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Women Hold Up Half the Sky

A case study on how professional women in contemporary Shanghai negotiate the contradictions between intergenerational obligations and career development

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Abstract

The Chinese party state has taken the initiative to exercise control over the nation's population in order to align with family policy and goals for national development. As a result, the negatively loaded stereotype "leftover women" has deeply penetrated Chinese society where single, urban and educated Chinese women have been the main targets. From analyzing marriage trends in Shanghai, population specialists have concluded that individuals are moving away from the model of universal marriage. A recent growth of individualism in Chinese society has given rise to the desiring self. This study explores how single professional women in Shanghai deal with the challenge of negotiating between intergenerational obligations and career development. Qualitative data was gathered from 12 semi-structured interviews conducted on urban single professional women in Shanghai. Through the analysis of cultural logic, social policy, state behavior and qualitative data, this thesis has incorporated a fruitful discussion on the interconnectedness between diverse perspectives and larger frameworks. Results of the study support the notion that there exists a diverse moral landscape as intergenerational obligations are complex and, in some cases, contradictory as they cross or even go against norms. These diverse trajectories reveal how negotiations can be handled and shaped in many ways. In some cases, conforming to familial obligations through traditional filial piety is apparent, while in others, descending familialism and a contemporary filial piety sustains an intergenerational intimacy.

Keywords: Intergenerational obligations, filial piety, desiring self, career women, leftover women, demography, China

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction

A large generation of educated, independent and career-driven women have been born. China is the second largest economy and has experienced a surge of unprecedented growth since the establishment of the open-door policy in 1978, resulting in an average GDP growth rate of 9.6 percent per annum in the first two decades of reform. (Chow, 2004). The open-door policy encouraged China to partake in foreign trade, opening its market to the rest of the world (ibid). China's economic reform was unique to that of the Soviet Union or other former-socialist countries in Eastern Europe as it was more pragmatic and politically stable (Chow, 2004). The reform process was not like a blueprint and instead it was, like Deng Xiaoping illustrated, like a person walking across the river by feeling the rocks in each step (ibid). China's economic reform and engagement in international institutions such as the World Trade Organization resulted in an increase of foreign trade within the national income, growing from 7% in 1978 to 37% in 1998 (Chow, 2004). Once the market economy was established in China, large amounts of human capital contributed greatly to China's competitive environment (ibid). The expansion of higher education systems and infrastructures after the economic reform has also allowed for individuals to focus more on career advancement (Chow, 2004).

With rapid industrialization, it is self-evident that the sustained socioeconomic growth over the past four decades has allowed for Chinese youth to climb up the ladder of opportunity. The People's Republic of China advocates for women's liberation, where it is vital for two contradictory elements to coexist: the fostering of traditional views and the dismantlement of patriarchal family structures which make women subordinate (Hershatter, 2012). Traditional gender norms are still engraved into many minds, especially amongst the older generation, where the women should be family oriented whilst the man should be career oriented. This has resulted in many daughters witnessing intergenerational obligations of marriage and family. Nevertheless, a moral earthquake has shifted younger women to be more independent and individualistic, as exemplified by a profound stereotype or social category: *leftover women*. Leftover women are defined by the All-China Women's Federation as single women above the age of twenty-seven (Fincher, 2012).

Communist ethical discourse in China is highly inspired by satisfying the greater collective, "seeking no advantage for oneself, pursuing benefits only for others" (Yan, 2011, p. 42). In the 1980s, a rising trend of

individualism perpetrated China, which state-media and propaganda referred to as a "moral crisis" and proceeded to identify three underlying absences: the absences of moral values, beliefs and confidence in Communist ideology (ibid). Many individuals were inspired by a "Chinese Dream", which entailed making enough money to become rich and successful (Yan, 2011, p. 44). This is exemplified by the Chinese political and cultural elite, who followed this "Chinese dream", as well as the large migration trends (ibid). With rapid industrialization, a strengthened education system and labor market, competition came quite naturally. Born in a time of rapid transition, with a tug and war between individualism and collectivism, desirous parents urge their daughters to educate themselves while also encouraging them to acknowledge their ticking biological clock and marital obligations.

 In 1982, less than 5 percent of urban Chinese women in their late twenties were unmarried, a percentage which doubled in 1995, tripled by 2008 by advancing to 30% (Wang et al., 2008). Thus, there has been a growth of so-called "leftover women". Although there exists a correlation between education and the delaying of marriage, especially for the urban population, Chinese women are delaying their marital engagement at a slower pace compared to equally educated men as well as equally educated women from other Asian countries (Ji and Yeung, 2014; Ji, 2015).

Population control policies have drastically shaped society. The one child policy, for instance, has been a steppingstone for the surge of educated, single urban women which were born (Fong, 2002). These urban daughters have been able to gain full parental investment without brotherly competition due to the one child policy (ibid). Although the one child policy left detrimental effects on the population ratio within China, where men outnumber women by 33 million, it has allowed for several urban daughters to bloom and flourish towards socio-economic independence (Fong, 2002). The deep-rooted cycle of patrilineal kinship which has prevailed in Chinese society and culture for hundreds of years has undergone immense transformation (ibid). Contemporary urban daughters are faced with more power and leverage to break down disadvantageous gender norms, allowing them to climb up the ladder of opportunity (Fong, 2002). According to Forbes Billionaire List 2017, 6% of Chinese billionaires are women whilst the average in other parts of the world is 2% (Ahmadov, 2017). China has one of the highest rates of female economic participation in the world and Chinese women contribute more to China's GDP than American women contribute to the United States' GDP (Deloitte China, 2017).

An increasing number of Chinese women have preference for egalitarian relationships, yet, marriage is a highly gendered institution which is based on the foundation of traditional cultural norms, fostered by feudalism and Confucianism (Ji, 2015; Sayer et al., 2011, p. 1985; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). 30 years ago, marriage was seen as obligatory, as this was the women's ideal state for childbearing.

Today, urban daughters have great opportunities, stemming from the unforeseen consequences of the one child policy, but along with it has come the burden of pressure. Nevertheless, some scholars suggest there has been a recent resurgence of Confucian tradition that has infiltrated Chinese society, where filial obligation lays at heart (Ji, 2015; Ji and Yeung, 2014).

1.1 Specific Aim & Research Question

The aim of the following study is to analyze how professional women in Shanghai negotiate the contradictions in intergenerational obligations and career development. By providing an explanation to these changes, we shall come closer to understanding how traditional gender norms still regulate gender relations in the private and public sphere. I hope to offer insight into the potential pressure which many single Chinese women live through, whether it be familial or career related pressure.

Simultaneously, the purpose of this thesis is to recalibrate the idea of single Chinese women, in order to better suit the respective women themselves. The idea, stereotype or social category of leftover women needs to be alchemized in order to tackle the discrimination and inequalities that they are faced with. As Fincher (2014) has illuminated, "leftover" women do not actually exist, but it is a cultural and political construct concocted by the government in order to "achieve its demographic goals of promoting marriage, planning population and maintaining social stability" (Fincher, 2014, p. 6). Although the stereotype or concept is interesting as a phenomenon, on an individual level, they do not exist (ibid). Therefore, the interviewees have been referred to as professionals. "Professionals" is a suitable descriptive term as all the respective interviewees are working professionals or aim to be working professionals after completing their studies. Moving on, this thesis aims to offer a dialogue, led by a group of Chinese women themselves, on a topic which deserves recognition, that is, the negotiation between intergenerational obligation and career development. Thus, the research is guided by the following question:

How do professional women in Shanghai negotiate the contradictions in intergenerational obligations and career development?

2. Background

2.1 Leftover Women & Why Shanghai?

In 2007, the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) officially defined *leftover women* (剩女, pinyin: shèngnǔ) as women over the age of 27 that were unmarried and the term was, through the Ministry of Education, added to the official lexicon (Fincher, 2012; All-China Women's Federation, 2007). The term has become a well-known Chinese stereotype and carries negative connotations, with the prefix "sheng" evoking an idea of being left behind, similar to "leftover food" (剩菜, pinyin: shèng cài) (Lake, 2018, p. 2). On top of this, the term is slightly ambiguous, as in more rural provinces a leftover woman may be applicable for a single woman already approaching her mid-twenties whilst in larger cities like Beijing or Shanghai, she is closer to approaching her thirties (ibid).

An increasing number of urban women are marrying later or not at all. The percentage of urban Chinese women in their late twenties that remain unmarried rose from 5 percent to 30 percent between 1982 and 2008 (Wang et al., 2008). In fact, population specialists have analyzed the trend in marriage within Shanghai, concluding that there exists a steady structural transformation in society as individuals are moving away from the model of universal marriage (Fincher, 2014, p. 188; Wang et al., 2008). Shanghai was chosen as a site of investigation due to being the most cosmopolitan city in China with a large numbers of individuals, from Mainland China and the Greater China region, migrating to the city in order to engage in the advanced industries and global firms (To, 2013; Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau, 2011). Shanghai has a competitive society which has been highly influenced by the socioeconomic liberalization, marketization and globalization transformations that has taken place under the past few decades.

Several treaty and trading ports were built on the coast of Shanghai and there exists a long history of Western imperialism stemming back to the mid-1800s (Jackson, 2012). PRC scholars have illustrated that Shanghai, historically, "took a typical path of semi-colonial and semi-feudal type of development" where economic development stemmed from years of imperialism, as Shanghai was a ground for exploiting China after the Opium War (Sit, 1995; Yao, 1990, p. 11; Zheng, 1987, p. 38). Several western scholars have supported the notion that Shanghai existed as a Sino-foreign base which allowed for the merging of values (Sit, 1995; Murphey, 1978). Today, Shanghai is a diverse metropolis and is known for being the most cosmopolitan city in China, both in terms of foreigners and Chinese nationals (To, 2013). Therefore,

it was a suitable location to gather a diverse range of participants from different provinces, of different backgrounds and of different career functions.

2.2 Marriage Trends

Marriage is a central institution which extends back to Chinese family traditions, affecting social and economic factors surrounding the self in society (Eklund, 2013, p. 150; Attané, 2012; Zhang & Gu, 2007) Imperial China's engagement in a social safety net was barely noticeable and therefore much of the social support came from within the family (Eklund, 2016, p. 150; Xiong, 2014). This was especially noticeable for women, who were highly dependent on their fathers and subsequently their husbands (Eklund, 2013; Ebrey, 1990).

A combination of state intervention and individual choice has shaped the marriage trend in China (Cai & Feng, 2014, p. 97). The Chinese state has persistently taken initiative and altered rules related to marriage, divorce and childbearing (Davis, 2014, p. 41). China's state policies and market reforms have played a central role in the economic and social positioning of urban educated women in Shanghai, as they fall into the stigmatized "leftover woman" category (Zhang & Sun, 2014, p. 118) The institution of marriage in China has changed and undergone immense transformation since the 1970s, where women are increasingly choosing to postpone or reject marriage (Davis & Friedman, 2014, p. 4-7). Although Shanghai has one of the highest divorce rates, there still exists a great amount of social stigma surrounding the act of divorce (Davis & Friedman, 2014, p. 11-12). In 2006, Shanghai had 3.5 divorces for every 1,000 persons, compared to the PRC's average of 1.5 divorces for every 1,000 persons (ibid). David & Friedman (2014) have even stated that marital norms and behaviors among the new millennium have altered so much that marriage can be interpreted as "deinstitutionalized". With the expansion of the Chinese education system, a large number of urban women shifted their attention from marriage to occupational choices, resulting in later marriage formation (ibid).

Xu (2004) has illustrated that only 13.8 per cent of women in Shanghai believe that marriage is a personal choice. Table 1.1 displays the percentage of never married college-educated men and women. In 2000, within Shanghai, 30.9 percent of the college-educated female population remained unmarried between ages 25 and 29. Nevertheless, the amount of never-married college-educated women in Shanghai between ages 25 and 29 increased by 15.9 percent by 2005. This suggests more women between the ages of 25 and 29 focused on non-marital related interests in 2005 compared women in 2000. On top of this, divorce rates continuously increased between 1980 and 2000, which then proceeded to rise drastically after 2003 (Davis, 2014, p. 47). Between 2002 and 2017, the divorce rate in China rose from 0.9 to 3.2 (China's National Bureau of Statistics, 2011) This illustrates that women in Shanghai are engaging less in marital relations and that marriage often does not feel like a personal choice. Thus, singlehood has increased.

Table 1.1. Percentage of never married among college-educated men and women, 1982-2010.

Age	Year	Hong Kong		Taiwan		all PRC		Shanghai	
		Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
25–29	1982	58.3	49.4	65	47	46.6	36	72.9	57.3
	1990	73.6	59.3	78	65	31.3	18.8	61.3	36.2
	2000	83	75.9	85	75	38.2	21.1	57.8	30.9
	2005	87.7	83	—	—	46.9	30	61.3	46.8
	2010	—	—	88	77	—	—	—	—
30–34	1982	33.6	19.6	17	19	7	8.3	20.3	18.5
	1990	34.6	35	28	25	4.3	6	17.6	10.6
	2000	48.1	43.2	39	35	6.2	3.9	20.2	13
	2005	52.2	46.7	—	—	10	5.4	20.8	15.2
	2010	—	—	51	41	—	—	—	—
35–39	1982	8.2	11.4	5	11	1.4	1.8	6.8	4.8
	1990	16.6	21.6	9	15	0.9	2.6	4.5	6.6
	2000	23.6	30.5	15	22	1.6	1.4	9.6	6.1
	2005	27.3	31.3	—	—	2	2.2	9.3	5.3
	2010	—	—	23	24	—	—	—	—

Sources: Davis & Friedman, 2014, Taiwan figures calculated from census of the Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics (DGBAS), with 1980 substituted for 1982 and 2010 substituted for 2005. PRC figures calculated by Yong Cai from census micro samples. Hong Kong figures calculated from 1 percent census samples (1981–1996), 5 percent census samples (2001–2006), Hong Kong Census and Statistic Department 2007a, 2009a, 2009b.

2.3 Women and Work

"Women hold up half the sky" is a common saying which dates back to the Mao era, when self-identifying as a liberated woman in Socialist China was crucial (Hershatter, 2012). In the 1950s during the Socialist era, Marxist ideology influenced women's liberation to a great extent, resulting in one of the world's highest female labor force participation rates (Sun & Chen, 2015). Propaganda posters of "Iron Girls", that is, the portrayal of women in male dominated industries, allowed for the degendering of labor and the flourishment of women to enter the workforce (Sun & Chen, 2015).

Nevertheless, the Communist state did not recognize gender inequality in other areas besides labor, such as the gendered division in the household, wage discrimination and gender inequality in the workplace (Sun & Chen, 2015; Bian et al., 2000). Women are over-represented within the part-time sector and informal market, which minimizes women's access to welfare support and security (Eklund, 2013; Attané). Between 1990 and 2010, women's engagement in the labor market decreased, while many women did not have the opportunity to enter in the first place (Eklund, 2013; Attané, 2012, p. 12). On top of this, wage discrimination increased for women. In 1990, the urban female income was 76 per cent of their male counterpart salary, while in 2010 this number fell to 67 per cent (ibid). This suggests that labor policies have played a role in fueling gender disparities.

The double burden of career development and marital obligation, till this day, perpetuates Chinese women. Patriarchal gender roles, which assume that feminine duty is to solely tend to family, are based on core values extracted from Confucianism (Chang, 2020; Yao and Yao, 2010) Confucianism is a way of ethic, thought and belief which was born in ancient China. The Confucian philosophy made it so that state regulation was indirect and the markets could function on a microlevel (Davis & Friedman, 2014, p. 26) Therefore an emperor was able to exercise authority upon men, through their official roles, while the officials then extended this power at home where "fathers chose wives for their sons and husbands dictated the needs and desires of their wives" (ibid). Neo-Confucianism has been constructed to revive traditional patriarchal values and some scholars also argue that the creation of "leftover women" as a common phenomenon is a sign that these patriarchal values are being put in place (Yu, 2019; Fincher 2014; Ji 2015; Sun & Chen 2015; Zhang & Yu 2017).

3. Existing Research

There exists a great amount of research on the stereotype of "leftover women" and professional women, covering topics related to the marriage squeeze, mate choice strategy, familial obligation and the empowerment of daughters (Fong, 2002; Fincher, 2014; Eklund, 2013; Eklund, 2018; Ji, 2015; Lake, 2018; Ahmadov, 2017; Cheung & Kwan, 2009). Although little research exists on the dynamics between familial obligations and the renegotiation of career development in China, a vast amount of scholarly material will help form and shape this thesis' analysis and discussion.

3.1 Leftover Women & the Marriage Squeeze

The leftover women phenomenon, stigmatizing unmarried Chinese professional women, has risen in the past couple of decades (To, 2013). There exists an increasing amount of single urban Chinese women, especially in urban cities like Shanghai. Although Western scholars have attributed Western women's late marriage to individualization, individual agency, empowerment and liberation, the Chinese-state media and the Chinese Ministry of Education have attributed unmarried educated women as having "overly high expectations for marriage partners", in turn blaming them for their own competence and individuality (To, 2013; Giddens, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

According to the Economist, by 2050 there will be up to 186 single men for every 100 women (The Economist, 2015). This statistic suggests that Chinese women should have an easier time finding a "better" husband in China due to the staggering gender imbalance, although this may not be the case. Hypergamy, the idea that women tend to marry upwards in class or caste, is apparent in China (The Economist, 2015; Eklund, 2013). This has resulted in two variations of marriage squeezes, one at the bottom of the pyramid, leftover men or bare branches, and one at the top, being leftover women (ibid).

In regard to the compatibility of leftover women and leftover men, there exists a problem in feasibility. The so-called leftover men and leftover women are not compatible, as they are opposites in terms of socioeconomic ladder and geospatial landscape (To, 2015). An overflowing amount of single men are mainly concentrated in rural provinces, where there exists a scarcity of women (ibid). The so-called leftover women, on the other hand, are mostly localized in urban provinces. These two categories of "leftovers" exist on opposite ends of the socioeconomic scale, as cosmopolitan and educated single women in Shanghai would most likely not be compatible with uneducated poor men from rural provinces (To, 2015). Fincher (2016) has suggested that the authoritarian state plays a role in stigmatizing single

and educated women in their late twenties, as state-led media channels pump out information which aligns with their plans to increase China's population. Educated urban daughters are the perfect target, as they would produce sturdy offspring.

3.2 Urban Daughters: Empowered or Restricted?

In 1980, just a few years after the Cultural Revolution, the implementation of the one-child policy occurred, with the aim of increasing modernization and slowing the rapid population growth (Gu et al., 2007). Wang et al. (2008) states that traditionally, marriage and childbearing has been obligatory for women in their late twenties as they were seen primarily as biological beings. Nevertheless, a combination of the one child policy and access to contraceptives increased sexual freedoms, disconnecting sexual encounters as a mere recipe for biological production and allowing it to also become an acknowledged form of desire (Wang et al., 2008). Hong (1987) illustrates that the one child policy eliminated the freedom and right for women to control their bodies and reproduction but in the long run, has allowed for gender equality to prosper as the patrilineal kinship system was dismantled.

The evolution of the one child policy has been documented by scholars from short-term and long term affects, while also considering the foreseen and unforeseen consequences. A distortion in sex ratio reveals the existence of a son preference, where a surplus of 22 million boys were born between 1980 and 2000 (Eklund, 2013; Ebenstein & Sharygin, 2009). The son preference has not only led to a large degree of abandoned and hidden girls, but also contributed to enforced sterilization and sex-selective abortions (Deutsch, 2006; Croll, 1994; Dalsimer & Nisonoff, 1987; Davin, 1985; Greenhalgh, 2001; Keng, 1997). Some scholars have indicated that fifty million Chinese women are missing, a number of which accounts for 45% of the world's missing women (Wexler, 2006; Hudson & Den Boer, 2004; Sen, 1990).

Fong (2002) has illustrated how the one-child policy has positively affected the empowerment of urban daughters as the singleton status has given them full parental investment. The findings reveal that, through the process of modernization, industrialization and urbanization, a growing degree of self-interest has become apparent (Fong, 2002). This has in turn fueled daughters to challenge gender norms and strategically utilize these norms to advance within the education system, career arena and marriage market (ibid). On the other hand, Fincher (2014) theorizes that a resurgence of patriarchal gender norms is infiltrating China, where the state agenda supports the subordination of women.

Li (2014) illustrated that, on televised Chinese dating shows, women are often essentialized, represented as subordinates and dependent on the material support given by men while also being motivated to be

"sexual subjects". The "leftover women" phenomenon has infiltrated television, where women are systematically incorporated and portrayed as subordinates in order to conform to traditional and patriarchal gender roles for the sake of marriage and romance (Li, 2014). State-media has indoctrinated readers with an internal understanding of what is "ideal" for a woman (Sun, 2004) State-media has strategically utilized media to attract and encourage middle-class urban readers to fit into patriarchal gender roles (ibid)

Chinese media reports have conveyed that universities have limited female admissions and that there exists immense discrimination against female graduates in the labor market (Fincher, 2014). Sun & Chen (2015) argue that the marketization of China's economy since the 1970s allowed for market forces to take control over class and gender relations, which has in turn spiraled further patriarchal gender relations. For instance, scholars have exemplified how the vicious cycle of gender inequality has been reinforced by declining employment rates for women, the widening of wage gaps between men and women, and the growing segregation between men and women in the urban labor market due to state policy and market reforms (Sun & Chen, 2015; Dong et al., 2006; Giles et al., 2006; Shu, 2005; Shu & Bian, 2003).

3.3 Filial Piety & Intergenerational Obligations

Filial piety is a moral code which regulates intergenerational relations, where children are expected to obey and respect their parents, showing compassion and gratitude in exchange for their upbringing (Eklund, 2018; Bell, 2010; Croll, 1995, 2000). Eklund (2003) has illustrated how intergenerational obligations are being renegotiated by sons and daughters, revealing that intergenerational contracts are highly gendered. Parents do not have the same expectations for their sons and daughters. Filial piety is being rearranged in a complex manner, as norms and expectations are not always intact with contemporary practices (Eklund, 2013). Her narrative illuminates the notion that filial daughters have more leeway in passing on the family line. Yan (2016) illustrates a decline in filial piety and a growth of intergenerational intimacy (Yan, 2016, p. 252). He argues that there has been a redefinition of filial piety, where younger generations have rejected the idea of submission to elderly and challenged the notion of unconditional obedience (Yan, 2016, p. 244-255). On top of this, a growing degree of individualism has become apparent which has resulted in youth being more open in pursuing their personal desires (ibid). This is also supported by the works of Rofel (2007) and Kleinman et al. (2011), whose scholarly work will be elaborated on further on in the theoretical framework section.

Over the past two decades a new kind of intergenerational intimacy has flourished in China, where there exists a mutual understanding and emotional bond between generations (Yan, 2016, p. 250). This opposes

the traditional type of intergenerational intimacy, which was predominantly built on becoming "familiar with each other's thoughts and actions by default due to the absence of mobility, lack of privacy, likeness of mind, and high predictability of life routines." (Yan, 2016, p. 250). The new form of intergenerational intimacy marks a breakthrough in the traditional Chinese family structure, as historically, intimacy and desire were suppressed in order to maintain stability but also hierarchy (Yan, 2016, p. 245). Descending familism, also interpreted by other scholars as the only-hope phenomenon (Fong, 2004), intimacy through intergenerational negotiations (Zhong and He, 2014), child-centered relatedness (Kipnis, 2009) and bilateral-multigenerational family centered on grandchildren (Jankowiak, 2009), is the notion that "family resources flow downward and the focus of the existential meaning of life has shifted from the ancestors to the grandchildren" (Yan, 2016, p. 245). Yan (2016) suggests that descending familialism has challenged the traditional family structure which exists in China.

4. Theoretical framework:

The theoretical framework is presented as a guideline for the analysis of the empirical data gathered from the respective field study. In order to understand how successful women in Shanghai renegotiate the contradictions in marriage formation and career development, one must come closer to understanding the desires of the individual as well as the pulling forces of the kin. By understanding the individual's intentions and the pressures which the individual is faced with, we come closer to understanding how renegotiations are made. Theoretical guidance will be supported by the works of Eklund (2018), Yan (2016), Kleinman et al. (2011) and Rofel (2007), scholars which have paved a pathway for understanding the complexities of individualism as well as the ever-changing family in contemporary China.

4.1 Intergenerational Obligations & Filial Piety

In order to understand intergenerational obligations, one first needs to consider intergenerational relations and the influence of filial piety. Intergenerational relations are held together through intergenerational contracts, a pattern of implicit rules on mutually understood roles and obligations which are held through social relations (Eklund, 2018; Gerhard et al., 2002). According to Eklund (2018), the Chinese intergenerational contract has transformed due to five fundamental reasons: an increasing proportion of individuals entering the paid labor market, urbanization/migration processes, women entering the paid labor market, singleton children status and lastly, the marriage squeeze (Eklund 2018, 2013; Santos & Harrell, 2017; Zhang, 2009; Gaetano, 2004; Yan, 2003; Bregnbaek, 2016; Fong, 2004). These underlying

principles shall be explored further in the analysis, as they will help guide the discussion of intergenerational contracts and obligations.

Filial piety can be described as the unconditional material and emotional support for parents (Cheung & Kwan, 2009). In this, there exists a sense of obligation to provide care for the kin, especially the elderly. Filial piety stems from the moral codes exhibited by Confucianism, which consist of but are not limited to parental care, obedience, disregarding parental imperfections, mourning of relatives' deaths as well as being respectful and courteous (Cheung & Kwan, 2009; Lin, 1992). Confucian practices are grounded in that the family is the center and that the family comes before the individual (ibid). Nevertheless, Yan (2016) has illustrated that a contemporary form of filial piety is being shaped, where the "relinquishing unconditional obedience and submission from the junior to the senior generations" is taking place. Thus, according to Yan (2016), individual awareness has resulted in the erosion of traditional filial piety.

Filial piety and intergenerational obligations may cover a large array of topics, such as parental care obligations, marital obligations or educational obligations. This thesis aims to mainly tackle the topic of marital obligation. Marital obligations were of particular interest due to "leftover" women phenomenon and because single urban educated Chinese are stigmatized for being unmarried and face immense pressure to marry (Fincher, 2014, p. 4).

4.2 Descending Familism

Yunxiang Yan (2016) theorized descending familism, a concept which deviates from the traditional Chinese family structure as "family resources flow downward and the focus of the existential meaning of life has shifted from the ancestor to the grandchildren" (Yan, 2016, p. 245). This concept has been constructed from a redefinition of filial piety. This contemporary form of filial piety is built upon the notion that the younger generation has abandoned unconditional submission to filial piety and instead replaced it with the notion that one's parents should be content if their children are content (ibid). Yan (2016) illustrates that contemporary filial piety means "relinquishing unconditional obedience and submission from the junior to the senior generations, thus paving the way to intergenerational intimacy" (Yan, 2016, p. 244). This implies that the intergenerational obligations are changing, as social structures and power dynamics in the family are altering. Intergenerational intimacy is defined by Yan (2016) as, "a breakthrough in the traditional Chinese family culture, which in the past required the suppression of intimacy in order to maintain discipline, hierarchy, and the efficiency of the family as a corporate group" (Yan, 2016, p. 245; Cohen, 1976; Fei, 1992). On an overarching level, these concepts have large implications for the new Chinese family structures, and on an individual level, they have paved a pathway

for individualism and therefore human agency. The process of individualization has resulted in a decline in parental authority and instead, an increase in youth autonomy (Yan, 2016, p. 253; 2003, 2009, 2010, 2011).

4.3 Surface China & Deep China

According to Kleinman et al. (2011), the way in which Chinese individuals interpret themselves in everyday life often goes unheard or blends into the larger picture of how dominant voices project China. These dominant voices of China's image are projected and defined as *surface* China, that is, how institutions, market activities and government policies view China (Kleinman et al., 2011, p. 3). Understanding how so-called "leftover women" interpret their own behaviors and express themselves can be related to the concept of *deep* China, that is, "... the perceptual, emotional, and moral experiences of Chinese, hundreds of millions of them..." (ibid).

The following theoretical framework considers the participants from an interconnected lens, with the support of deep China and surface China, as this thesis aims to offer dialogue guided by more than one narrative. By considering a combination of personal stories, as projected by deep China, as well as government policies, market activities and institutions, portrayed through surface China, I aim to illuminate a more holistic perspective. The study will entail gathering data on how professional women in Shanghai evaluate and justify their own social actions as well as how they respond to factors which may detach them from their desiring self. It is vital to examine actions which are embedded in everyday life in order to gain a clear understanding of the several individual voices which may go unheard under one large unified system. Nevertheless, instead of seeing deep China and surface China as two completely separate concepts, the following thesis aims to see the interconnectedness between these two concepts.

4.4 The Divided Self and the Desiring Self

Highly influenced by anthropology and psychology, Kleinman et al. (2011) have introduced the notion of the *divided self*, that is, that individuals are morally divided into the private and collective self. The collective self can be defined as the self-identity which Chinese individuals base around the centrality of the family while the private self, on the other hand, is controlled by self-interest, desire and self-gratification (Kleinman et al., 2011, p. 5). Emotions and desires play a large role in shaping human behavior. Traditional socialist and Maoist culture is closely binded with a notion of desire, only that it was filtered through state intentions or the greater self, a collectivistic kin-identity (Kleinman et al., 2011, p. 4). This has, in turn, resulted in the inhibition of acting out on individual desires as they were either

stigmatized or controlled (ibid). When examining the negotiation between career development and intergenerational obligation, it is useful to consider the divided self in order to understand the desiring self in comparison with the collective kin.

The *desiring self*, inspired by Lisa Rofel (2007), explores how contemporary Chinese individuals handle emotions and gratification. Among those born in the 1990s, the desiring self stems from a mass culture of consumerism and was first introduced to urban life after China began engaging in more global market activities, such as joining the World Trade Organization (Rofel, 2007, p. 85) The desiring self encompasses the exploration of individual desires while also illuminating an anthropological perspective, recognizing that a new form of Chinese individualism has gained recognition. A dive into the desiring self will explore if and how professional women deal with their desires. The study will also encompass analyzing how professional women deal with the renegotiation of their desires, based on the strongest and closest outer influence, indubitably, the collective kin.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This field study and thesis consists of empirical data gathered through qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted in Shanghai between January-February in 2020. The methodology has been constructed with the support of Alan Bryman's (2016) social science research guide, "Social Research Methods", with the aim of utilizing methods which allow for an open dialogue on the participants' family relations, career development and personal obligations. Although the study consisted of semi-structured interviews, maintaining a holistic and anthropological perspective was vital in order to illuminate Shanghai's cultural context.

The respective piece has followed an iterative approach, a repetitive interplay between the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2016, p. 566). Bryman (2016) illustrates that studies are strengthened when the researcher cross-checks their gathered data with previously gathered sources. The gathering of primary sources through semi-structured interviews allowed for original data to be obtained in a flexible manner. Secondary sources are utilized in order to introduce comparative and complementary studies, giving light to relevant key findings extracted from prior research.

5.2 Semi Structured Interviews

For this thesis and Minor Field Study (MFS), a total of twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted. Qualitative semi-structured interviews have allowed for deeper insight to be extracted from interviewee's point of view, allowing for the interviewees' voices to be heard. Quantitative research has the possibility of suppressing the voices of women by either ignoring them or submerging them in a torrent of facts and statistics (Mies, 1993; Bryman, 2016, p. 403). On top of this, the use of predetermined categories in quantitative research leads to the silencing of women's very own voices (Maynard, 1998, p. 18; Bryman, 2016, p. 410). Thus, a qualitative method was deemed as more appropriate.

An interview guide was utilized during the semi-structured interviews, but the interviewees were also presented with a amount of leeway and freedom in how to reply to the interview questions. This allowed for new relevant topics to be brought up and introduced in a flexible manner. The interviews were conducted between January and February of 2019. Ten interviews were conducted in Shanghai, either online or at local cafes, while an additional two online interviews were conducted in Lund from a distance. Although the interview guide was helpful, due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) the study was cut short by one month and alterations in methodology had to be made.

5.3 Data Collection & Sampling

The method for participant recruitment will be a form of purposive sampling technique, as it is an effective method to gather participants with similar features (Bryman, 2016, p. 188). This thesis is principally concerned with understanding the process of negotiating familial obligations and career development. Thus, "leftover women" were deemed relevant and representative to the research themes. Twelve recorded semi-structured interviews were conducted on a sample of participants in Shanghai who met the general criteria of "leftover women":

a) Are women. b) Are single. c) Aged 24 or older. d) Live in Shanghai.

It is useful to consider the representativeness of the samples. The objective of the study is to understand how successful women renegotiate intergenerational obligations and career development. Interpretation of the participants' respective self allows for the researcher to gain a *deep* China perspective, that is, understanding perceptual, emotional and moral experiences as well as how these individuals justify their own social behavior (Kleinman et al., 2011, p. 3). Single and career-oriented women in China are usually associated with the so-called leftover women, therefore, recruiting participants who fit this social category

was suitable. In order to do this, one must carefully analyze who exactly falls into the category of "leftover women", something which may be quite sensitive. This may be difficult to dismantle since it is a stereotype, therefore, may be more ambiguous. The criteria for who can be defined as a leftover woman is highly subjective and based on pre-existing knowledge. Nevertheless, the minimum age limit was set to twenty-four, as this was the minimum age women were defined as leftover women in scholarly material, news channels and documentaries.

In order to secure the confidentiality of the participant information, I gave the participants mock-names. The chosen names have been randomly assigned in-respect to their interviewee letter, such as "A" for Amy. By assigning the participants a mock name in the research, a sense of personality is awoken, while still safeguarding their anonymity. Retaining anonymity and privacy was paramount in the research, as the nature of the study was concerned with personal, emotional and sensitive topics. Due to the fact that all interviews were recorded, whether online or offline, the most suitable manner to receive the participants' consent was through verbal consent.

5.4 Online & Offline

In light of unforeseeable circumstances, that is, the outbreak of COVID-19, the study developed into a blend between an online and offline study. Information technology and online communication tools became extremely helpful. Online dating services, in the light of the COVID-19 epidemic, seemed like the most appropriate choice for recruiting as it allowed for a sample to be recruited based on the same criteria; being a single woman over the age of twenty-four years and living in Shanghai. In the settings of Tinder, one can alter the criteria of dating candidates by changing the age range, distance and gender. The online dating application was utilized in a transparent manner, where the researcher was open and honest about the intention of the study as well as how the interviews' content would be utilized. Approximately half of the interviews were conducted online, using digital communication tools like Skype or WeChat. The other half were conducted in real life, at local cafes or restaurants. Although online communication tools and online dating services were suitable for this research, a great deal of limitations may stem from the respective design. This shall be further discussed in the limitations section.

5.5 Data Analysis

A steady process of transcribing and analyzing took place throughout the study, which was fitting in combination with an iterative approach, as it allowed for more themes to be generated (Bryman, 2016, p. 566). Theoretical saturation was used as a criterion to determine when the researcher had enough data to

work with, as no new themes were generated (Bryman, 2016, p. 426). NVivo was a suitable tool to use in order to analyze data, identify themes and cross examine information. This software program assisted the researcher with organizational tools to analyze data and build a body of evidence for generated themes. Once the research finished transcribing all the twelve interviews, the researcher was able to generate themes through coding. Coding assists in grouping data by topic or theme. For example, by extracting information from paragraphs which relate to filial piety and adding it to a node, the researcher was able to cross examine information more effectively. Here the researcher was also able to examine emerging patterns, trends and ideas.

5.6 Ethical Considerations

As the research was conducted on a sample of Chinese professional women, there exist a number of ethical considerations and biases which are important to bring light to. It is vital to be aware of asymmetrical power relations and the nature of the research topic, which is highly sensitive. On top of this, there exist a few personal biases of the researcher that may affect the data obtainment, such as western bias.

5.6.1 Asymmetrical Power Relations & Sensitivity

As the study required human interaction, the researcher had to focus on building relationships. It was important to consider the power dynamics in the study, especially in the case of interviews with a focus on personal issues (Scheyvens, 2014, p. 4). I was committed to creating a non-hierarchical and non-exploitative relationship between myself and interviewee. One of the main strategies that I utilized when extracting personal data was to be non-judgmental and make the interviewees feel secure and respected. Since the semi-structured interviews entailed the documentation of personal experiences using their own words and perspectives to understand Chinese singlehood and obligations, many sensitive topics were brought up. Here especially, it was vital for the researcher to not only create a safe space for the interviewees, but also to maintain a balanced relationship between the Western researcher and the interviewee. Creating and maintaining a balanced relationship was a challenge in some cases when the interviewee offered stories or personal experiences that may have felt humiliating to be reminded of. By being mindful of reflexivity, the researcher was able to constantly reflect on the self and representation of both parties while critically examining power relations throughout the research process (Scheyvens, 2014, p. 62; Sultana, 2007, p. 376).

5.6.2 Personal Biases & Western Bias

The researcher has acknowledgement of positionality, that is, how aspects of the researcher's position may influence the study, such as in the way information is collected and interpreted (Scheyvens, 2014, p. 61; Sultana, 2007, p. 376). It is important to consider how gender, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age and other attributes may affect the way one gathers and interprets information (ibid). Values also play a role in shaping personal beliefs and feelings. The researcher does recognize and acknowledge that a research cannot be value free, as values exist everywhere. Nevertheless, to ensure a safe research space, it has been vital for the researcher to be self-reflective and exhibit reflectivity (Bryman, 2016, p. 39) The researcher has considered the personal biases and western biases, which have the potential to fuel assumptions influence the findings.

5.7 Limitations

5.7.1 COVID-19

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 to be a global health emergency in January of 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). Thus, the researcher was not able to conduct participant recruitment at companies, universities or marriage markets. With a full lockdown in place, the researcher was not able to recruit participants in open spaces due to the shut-down. Participant recruitment was conducted online through online dating applications, in a transparent manner. Due to the limited time that I had spent on the field, I decided not to refer to the study as an "ethnography". Four weeks on the field, which was half of what was planned, was not enough time to gather a holistic perspective of Shanghai and the influence of Chinese culture in relation to the area of study.

5.7.2 Ecological Validity

The ecological validity - whether social scientific findings are applicable to people's everyday, natural social settings - is also questionable in the following research (Bryman, 2016, p. 48). The participants that were interviewed in an offline setting, such as a cafe, may not have been in the most comfortable setting to talk about personal topics such as marriage obligations or dating habits. The other half of participants were interviewed online, which means that their setting is unknown. Whether it be in the comfort of their own homes or in quarantine with their relatives, the ecological validity is highly questionable under these conditions. Relevant to the time and place, due to the fact that most individuals had been quarantining

since Chinese New Year, many participants could have been living with their extended families. This could very well be a factor which would affect the data obtained.

5.7.3 Participant Representativeness

It is important to consider the representativeness and typicality of the sample, as it should capture circumstances that occur at commonplace (Bryman, 2012, p. 70; Yin, 2009, p. 48). Recruiting participants online, specifically on online dating applications, calls for some bias in sampling. First and foremost, it would be questionable to assume that all leftover women or all professional women are on online dating applications. In fact, one may assume quite the opposite. If professional women are fully focused on their careers, they perhaps do not have time or do not prioritize spending time on online dating applications. Participant recruitment on online dating applications calls for highly fragmented sampling as it proves that the participant may have intentions in dating to begin with. Some professionals or leftover women would not have any intention to be on online dating sites, as they may not be open to dating, hook up culture, etc.

A great amount of regional diversity persists within Shanghai; thus, the interviewees are of mixed provincial background. Shanghai lies in the heart of eastern China and is known for its drastic urbanization and, along with Beijing, for its highly educated population (Cheek, 2006, p. 83). China can be understood as a continent, with a landscape that stretches as far as Dublin stretches to Damascus and Moscow extends to Marrakesh while also retaining one of the most ethnically diverse populations (Cheek, 2006, p. 13). The following thesis narrows down to the provincial level and looks at how professional women in Shanghai negotiate between intergenerational obligations and career development, although these women may have different provincial backgrounds. It is important to consider how diverse the sample is in terms of age, provincial origin and career type. This reflects that large conclusions cannot be drawn from the following data, especially due to its small sample size.

5.7.4 Generalizations

The idea, stereotype or social category of leftover women is highly ambiguous and blurry. In this study I refer to the participants as professionals for two main reasons. Firstly, although most of the participants loosely fall into the criteria of leftover women, all of the participants do not meet the age of 27, being the All-China Women's Federation's official minimum age criteria for leftover women (Fincher, 2014, p. 3). Secondly, due to the ambiguity of the term "leftover women", as well as the negative connotations connected to the term, I believed it would distort the interpretation of the respective participants. Fincher

(2014) explains that leftover women do not actually exist, but that it is a mere category concocted by the government to "achieve its demographic goals of promoting marriage, planning population and maintaining social stability" (Fincher, 2014, p. 6).

Self-evidently, these findings are based on twelve participants and therefore the findings are not representative of all Chinese female professionals or leftover women. The implications and applicability of the results are limited, as the data was gathered from a sample of only twelve participants. Thus, we cannot draw big conclusions or generalize the nature of these findings. Nevertheless, the study adds a deeper understanding of the reality these women live through and perhaps many more. It allows for more exploration of topics related to China's changing moral landscape.

6. Analysis/Findings/Results

6.1 Setting the scene

In the following study twelve professional women, between ages 24 and 33, were interviewed on personal topics related to career, family, obligations and expectations. Each individual was a completely unique character, having a blend of different interests, family backgrounds and ambitions. The participants had careers within a variety of fields - ranging from IT and Marketing Managers to Lawyers and English teachers. Due to the diversity of the sample, one cannot see these individual voices as one big narrative, but instead one must see these their voices as separate stories and trajectories. By not letting voices go unheard or blend into the bigger picture, this study seeks to cover a range of topics while incorporating sociological theories presented in the framework.

In order to localize the most central themes of obligation, the interviewees were first asked to discuss if they felt any expectations from their parents. Building on this, an investigation on how interviewees deal with expectations takes place, where they are divided into three different categories based on their response towards marital obligations, the most central theme. Participants are grouped into showing either traditional filial piety, contemporary filial piety or no displayed filial piety. Continuing, an investigation is conducted on how the desiring self, through several trajectories, interacts when faced with policies, marriage markets and state-media that may challenge their sense of individualism. This allows for a fruitful discussion on how individual voices handle top-down pressure that is initiated or fueled by the party states' population consensus strategies. Through localizing the desiring and the divided self, a deeper exploration is conducted on how negotiations take place. At this stage it becomes clear that these

diverse narratives have shaped several kinds of negotiations through the emergence of descending familialism, intergenerational intimacy as well as hypergamy. These negotiations are complex and sometimes go against norms.

6.2 Obligations and Filial Piety

One of the most central themes that came up was the theme of "expectations" when discussing topics related to the individuals and their parents. Although different types of expectations were considered, three reoccurring themes were expectations related to marriage, care and career development. A majority of interviewees, mainly those above the age of 25, brought up that marriage was a pressure they felt from their parents after they had graduated from university. Extending from this, the topic of care was an expectation that was related to marriage as parents urge their daughters to find a suitable husband to walk through life with them. Expectations in care also entailed being family-oriented, contributing to parental care and respecting the elderly - a moral logic that dominates Chinese society, stemming from Confucian values and ethics.

When discussing marital obligations, interviewees were found expressing one of the following: traditional filial piety, contemporary filial piety or no filial obligations. Traditional filial piety is defined as the moral code regulating intergenerational relations, as expressed by Eklund (2018), Bell (2010) and Croll (1995), while the contemporary form of filial piety refers to Yan's (2016) illustration of a new filial piety, that is, "relinquishing unconditional obedience and submission from the junior to the senior generations, thus paving the way to intergenerational intimacy" (Yan, 2016, p. 244). Lastly, no filial obligations referred to the interviewees that did not express feeling any marital obligation from their parents.

Nine out of twelve of the participants felt marriage was a filial obligation that they needed to attend to at some point in their life. Out of these nine participants, five participants expressed feeling contemporary filial piety while four expressed feeling traditional filial piety. Contemporary filial piety often entailed the notion that parents were happy if their daughters were happy – whether single or not. Traditional filial piety, on the other hand, was often associated with parental pressure where there existed strong expectations for their daughters to find a well-rounded husband.

Those who did not feel marital obligation were Cindy, Grace, Bella and Amy. Cindy did not feel any marital obligation due to being recently divorced. Her number one priority was to focus on building a strong relationship with her parents. Grace felt no marital pressure and emphasized that her family was quite "Westernized" and "non-traditional", adding that her brother and father had both worked abroad for

several years. Grace explained that her mother would never want her to feel the same double pressure that she felt, having to balance raising two children while also holding a managerial position. Bella also expressed that her family was "non-traditional" and that her parents did not express having high expectations for her and her sister, "We don't expect you to be Nobel prize winners" (Bella, 2020-02-28). Most of the interviewees felt more grounded in their individuality and their own desires when asked about their singlehood. Pursuing in "self-development" was vital for all participants. This suggests that the divided self and the desiring self were apparent phenomena. The representation of a desiring self reveals that interviewees had their own personal aspirations, needs and longings. As a majority of interviewees separated their own desires from parental desires, therefore the divided self was visible.

A great majority of the participants explained that career development was their number one current priority in life. This can be highlighted by Amy, a bisexual Shanghainese 27-year-old IT consultant, who expressed that career development was the most important factor in life. Amy was born and raised in Shanghai but pursued her master's degree in Australia. Although Amy has been exposed to "western values" during her early years of adulthood when pursuing her studies, she has settled back in Shanghai and is now focusing on her career within the STEM field.

During the online interview she was very open to sharing information related to her career as an IT consultant, such as her research on functional encryption in machine learning. Nevertheless, when I asked Amy questions related to family and relationships, she became a bit more uncomfortable and explained that she was hesitant in sharing her own perspective because she was afraid people would not tolerate her opinion. Considering Amy's sexual orientation, this discomfort could also be fueled by the fact that Chinese society's acceptance of LGBT rights have remained quite distant throughout history (Fincher, 2014, p. 186). Although the Ministry of Public Security have announced that Chinese citizens have the right to choose their own sexuality, it would be rash to state that homosexual relations have the same legal and normative recognition as heterosexual relations do (Davis & Friedman, 2014, p. 18-19). Although there has been a persistent growth in LGBT organizations which advocate for public visibility and gay rights, jurisdiction, grassroot nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), media, medical clinics, police and Chinese society as a whole have not illustrated full acceptance of gay rights (ibid). Amy shares:

> I never told my parents that I didn't want children or that I didn't want to get married, even though I kind of feel this way. I do not believe that they could ever accept this. In fact, I wouldn't feel comfortable saying this to my friends or colleagues either. When I am with my friends I avoid talking about children and when I mention that I do not want to get married they seem shocked and we do not talk about it more from there on. (Amy, 2020-02-28)

This quote illustrates how filial obligations may be challenged. Amy challenges filial obligations by distancing herself from her parents, assuming their conflicting views. While expressing herself in a more individualistic manner, she utilizes words such as "I" instead of collective words. There exists a clear distinction between "us" and "them" when embracing her own desires, which reveals that the notion of the divided self exists as Cindy understands her own individual morality and does not feel a collective moral experience to self-sacrifice this individual mortality. As supported by Yan's (2016) work, the rise of individual awareness which is portrayed acts as a haven for her personal happiness, which in turn, has challenged the traditional Chinese family structure and filial piety. The desiring self, recognized by Rofel (2007), can be portrayed in this instance as Amy has distanced herself from her families' conflicting expectations in order to pursue her own dreams which are very much career centered. By avoiding the conversation about future plans with her family, she does not need to deal with the potential backlash the deviant act could induce.

Engebretsen (2017) reveals that Chinese social norms hold emphasis on familial duty above everything else, where individuals are recognized according to how they respond to their responsibilities (Engebretsen, 2017, p. 165). Marriage and childbirth are imperative and unavoidable topics, regardless of sexuality or gender (ibid). Although family, friends and state media pressure women into marriage, many women in urban China are rejecting marriage as the institution of marriage does not benefit protecting women's rights (Fincher, 2014, p. 11). The idea of marriage is not a pleasant idea for Amy, instead, it seems to have caused more harm than good as it fuels anxiety and pressure – even more so due to her bisexual status. The LGBT community in China faces a great amount of discrimination and many LGBT individuals are marginalized by official women's rights groups as well as some NGOs (Fincher, 2014, p. 181). Whether part of the LGBT community or not, a large degree of educated women find there exists too much political risk to be part of a women's rights movement and instead demonstrate on a personal level by rejecting the institution of marriage (Fincher, 2014, p. 186). Engebretsen (2017) has also revealed that many LGBT women engage in a patriarchal bargain by securing contract marriages or "fake marriages" between gay men (Engebretsen, 2017, p. 163). This is a strategy and arrangement which helps both individuals resist societal marital pressure, while still securing ones physical, economic and personal independence (ibid).

Many of the interviewees often felt a sense of filial piety and filial obligation when summarizing their relationship status as single women. Nevertheless, filial obligation is a general phenomenon and can relate to obligation of care, marriage and career. Cindy, a 28-year old Shanghainese nurse, had been through a recent divorce and expressed that her parents never liked her ex-husband, who was from Shandong province. Her relationship with her parents had positively developed since she filed for the divorce, but

still felt a sense of guilt for being charmed by her ex-husbands "ruralness". Cindy expresses filial obligation, not in the marital sense, but in the form of care for her parents:

> It is easy to find a man, but it is difficult to find a good quality man - someone who is financially stable and also ambitious. Men need to have better economy. We Asian women have higher expectations and prefer men who are better than themselves in many fields. I still have some burden inside, since I am disappointing my parents with a divorce. My parents never liked my ex-husband - He was not polite and he came from a rural province. I didn't take my parents advice, but now I regret it. I feel guilty. They are old, tired and their lives are not easy. They supported my decision with a divorce and after I took their advice to leave him, I became closer with my parents. (Cindy, 2020-02-29)

Cindy wants to respect her parents and recalibrate the moral code which she feels she has abused by marrying an "unsuitable" husband. She acknowledges that her desiring self took over, which was not so instrumental in finding a cultivated and financially strong husband. Thus, she was, according norms, not hypergamous enough in her mate selection. With a divorce, she feels even more obligated to obey and show gratitude to her parents since she believes she has burdened them greatly. Nevertheless, in Cindy's case, intergenerational intimacy grew from the burden of a divorce and a "bad marriage". This intergenerational intimacy was formed at the basis of a mutual understanding and an emotional connection between the two generations. This reveals that the process of filial piety is being renegotiated in a complex manner and that norms and values may not always suit reality (Eklund, 2018). As illustrated by Eklund (2018), intergenerational obligations are to be handled in different ways depending on the social context (ibid). Divorce in China has historically been seen as something very stigmatized and taboo, whilst the act of sustaining a marriage is an important act of filial piety. Nevertheless, under Cindy's circumstances, the divorce supported her in strengthening the intergenerational intimacy between herself and her parents. This reveals how obligations have the potential to not only cross, but even go against norms.

Daisy is a Shanghainese heterosexual 33-year-old international school secretary and has experienced immense pressure from her parents, who expect her to already be married and have had children at this stage in life. Daisy states that she does not feel obliged to follow her parents' desires because she is financially independent and lives on her own. She has been single for her entire life but claims to be in the search for an open minded, stable and financially independent partner. In fact, she has taken part in government-sponsored matchmaking services. Nevertheless, she states that she will not marry due to

parental pressure - describing that her parents do not understand her perspective as they are "traditional" and followers of "Confucius philosophy":

> It is stressful to be a woman in China in general, but if you grow up with traditional value then you will be obedient. Traditional value is in the Chinese peoples' blood. You won't feel respect for your own independence but instead feel respected when you get praise from your parents. My parents do not understand my perspective because in their eyes, being single is something miserable. They will never understand my perspective because their education is limited and they have traditional values. My values changed because I was lucky to have gone to college and then go on to work for an international company for over a decade. (Daisy, 2020-02-29)

Cai and Feng (2014) have predicted that with the rapid expansion of the education system, a marriage revolution is on its way which will result in individuals choosing to stay out of marriage, clarifying that, "In Shanghai, among women aged twenty-five to thirty-four in 2005, higher levels of educational attainment are associated with a high likelihood of never marrying" (Cai & Feng, 2014, p 109). This illuminates why Daisy feels stressed, as she is interested in finding a partner while also belonging to a category of women who are, statistically, more likely to have a difficult time in finding a suitable partner. Daisy explains that she does not feel obliged to marry on the basis of her parents' desires due to individualistic characteristics such as living at home and not being financially dependent on her parents. Her sense of filial obligation only goes so far, and she expects her parents to understand her perspective and respect her choices. Thus, her filial ethic is, like Yan (2016) claims, a form of contemporary filial piety where she expects her parents to be content if she is content. Daisy has detached herself from unconditional obligation to her family by prioritizing individualism and her desiring self, hoping that her personal happiness will also please her parents too.

6.3 The Desiring Self

The topic of "individuality" and having one's own "aspirations" and "personal-desires" came up frequently throughout the interviews. This suggests that some interviewees subconsciously knew of the divided self, as one could divide parental desires from one's own desires. Kleinman (2011) illustrates that there exists a changing moral landscape in contemporary China, as the notion of China as collectivistic is being challenged. Ultimately, a new inner self is born and thus, there exists a divided self. It is apparent that the desiring self, as expressed by Rofel (2007), was noticeable as several interviewees were more individualistic and non-abiding to parental pressures. Traditional and socialist Chinese culture either stigmatized or controlled desires in the past and therefore, Chinese individuals did not have much

opportunity to celebrate individuality (Kleinman et al., 2011, p. 4). Instead, several large personal sacrifices were made in order to please the future larger collective. This is emphasized in previous scholarly work, in an interview Kleinman et al. (2011) had with a Chinese physician who endured the Cultural Revolution:

> To survive in China you must reveal nothing to others. Or it could be used against you … That's why I've come to think the deepest part of the self is best left unclear. Like mist and clouds in a Chinese landscape painting, hide the private part behind your social persona. Let your public self be like rice in a dinner: bland and inconspicuous, taking on the flavors of its surroundings while giving off no flavor of its own. (Kleinman et al., 2011, p. 6)

This individual who endured the Cultural Revolution during Maoist era explains how the individual could not act out of self-interest. Individuals born in a post-Maoism era, however, have not had to sacrifice self-interest but instead they have had the opportunity to act out on desires. Individuals in contemporary China escaped the shared experience of sadness, bitterness and anger which came from the Cultural Revolution and instead, they symbolize a generation of unprecedented opportunity, prosperity and pleasure (Kleinman et al., 2011, p. 7). Yan (2011) expresses that there exists a moral crisis due to the conflict between individual's desire and collectivistic way of sacrificing personal interest (ibid). Helen has been living in Shanghai ever since she graduated from university, while her parents are still living in her hometown, located in Hubei. Helen illustrates her own personal moral crisis in action:

> Since I graduated from university, my parents (in Hubei) started to have this push or pressure on me, in terms of marriage. It is not easy, but I need to differentiate their expectations from what I want. I don't think I could live up to their expectations fully because I would be sacrificing my own dreams and desires. (Helen, 2020-03-01)

The interviewee expresses the hardship she feels when having to please herself as well as her parents. She illustrates that this hardship stems from a clash between the individual desire and the collectivistic expectations, in the form of pressure to attend to familial obligations. She is dissatisfied with the pressure she feels from familial obligations, as this obligation of seeking a partner may entail sacrifice of personal desires and her desiring self. Nevertheless, as Helen's parents live in Hubei province, the daughter's socio-spatial freedom is significantly high. On top of this, Shanghai is known to have one of the lowest fertility rates (Fincher, 2014, p. 102).

Cheung & Kwan (2009) suggest that filial piety may be challenged by modernization as urbanization and industrialization triggers structural changes that may alter social roles, such as women entering the paid

labor market and attaining professional roles (Cheung & Kwan, 2009; Dioale & Seda, 2001, p. 129). On top of this, the growing urbanization that stems from economic modernization may lead to extended families' being geospatially divided, ultimately pulling individuals further away from their roots (Cheung & Kwan, 2009; Yang & Chandler, 1992.). Yao (2011), on the contrary, emphasizes that the economic prosperity which is brought upon from modernization will further fuel filial piety as it is already institutionally grounded. Traditional moral understanding of filial piety is engraved into the Chinese education system, which Yao (2011) suggests will continue to flourish in face of modernization. Although it is difficult to measure to what extent a concept like filial piety is engraved into an education system, an interviewee illustrated how the education system has, in her own experience, triggered internal obligations:

> There is pressure for sons and daughters to follow their parents' opinions, but I also think this kind of behavior stems from the education we received ever since the establishment of the Republic China - mainly educating us to become followers. They just want us to do the right thing in the right way, they do not make or teach or train us to have critical thinking, to always think about whether this is the right thing to do or not. Sometimes people follow a path blindly … but after the establishment of the PRC, we started to relearn a new understanding of the world, more western understanding. Eventually this traditional conventional Chinese culture was a bit abandoned during the Cultural Revolution. They cut some of the roots from the traditional Chinese culture. (Isabella, 2020-03-05)

Isabella expresses how Chinese youth are taught to follow instead of lead. This suggests that the education system can partly be used to better "mold" Chinese individuals into what to do, instead of allowing individuals to think and act on their own. In one way this is paradoxical because on the one hand, she assumes that people are being molded by the education system, and on the other, she analyses this situation and explains that more individuals are deviating from the notion of being "followers".

Another interviewee explained that, "Shanghai has modern influence due to its geo-political landscape; it has been influenced by other cultures since it was a trading port. Since much globalization has occurred, there is more acceptance for non-traditional views in Shanghai" (Daisy, 2020-02-29). Many individuals migrate to Shanghai to "reinvent" themselves, to become someone they desire to be (Yan, 2014, p. 37). Here consumption, emotions and aspirations have shaped the desiring self. This desiring self was exemplified when a great number of women expressed their own personal interest and experience with online dating services. Daisy has taken part in match making services and explained that she was looking for a partner that is open minded, good at communication, independent, economically stable, spiritual and

good looking. Nevertheless, age was not a factor that she determined to be very important. Daisy illustrates her experience with the state-led matchmaking services:

> I have had over ten blind dates and I have been to a marriage company where I have met professional matchmakers which investigate their clientele's backgrounds. The matchmakers are professionals, they have been to school and probably studied psychology to be good matchmakers - but they are quite expensive! I paid RMB 15,000 for half a year of service and this was even purchased during a promotional sale. I want to take time to find the right one. (Daisy, 2020-02-29)

Since 2011, Shanghai's government, through the Women's Federation, Shanghai Matchmaking Agency Management Association and Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau, have collaborated and invested heavily in the creation of matchmaking fairs (Fincher, 2014, p. 31). Target groups have often been educated men and women, where out of the 40,000 individuals registered in 2012 and 2013, approximately 80 percent had attained at least an undergraduate degree (ibid). Daisy is an educated urban woman who shows hypergamous values in their mate choices, as she has been investing a high sum of money and time into relationship seeking. It is clear that Daisy has a self-interest in finding a suitable partner and has devoted time into her desiring self. Urban women who have higher educational attainment have reduced parental control and in turn have more flexibility and freedom in mate-choice (Cai & Feng, 2014).

6.4 Why Are You Not Married Yet?

Top down measures such as education, state media, government-sponsored matchmaking and marriage promotions are subtle measures which influence the social order in Chinese society (Fincher, 2014, p. 23). Fincher (2014) has stated that Chinese state media portrays single women as "leftover women" in effort to promote marriage for social stability. The authoritarian state plays a role in stigmatizing single and educated women in their late twenties, as state-led media channels pump out information which aligns with their plans to meet China's population plan goals (Fincher, 2014, p. 23-28).

A long-standing tradition of hypergamy, the idea that women tend to marry upwards in class or caste, is forming a marriage squeeze and fueling demographic difficulties, such as an aging population (The Economist, 2015; Eklund, 2013). Hypergamy stems from an evolutionary perspective that men should be able to provide necessary resources for the families' survival. Building into the Chinese case, hypergamy is an obstacle for the state and its population development consensus which aims to maintain a harmonious society through the creation of more families, "the basic cell of society" (ibid). The educated

urban daughters that were interviewed are deemed as relatively independent and financially stable, as they are all of middle-class origin or higher. Daisy, who explains to me that she has been considered a "leftover" in the eyes of some people, states that:

> Women are regarded as attachment or product for man, so if a woman is single and old then it is a product no one want no matter how successful she is … In China there's an old saying "男人四十一枝花，女人四十豆腐渣" which means "men at the age of forty are blossoms, women at the age of forty are tofu dregs". (Daisy, 2020-02-29)

Although the rhyme is lost in translation, the saying itself reveals that the natural insecurity of growing old is intensified for women. The saying also suggests that men, unlike women, grow more as they develop with age, like a rippening fruit, as they are able to focus on their careers and developments. Daisy's quote illuminates that hypergamy is apparent, as women are expected to marry older men who have had the opportunity of time to develop their careers and establish themselves. Hypergamy is also reinforced in the Chinese marriage law, as the minimum age for marriage is twenty for women and twenty-two for men (Eklund 2013; PRC, 1980). The same conclusions can be drawn from Jasmine, a Shanghainese master's student who theorized hypergamy in her own words throughout the interview:

> It's kind of a dilemma though. Once you get too successful or career driven, then your selection pool gets smaller. You always want someone that's stronger, more educated and better looking than you. I don't want marriage to be a pure economic model, but you still want someone with a similar financial or better than you. You have to find a good bundle, a good set. You need to find a total bundle which meets your expectations. Some guys are intimidated by how successful or smart you are. Based on my total bundle theory, women are trying to find the best bundle for them. People want to match with a slightly better guy, there will always be some leftover guys. (Jasmine, 2020-03-12).

The Chinese state has been open about upgrading population quality and has granted the Women's Federation, along with agencies such as propaganda, public security and civil affairs, to be the central implementors of the population planning policies (Fincher, 2014, p. 29). Professional urban women exist as a central target group of population planning policies, as they have the potential to cultivate quality citizens (ibid). China's population planning policy is designed to, "control not just the quantity of people in the country, but also the quality." (Fincher, 2014, p. 29) Helen, from Hubei province, is an IT consultant manager and has lived in Shanghai for six years. She is ambitious, confident and bold, which has resulted in her being promoted twice within a year. Her commission has constantly increased, and she

has had a number of recruiters contacting her, indicating that she has been extremely hard working and career oriented. Helen is frustrated with state media and how society tries to affect her behavior, by illustrating:

> They do not only nag women to have kids, but they do so by making them feel worthless, they say: you are nothing, you are just an old woman who is not married yet, you should not be so picky. You should just find a man, whatever, whoever, just a man who has a dick, then have a family and have kids… They break down female confidence in order to gain control over them (Helen, 2020-03-1)

Being target groups of state media, urban single women would naturally feel immediate pressure from the intentions of the state as well as their general surroundings. Being exposed to state-media that incentivizes one to be less hypergamous goes against Helen's ethic of mate selection, which is uncomfortable as it may push the freedom which she has gained in her independence and singlehood. State-media bombards individuals, especially the urban, female, single and educated, with articles, columns, films and reports on why one should not be delaying marriage (Fincher, 2016, p. 16-19). On a Xinhua News column, a state-run news agency, the following was illustrated, "The main reason many girls become "leftovers" is that their standards for a partner are too high … As long as girls are not too picky, finding a partner should be as easy as blowing away a speck of dust. (ibid)"

This suggests that state-media is incentivizing single women to settle and be less hypergamous. This is in line with the CCP's reproduction goals of the century, with the aim of balancing out the aging population (Fincher, 2014, p. 30). Due to norms of hypergamy, urban educated women have high expectations on their potential spouses, that is, to be older in age and to have an equal or higher educational and professional attainment (Zhang & Sun, 2014). It is hypergamous norms that have created this marriage squeeze for urban educated women, as there exists a scarcity in "marriageable" men.

6.5 Online Dating and Marriage Markets

Decades have passed since market reforms were established and Shanghai still stands at the forefront of China's engagement within globalization and modernization (Zhang & Sun, 2014). Yet, in the midst of the buzzing cosmopolitan city center of Shanghai, marriage markets have been hosted every weekend since 2005, hinting at the revival of "tradition" (ibid). Marriage markets or marriage corners are a common ground for Chinese parents who are worried their offspring will not find a partner. Parents will socialize and engage in finding potential mates for their offspring by advertising their children for

marriage by holding up posters containing personal biographies describing their offspring's education, income, weight, height, physical features and personality traits.

Throughout the years, Helen's parents have become more invested and involved in her love life as she approached her thirties. Her mom has not only displayed Helen's personal information on online matching services, but she has also been active in partaking in physical marriage markets. Helen has also illustrated that, in the past, she has felt extremely controlled by her parents and one of her previous boyfriends from Hubei. After being in an unhealthy relationship at a younger age, she decided she would never want to settle for someone who would try to control her. Helen shares her experience:

> Sometimes they have speed dating events for parents, where the parents exchange information about their children. My mom presented all my information and then she realized that I am just too outstanding - there is no one for me. I am only 28 and I am making so much money. There was no one making more money than me in that group. They are all short, they are ugly, and they are old. My mom gave up and said that this was not a good place to find a husband. I do not care if my mom shows my personal information to other people, in the end I know she really cares about me and I think that it is interesting that she found a hobby. When she saw the men at the market, she thought it would just be better to leave the dating aspect of my life to myself or that it would be better for me to remain single. (Helen, 2020-03-01)

Three key concepts were made sense of from Helen's quote: the marriage squeeze, descending familialism and hypergamy. Hypergamy, the expectation that one should marry upwards in caste or class, has influenced the creation of a marriage squeeze for high class women in urban China, as illustrated by Eklund (2013). An example of hypergamy would be an illiterate woman marrying a man with primary education, a woman with secondary education marrying a male with tertiary education and so forth. Due to there being a scarcity of "quality men", Helen's mother has abandoned her traditional obligation to help her daughter find a husband. The marriage squeeze exists for both rural men as well as urban women, but due to their differences in class and geographic location, they are highly incompatible (Eklund, 2013). Although there exists a scarcity of marriageable women and surplus of men, in this case, there exists scarcity quality men for Helen to marry due to hypergamous influence (Srinivasan & Li, 2018, p. 15; Eklund, 2013). The urban daughter marriage squeeze has resulted in the creation of the social category "leftover woman" (ibid). Since a great amount of couples avoided having daughters since the mid-80s through sex-selective abortions, there exists a scarcity in marriageable women which has in turn intensified the marriage squeeze (Eklund, 2013). Nevertheless, as supported by Fong (2002) the urban daughters that were born were singleton and received full parental investment, due to having no brotherly

competition. It came to my surprise that Helen and her parents were hypergamous, despite having high degrees of social mobility and independence, as I would assume this independence would allow for her desiring self to have free range and "take over".

The marriage squeeze, through hypergamy, is exemplified in Helen's case as both herself and her mother have come to the conclusion that there exist no "quality" men for her to marry. On top of this, descending familialism can be observed as the mother has given up on finding a husband for her daughter and has instead internalized that she will find happiness through her daughters' contentment, whether it be through singlehood or finding a partner along the line (Yan, 2016). Helen has remained filial by allowing her mother to display her personal information on online and offline matchmaking services.

Further on, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established policies which have directly as well as indirectly affected the consequences of marriage (Eklund, 2013; Johnson, 1983; Wolf, 1985). In 1949, the establishment of a dual system which redistributed resources and welfare security became apparent through the work unit (*danwei*) (Eklund 2016; Chan et al. 2008; Lü & Perry, 1997; Xiong, 2014). The work unit (*danwei*) indirectly affected the intergenerational contract and in turn, obligations, as it made individuals more responsible for their own mate choosing (Eklund, 2016; Chan, 1997). This put more pressure, and opportunity, on the individual to choose who to marry, while decreasing the pressure and opportunity for parents to interfere with their children's marital status (ibid). Helen's most recent relationship, that ended two years ago, was a long-distance relationship with an American male who was situated in the United States and before that, with a male located in Beijing. She explained that these long-distance relationships have been eye-opening for her and have allowed for her to maintain her independence.

6.6 Social Policy & Singleton Daughters

In order to investigate how intergenerational obligations are changing, it is also vital to examine larger frameworks of social policies, law and structural change (Eklund, 2018; Croll, 2006; Göransson, 2013). It is the intersection between cultural logic, economy and social policy which determines the informal and formal obligations which exist in Chinese society (Göransson, 2013). Ideological and normative implications are imbedded into social policy, as they shape social imaginary, hence gender relationships, formation of identity, mobilization and interests (Eklund, 2016; Razavi, 2007; Sainsbury, 1996).

Fiona is a 25-year-old teacher from Harbin, a province located in the north-west. Although she has grown up in a middle-class family, due to her parents' busy work schedule she has spent majority of her

childhood being raised by her paternal grandparents. She had a very pleasant upbringing with her paternal grandparents, suggesting patrilineal family formation. The preference of son can be illustrated in the following quote:

> My mother always wanted to have a boy, but I am a girl. You've heard of the one child policy? I was their only chance, so my mom was very disappointed, and she apologized to my grandpa. She felt a little sad that she had not given the family a boy. (Fiona, 2020-02-31)

Filial piety and son preference can be observed in the above quote, as Fiona's mother apologized to her elderly relatives for having a daughter. The mother shows a sense of responsibility to please the grandfather, signaling filial obligation. She assumes that having a daughter instead of a son is a disappointing result or even a burden, recognizing that the mother is fully aware of traditional and feudal gender norms. This results in not only the mother, but also the daughter, in feeling inferior which in turn fuels the vicious cycle of son preference. On top of this, Croll (2000) as well as Eklund (2013) illustrate that, due to a culture of gender reasoning, women are not substitutes or secondary choices to men as men are irreplaceable. The same interviewee continues:

> But my grandpa told her, whether it is a boy or a girl, we will give her the best education and make her an excellent person. It is true, they spent so much money and effort on me: I played the piano, did dancing, painting, singing, whatever I wanted. But sometimes I would wonder, if I had a younger brother, would they still spend all their effort on me? So maybe I should thank the one child policy. (Fiona, 2020-02-31)

In the following quote the interviewee shows deep appreciation for the one child policy as it has allowed for her to embrace full parental benefits, that is, education, extracurricular activities and perhaps even affection. The families' resources have flowed downwards to the daughter, showcasing that Yan's (2016) theory of descending familialism appears to be taking place in Fiona's case. Although Fiona recognizes her rights and, in some cases, her privileges, she ponders hypothetically at the thought of having a brother and how this could affect her. This suggests that she is aware of gender disparities on a personal level, but also implies that she does not like the thought of sharing her parental benefits. She recognizes her agency and independence, where after she expresses her gratitude for the one child policy, as it is the government which has granted her with the privilege she has received.

Grace, a 24-year-old Shanghainese clinical medicine student, is focused on developing her career in the coming years, with the goal of landing a position as a doctor before the age of 30. She is grateful to have a

supportive family that wants to see her develop within her career. Grace is not interested in focusing on building a family at this point in life. In fact, she expresses discomfort when she discusses marriage:

> I cannot see myself getting married in the future. I do not want to get married; everything will become complicated. Sometimes the public opinions are so extreme - they think a woman should get married at the age of 30 years old - You need to get into a new family and build a relationship with your husband and his family. This is very difficult for me. In our culture, if you get married, you have to be a good wife which means you sometimes have to give up your career. I just want to be a doctor and the life of a doctor is very busy, I need to do a lot of work for myself. (Grace, 2020-03-01)

Fincher (2014) has illustrates that many women in urban China are rejecting marriage as the institution of marriage does not benefit protecting women's rights. Grace illustrates that the bond between two individuals often requires the woman to sacrifice a great amount of her "desiring self" for "the collective self". By rejecting the institution of marriage, perhaps she is protesting the system through her systematic behavior, which in turn increases her autonomy and agency.

7. Concluding Discussion

In order to understand how professional women in Shanghai negotiate the contradictions in intergenerational obligations and career development, this study has examined several individual perspectives, cultural logic, social policy, state behavior and relevant sociological theories. A qualitative analysis has been extracted from the perspective of 12 interviewees, incorporating relevant topics of state media, marriage promotion, filial piety and social policy. The theoretical framework has allowed for an analytical research-based thesis from the lens of several social theories inspired by the works of; Eklund (2018), Yan (2016), Kleinman et al. (2011) and Rofel (2007), while incorporating further findings from other relevant scholarly material.

This study illustrated how intergenerational obligations, in the context of marriage, can be handled in different ways depending on the familial context. The contemporary marital landscape looks to be highly contradictory. In some circumstances, familial obligations are so strong that daughters cannot act out on their desiring self as they are focused on filial duties. Nevertheless, intergenerational obligations have the potential to cross and even go against norms. This reveals that there exist several manners in which intergenerational obligations can continue but also alter intergenerational relations (Eklund, 2018; Feng, 2017). In other circumstances, a contemporary form of filial piety has allowed for descending familialism

to take place and through this, the potential to pave a pathway for intergenerational intimacy has grown (Yan, 2016). This intergenerational intimacy is quite a recent, strong and emotional bond which may have been silenced or disincentivized in the past, as supported by Kleinman et al. (2011) and Rofel (2007) through the lens of the divided and desiring self.

Through detailed assessment, this study has elaborated on the diverse trajectories which persist for single, professional women in Shanghai. Descending familialism, as introduced by Yan (2016), was in some cases perceived in action. A strengthened intergenerational intimacy was occasionally detected, although in other cases, individuals were more segregated and distanced from their families. Whether individuals distanced themselves from their families or had strong intergenerational intimacy, the desiring self, as illustrated by Rofel (2007), can be witnessed when observing the lives of many Chinese urban daughters. It is clear that urban daughters are becoming more desirous and that many individuals have more leverage to act out on their respective desires. In many cases there exists a large on-going and perhaps never-ending negotiation between parents and daughters based on clashing expectations and internalized obligations. Nevertheless, it is vital to consider how diverse intergenerational obligations are and that these obligations range depending on the social context and values of the respective family.

To conclude this research, it is clear that the intergenerational negotiations which occur between the family and the self are fueled by the ability to adapt. Whether these negotiations entail obligations which go against norms or not may differ from individual to individual. Adaptation can take place in several ways; whether one adapts their behavior by distancing themselves from the family in order to focus more, or fully, on the "desiring self" or if the self makes small sacrifices in order to gratify the collective, the ability to adapt has become a process which plays a large role in shaping the family and the individual.

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9. Appendix

Interviewee Letter	Mock-Name	Date	Education	Occupation	Relationship status	Province of origin	Age
A	Amy	28/2/2020	Masters	IT Consultant	Single	Shanghai	27
B	Bella	28/2/2020	Masters	Lawyer	Single	Shanghai	27
C	Cindy	29/2/2020	-	Nurse	Divorced, 2 months ago	Shanghai	28
D	Daisy	29/2/2020	-	International School Secretary	Single & looking for relationship	Shanghai	33
E	Emily	30/2/2020	Bachelors	English Teacher	Single	Shanghai	25
F	Fiona	31/2/2020	-	Music Teacher	Single for 2 years, but openly dating	Harbin	25
G	Grace	1/3/2020	Masters (current)	Clinical Medicine Student	Single	Shanghai	24
H	Helen	1/3/2020	Masters	IT Manager	Single for 1-2 years, but openly dating	Hubei	28
I	Isabella	5/3/2020	Masters	Marketing Manager	Single, not actively looking for relationship	Jiangsu	30
J	Jasmine	12/3/2020	Masters (current)	International Relations Student	Single for 3 months, open to dating & casual relations	Shanghai	24
K	Kate	22/3/2020	Masters	Innovation Incubator Manager	Single	Shanghai	28
L	Lily	23/3/2020	Masters	Design Store Manager	Single	Shanghai	25