex of the first child affected the preferred gender of the next child (McClelland, 1979), although not much data supports a preference for two daughters.

Another theme that emerged in the interview material was the emphasis on the attitude to having two children of the opposite sex, of which the older child was a son and the younger a daughter. Na has a son, and she hopes to have a daughter too, with the big brother and little sister being the best combination for her. Na explains that she has a younger brother. When she was young, she knew that she should take care of her younger brother as much as possible, but she also envied her friend, who had her older brother protecting her. The family unit promotes gender identity and determines ‘real men’ and ‘real women’ in different ways (Bornstein, 2013). The image of women should be soft and men should be strong. Women are shaped as weak and need to be protected, while men are the protectors. Therefore, a younger brother is considered the most protected in the family, and often labelled with the names ‘Nancy son’ (niang pao) and ‘Mama's sons’ (ma bao) (Ehrenreich, 2002), which are literally translated as not strong enough, as weak as a woman, and inseparable from the mother.

On the contrary, there were sometimes reasons for wanting an older daughter and a younger son, that stemmed from some kind of awareness of unequal gender relations. Mothers continue to educate daughters in gendered expectations of behavior, including women’s responsibilities toward the nurturance of the ‘inner’ or family domain (Evans, 2007). As told by Yang:

“I gave birth to twins. In fact, according to the order of birth, should be older brother and younger sister. However, we do not think that the brothers in the twins can protect the younger sisters because the mental development of sons is later than that of daughters. On the contrary, if the daughter is a sister, she should be able to take care of her younger brother in the process of growing up. So from birth, we choose the combination of my sister’s brother.”

Interestingly, in order to foster the most ‘advantageous’ gender identities, those parents took for granted the gender identity of their children. It is manifested in the expectations of different families regarding the gender structure and gender sequence of their children.

5.3.1 Son preferences

In the interview materials, it can be found that son preference of the older generations (parents, parents-in-law or in-law parents) and their husbands were more significant (Eklund, 2015), especially in families with exceptionally good economic conditions. Qian's husband is the only male in their whole family. He has two daughters with his ex-wife, whose refusal to bear any more children led to their divorce. So when Qian married her husband, she was clearly aware of her 'mission' to give birth to a son. After giving birth to a daughter, they chose IVF to increase their chances of having a son. She explained that it is understandable for her husband's requirement and desires for a son, and that she must have a son, no matter what the cost:

“My husband is a local entrepreneur and his company is very large. Therefore, it is understandable that at least we have one son who can inherit his company. I don't want him to go outside for a solution because he wants his son.”

Na's family are also in an exceptionally good economic situation and her husband has a very strong preference for sons. Na's husband has four brothers and only two of them have sons, so when she gave birth to her son, it did give them a sense of pride. In addition, Na's husband showed a very clear daughter aversion. As told by Na:

“My husband and his parents really like son. They think that the daughter will be married with someone and become a part of other's family.”

It is striking that although the women surveyed came from varying cities, and ethnic backgrounds, the interview results were relatively consistent concerning the topic of why you have a preference for sons, except for Yao. All respondents who experienced natural childbirth used 'too painful' to describe the pain caused by childbirth. If there was a prenatal daughter preference it focused on the female's needs for children, but why do some change their mind postpartum? Through the analysis of the interview with Yao, we learn that when she was pregnant, her husband and her both wanted a daughter. They believe that the relationship between daughters and their parents is more intimate and the son is relatively strong and independent (Evans, 2007). So when they knew that

it was a son, they were a little upset, but after experiencing the pain of giving birth, Yao was relieved that her baby was a son because he did not need to suffer the pain that women experience. Yao believes that the responsibility of a mother is too heavy.

Moreover, parents from young generations are planning for the future by preparing for their pension in advance, because they do not want to rely on economic support from their children. As the cases of Yi and Na illustrate, they are raising children who in the future will have emotional dependence.

In general, with the birth control policy more open, the second child bears the gender tendency preference, and it may even strengthen gender preference desires especially for the family who longs for a son. Although care in old age is no longer the most important factor in son preference, the son's preference is still closely related to ancestor worship.

5.3.2 Daughter preferences

However, should a son be preferred where possible as they carry the inheritance of the family bloodline? It seems does not always work like this. With increasing costs in society, the cost of raising a son is significantly higher than that of a daughter. Its roots lie in the traditional cost of providing housing for newlyweds, costs which are often incurred by the sons' parents. Apparently, as the son's position is unshakable, then a daughter may be chosen as an alternative by a family (Eklund, 2016).

Yi has two siblings, a younger sister, and a brother who is 10 years younger than her. Yi's parents seemed to have had a strong desire to pursue trying for a son. Yi describes that during her childhood, it did not feel that her parents treated their son and daughters differently. She too, inherited the responsibility of providing a son. She explained that although she doesn't need a son to provide for her or the family in the future, she believed a son was necessary to consolidate her family status in terms of the expectations of her husband's family, even if her work and income were better than her husband. In addition, she also had concerns regarding the financial burden associated with having two sons. As told by Yi:

“I want to two children, but one son is enough. Two sons can seriously increase the financial burden of the family. As you know, in China, how many sons you have, you may need the same apartment for their marriage. Now the house price is quite high, I dare not to think have more than one son. if it were not for my first child is a daughter I should not be having second.”

Reflecting on the experience of growing up in a one-child family context, Deng thinks she lacks the knowledge to raise children. Her own experiences growing up can help her to raise daughters because they are same gender, but not for a son. She describes:

“I find it easier to get along with female than with male, and I don’t have the confidence to raise a reasonable son, because I’ve never seen a particularly reasonable adult man in my life.”

There are strong bonds the generation sought to build with daughters, and ‘communicative intimacy’ between mothers and daughters in their mutual relationship (Evans, 2007). As the cases of Jun and Na both illustrate, it is easier to communicate between females and there is a more harmonious relationship. In Chinese traditional culture, the daughter is like a mother's cotton-padded jacket (*mian ao*), close and intimate. Daughters are thought to be more delicate than sons as they are more gentle and considerate, and can give their mothers emotional support (Evans, 2007).

The concept of family reproduction is constantly updated, and the family’s preference for children’s gender has been diversified. More and more young parents said that the concept of ‘bring up sons to support parents in their old age’ is already outdated. It is necessary to pay attention to the quality of children reared and constantly improve their quality of life. Raising children is not about having more, but doing it well is considered the most important thing. More young parents agree that nurturing and companionship are the most important. Parents must be able to create the best conditions as possible for their children, regardless of whether they are sons or daughters.

6 Concluding Discussion

In this paper, through qualitative interviews, I discovered that the factors affecting the fertility desire of women of the younger generation are complex and inconsistent. China's one-child policy has been in force for 40 years, since 1978. The families in urban areas in China generally have one child. Although this one child policy will alleviate China's population problem to a large extent, in the '4-2-1' family structure, the younger generation is under greater pressure. The data shows the importance of not just obtaining numbers on important issues such as people's growth experiences, but also the context that many people actually experience them. In this case, the topic is quite complicated. It is further illustrated that qualitative interviewing research methods can provide a more in-depth understanding of complex issues, despite small sample sizes.

6.1 Quantity preference

1) From family structure

This article mainly analyzes women's fertility desires under the second-child policy. Therefore, the most important concern was the number of ideal children for women. According to data materials, we can see that the number of siblings women had often correlated to the number of their ideal children. Their intent of giving birth to the second child was mainly guided by their own growing experience. Among them, loneliness and expecting mutual help and support from family members were important influencing factors. As women have realized that siblings can ease the burden and pressure, the younger generation of women tend to let their children enjoy this advantage.

2) From family members

In the family, a women's fertility choices will not only be determined by themselves, but also be influenced by other members of the family, such as parents, parents in law and husbands. Sometimes the opinions of other family members will also play a decisive role, such as for the respondent, Qian.

Given China's "filial piety" culture, having children is more about a responsibility to

pass on the bloodline. Most parents will encourage their children to reproduce and often more than once. This also shows the traditional concept of the hopes of generations, and having many children still guides the concept of fertility in Chinese families. In addition, infertility in China is a very serious problem. If the younger generation do not have children, then there will be many pressures from the outside world. Many of the advertisements about treatments for infertility reflect the inability to have children in China as a matter of intense social concern. This psychological influence affects the young Chinese generation.

It is worth noting that modern intergenerational relations tend to show a downward trend. Most grandparents are willing to take care of grandchildren voluntarily. This kind of "refeeding" relationship has become a new Chinese culture. It has to be said that the 'refunding' cultures encourage women's willingness to give birth to some extent. The economic status of the family and the pursuit of quality of life for all family members, also affects the ideal number of children. I have found that the two respondents who had a rich family economic status did not care about the number of children, they were more concerned about the gender of the child. Rich families are not affected by economic and professional development concerns.

3) From two-child policy

The above research about the factors influencing the number of women giving birth to children is based on the introduction of a comprehensive two-child policy. After 40 years of the Chinese government's implementation of the one-child policy, not only has China's population model changed, but also the way people live. There have been earth-shaking changes, and the one-child policy has been internalized into a concept that deepens into the Chinese family. The younger generation's attitude towards this policy are not the same. With the development of society and an increase in women's cultural level and self-consciousness, females no longer passively accept the birth of children. The concept of contemporary women is changing, and the concept of devoted teachers and internal and external divisions has gradually weakened. Women show more autonomy, not only in career development but in other areas as well.

It is noteworthy that contemporary women do not reject the concept of giving birth

more than once. They will make rational choices often after making a tradeoff. Young women will not only take into account family factors, but also consider the supporting welfare system. These include the father's leave, childcare provision, and medical and insurance systems.

6.2 Gender preference

Female fertility gender preferences are diverse. Traditional patriarchal thoughts have changed in modern society. As raising sons implies huge economic pressures, and people find that daughters provide more emotional support for their parents than sons, the advantages of daughters are increasingly being recognized by more families.

In addition, because son preferences no longer serve as the dominant status of the family, it can be found that women are under the influence of more traditional ideals and the concepts surrounding fertility choices have become more rational. The awakening of women's subjective consciousness has led to more autonomy in fertility issues. More young women have shifted their attention from reproducing a particular sex to the quality of child care.

I have also shown how gender and generation play important roles in shaping fertility preferences, in particular, it is reflected in the preferences for sons. Ancestor worship and intergenerational transmission are still deeply rooted in the ideas of the older generation. The younger generation will inevitably be 'guided' and 'educated' by the older at home.

The study also found that if the first child was a daughter, they would be more likely to accept the birth of a second child. This is mainly related to the concept of "residence" in Chinese culture. As the parent of a son, it is necessary to pay for the son's marriage and buy real estate for him. This inevitably puts a lot of pressure on middle-class families.

In summary, there are still some additional problems with this study due to limited time and resources. For example, I only had a limited data sample to analyze the fertility

desire for a female child. If I were to conduct a follow up study, I would like to enrich the interviews through widening the diversity of age and class. In addition, I would take the interviewees' education background into account.

7 References

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8 Appendices

Appendix A:

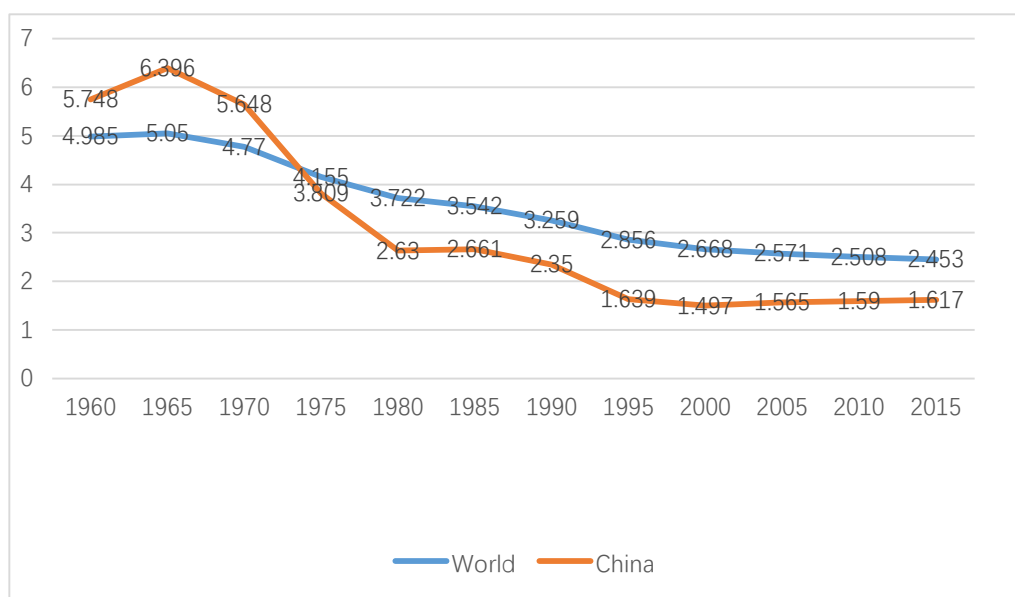


Fig. A1 The fertility rate of World and China from 1960s to 2015s.

Appendix B:

List of interviewees								
No.	Name	Education	Age	Number of children	Occupation	Wanted more than one	Have siblings or not	Sex preference
1	Jun	bachelor	31	2	Public Institution	YES	NO	DAUGHTER
2	Xia	master	30	2	Unemployed	YES	YES	Both
3	Yang	Vocational Schools	37	2	Employee	YES	NO	Both
4	Chan	bachelor	31	2	Unemployed	YES	NO	No
5	Hui	bachelor	33	2	Employee	YES	NO	DAUGHTER
6	Xin	bachelor	40	2	Employee	YES	NO	DAUGHTER
7	Yi	bachelor	33	2	Employee	YES	YES	SON
8	Jing	bachelor	33	1	Employee	NO	NO	DAUGHTER
9	Qian	Vocational Schools	34	1	House Wife	YES	NO	SON
10	Yao	bachelor	31	1	Employee	NO	NO	NO
11	Nan	bachelor	32	1	House Wife	NO	NO	NO
12	Li	Vocational Schools	32	1	Employee	NO	YES	NO
13	Xue	Vocational Schools	30	1	Employee	NO	NO	NO
14	Deng	bachelor	31	1	Employee	NO	NO	DAUGHTER
15	Na	Vocational Schools	42	1	House Wife	YES	YES	Both
16	Ying	master	32	1	Employee	YES	YES	Both

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Theme 1 – More than one Child (Affordability)

Opening question/s: Can you tell me yourself? (family, work)

Can you tell me about your first child? (pregnancy and deliver)

Are you/When do you planning to have a second child?

Knowledge of pregnancy and deliver

Experience

Motivation and needs

Theme 2 – Family

Opening question/s: Who do you live with?

What is your ideal family composition?

Can you tell me the opinion of having a second child in your family?

Who will take care of the children?

Fertility desire

External pressure

Gender Identity and Sex preference

Intergenerational relations

Support (Housing, Daily, Emotional, Financial)

Theme 3 – Policy and Society

Opening question/s: What is the number of children you expect? Why?

Does fertility policy affect your fertility decisions? Which way?

Reproductive rights and fertility desire

The costs of raising children

Social costs

Other policies (parental leave, child care, job security)

Theme 4 - Career

Opening question/s: Can you tell me about your work?

Career and gender discrimination

Type of work (Challenge or Office Routines)

Corporate welfare