Becoming a Good Mother: Experiences of motherhood in the Early Years of Childrearing in Urban China

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PhD

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Sociology

September 2022

List of Contents

<u>Abstract</u>

This thesis focuses on exploring what constitutes a 'good mother' from the perspective of Chinese middle-class heterosexual mothers. The aim of this thesis is to fill in gaps in sociological understanding of motherhood from the Chinese social and cultural context. In addition, this thesis will discuss motherhood and the role as a 'good mother' not only from mothers themselves, but also from angles of children's education, intergenerational relationship, marriage and gender. Participants' understandings of what it means to be a 'good mother' are explored through four analytic chapters, which address children's education, intergenerational negotiations around child-care, husbands' participation in child-rearing, and the understandings of gender that women are seeking to pass on to their own children. By focussing on mothering in the early years of childhood in China from these angles, this thesis offers a detailed analysis of what 'good mothering' means in everyday life in middle class urban China, and the practises through which it is accomplished. The focus on everyday practises of mothering provides rich insights into the ways in which the accomplishment of mothering is simultaneously about the negotiation of gender and intergenerational relationships. My analysis provides an analysis of what the 'intensification' of motherhood looks like in a context which is often conceptualised as less individualised. The analysis of this thesis highlights the complexity of motherhood in this context, and the ways in which aspects that are apparently more relational can themselves become part of the process of intensification. In addition, my findings also demonstrate women's awareness of the intensive pressures on a mother's role and the ways in which they are bound up with limited understandings of gender. Collectively, these insights both provide important empirical detail about motherhood in contemporary China and offer useful perspectives to contribute to broader sociological analysis of parenting cultures.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I really appreciate all my previous supervisors, Dr. Steph Lawler, Dr. Laurie Haquient, and Dr. Wes Lin, who have given me a lot of help for the past years. And my tap member Dr. Merran Toerien, who could always give me great opinions every time we meet. I especially thankful for my current supervisors, Dr. Anna Strhan, and Dr. Sian Beynon-Jones, who have dedicated a lot of time and energy to help me achieve the thesis I have now. They have always been patient and helpful with me, both of them always give me detailed feedback and useful opinions every meeting to help me make progress step by step.

Moreover, I also thankful for all my friends who have helped me get through many hard times in the past four years. I have been through many difficult times myself and with the worldwide pandemic, everyone need strength from their friends every now and then. In my four years' PhD study, all my friends in China and in UK are always there to encourage me and give me help whenever I need them. They have given me courage to confront any difficulties, and they also helped me a lot during my time of conducting field work, especially in the process of recruiting participants in two different cities in China. Without their help, I cannot accomplish my field work and finish this thesis.

Finally, I am thankful for my parents, who have always believed in me. They have not only invested a lot in me financially, but also being really understanding for my absence for years far from them. With the pandemics, it has become even harder for me to take chance to visit them in China. Thanks for their understanding and support. As such, this thesis is dedicated to them.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for any degree or other qualification at this university or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

1. Introduction

In 2011, a book called Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother by Amy Chua raised widespread media attention about differences between western and eastern parenting styles. In this book, the author talked about her own experience of raising her two daughters in her perceived traditional Chinese way including minimising leisure time, strict requirements on academic performance, and long hours practising the piano. On the one hand, Chua seemed to be ensuring the future career success of her two daughters. Whilst on the other hand, the book drew attention to the particular rigorous parenting style influenced by traditional Chinese cultural values Chua believed in and stimulated public and media debate about different understandings of 'good parenting' in 'western' and 'eastern' societies (Lui & Rollock, 2013). Amy Chua was born and raised in the US, graduated from Harvard, but still chose to raise her daughters in her perceived Chinese way before the age of 18, believing that it was best for her daughters. Ambert argued that the notion of 'what is good for children' shapes ideas about 'what counts as a good mother' (Ambert, 1994) which echoes Chua's choice of parenting methods, as she believed that her way of motherhood was good for her children and made her a good mother. Although in the second part of the book, Chua reflected on the negative side of her parenting practises, the debates surrounding her book and the perceived oppositions between 'eastern' and 'western' ideals of mothering prompted me to reflect on what it means to be a 'good mother' in relation to Chinese cultural contexts, and specifically to question how mothers with young children generate and reflect on the idea of what it is to be a good mother in contemporary China.

This thesis explores how middle-class Chinese mothers of young children understand 'good mothering' in their accounts of their everyday practise of motherhood, including through the daily interaction of mothers of young children with their children, husbands, and their own parents and parents-in-law. From their stories of how they interact with their relatives and stories of their conflicts and negotiations, this research develops a portrait of Chinese mothers' daily experience of parenting. This study develops and advances existing research on motherhood in China by discussing how women interpret 'good mothering' of preschool children in negotiation with their relatives, and expands existing understandings of family

relationships, gender, intergenerational relationships, and intimate relationships. Grounded in analysis of the participants' daily tensions and interpretations of everyday child-rearing, this thesis aims to develop broader sociological understandings of motherhood through a focus on everyday parenting practises in a southeast Asian context. In this introductory chapter, I will contextualise this research in relation to my experience as a researcher and outline how my focus has developed throughout the period of the research. I will also outline my conceptual framework through my research questions and aims. In the final part of the chapter, I will present an outline of the thesis.

1.1 Contextualisation of the researcher and the public discourse

When I originally began this research project, I had been interested in exploring mother-daughter relationships in China. Much of the literature about mother-daughter relationships and women's family relationships in China presents mothers and daughters as having a unique relationship. As they are closely related women who might be expected to experience similar situations in society and within their family, it has been suggested that they could understand each other better and have more influence on each other, especially mothers upon daughters (Linda et al. 1995, Selin & Ozgur, 2013). Despite this closeness described in the existing literature, in the historical, cultural and social context in China, the idea of women being inferior to men has been a long existing historical ideology where daughters are usually portrayed as raised to be dependent and obedient, both to their parents and their husbands. Therefore, the emotional interaction between mother and daughter may not always be that close due to differences between mothers' expectations on their daughters and daughters' needs from their mothers (Chen, 2002, Zhen, 1999, Wang, 2012). Words like 'good husband', 'good marriage', 'stable job' are closely related to the normative idea of a 'good life' for women in China. However, while growing up and trying to pursue their own aspirations and individuality, these social norms that are being instilled in women might be different from their own self-expectation and self-identification (Gong, 2018).

From the late 1950s and 1960s, China has been promoting women's participation in the workplace; the gender messaging during the 1960s was along the lines of: 'women hold up half of the sky' (A slogan Chairman Mao brought up in 1955 to promote the idea that men and women are equal, women could do everything men could do, so that to encourage more women take part into the workplace[1]), together with images of 'iron girls'((also an image promoting women as strong and who can contribute outside the household just like men) (Honig, 2000; Short, Chen, Entwisle, and Zhai, 2002). Despite the active participation of Chinese women in the workforce, the State also expects women to be mothers, fulfilling the same gendered role in the household as in previous generations. However, the active inclusion of women in the workplace has not been matched by the equal participation of men as co-caregivers at home (Evans, 2007, Ji et al. 2017). As a daughter myself, I also constantly experience the contradiction of my pursuit of a career and the role my mother sees for me as a daughter and as a woman. Growing up in China, I would always hear the same answer from my parents: 'You could do this if you were a boy', or 'We would let you do it if you were a boy'. This led me to wonder why daughters and sons are treated differently. The woman's role as future mother and wife is still more highly emphasised than their professional achievements or self-fulfilment from my experience. And I wondered why, from my parents' perspective, sons are more obligated to pursue a good career while daughters should be pursuing a more stable job and good marriage? My parents raised me to be an independent girl who wanted to pursue further achievements in academia and have a good career, while as soon as I went to college, they started to push me to find a 'good man' to marry. These same parents, who had cared about my degrees, suddenly cared more about my future married life, and said that, for girls, 'a stable marriage is much more important than a good career!' and 'Limited by age, a girl has to seize the chance before she is too old to be a mother!' During my studies, I also met many female friends whose parents made the same shift after they became adults. This anxiety around a woman's role of becoming a mother prompted me to interrogate why my mother, as a woman who has been through these struggles, wanted to reinforce the same gendered expectations on me as well? What does the mother's role mean to Chinese women? What influence do mothers wish to have on their daughters, and what are the practical consequences of this in terms of their daughters' own views and self-understanding? Furthermore, when women then come to

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[1] https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/2123112676084073187.html

experience the roles of being both a mother and a daughter in the early years of motherhood, how do they interact with their mothers and their own children? How do mothers and daughters negotiate intimate relationships and exchange feelings in relation to these struggles and changes? Seeking to address these questions, I set out to conduct interviews with 34 women in China who were in the early years of motherhood.

In order to find out how women interact with their mothers, especially when they become mothers themselves, I chose 34 women who have preschool children in China, including 17 from Beijing and 17 from Xining, the capital of the Qinghai province. I chose these two cities for two main reasons. First, China is a huge country, to include more differences and take into consideration of the regional discrepancy. Beijing is the capital city and a very busy metropolitan area in China, as a density area of population and high population mobility from other areas of China, the social, economic and cultural context are more diversified here and is predicted to have been more influenced by neoliberalism in child-rearing. While Xining, within Qinghai province, in the northwest of China is a less developed region, and much smaller, prone to an acquaintance society, with more emphasize on interpersonal relationship and perceived to be less influenced by the changing idea of intensive mothering. The second reason is quite personal. Because I have grown up in Xining, Qinghai province, and I have been working in Beijing for years. I have more connections in these two cities compared to others, and I'm more familiar with the people and culture there. This would give me advantage when seeking for participants and knowing how to avoid any impropriate behaviour or questions. Therefore, I chose to do this research in these two cities: Xining and Beijing.

After I have decided which cities I would conduct my research in, I started to reach out for participants in these two cities. As my first intention was to find out more about mother-daughter relationship, I have prepared a list of questions in accordance to what I'm interested in, However, during the interviews, I was struck by the fact that across both regions, these mothers of young children were most frequently asking me: 'Am I a good mother?' and, 'If you are studying mother-children's relationships, do you have any idea what counts as a good mother?' These frequently asked questions led me to consider what this group of women really care about and struggle with at this phase of their life? And it became evident that although many of them have struggled with their role as a daughter and individual, this was not their

main concern at the present phase of their life after they have become mothers themselves, but rather the question of 'What counts as a good mother?' for themselves. Due to this finding at the beginning of my research, I made up my mind to change the focus of the research from mother-daughter relationship to 'what counts as a good mother' for middle class Chinese mothers with young children.

In addition, as I was conducting the interviews, I also began to notice that just a few years previously, there were not that many private early childhood education centres in urban areas, which accept children from as young as six months to kindergarten. However, almost every mother I interviewed both in Beijing and Xining had their children signed up for these early childhood education centres which offer interactive curriculums promising that children will 'win from the start', and several mothers who had children under one had already scheduled future courses for their children. It is a common pattern that Chinese children attend these childhood education centres first, and then take private lessons and courses in subjects such as English, Maths, Piano, Violin, and Computing; all of which were the most commonly mentioned by my interviewees. While talking to my participants, I sensed the fierce competition surrounding children's education in contemporary China, and how this fed into my interviewees' anxieties about whether they were making the right choices for their children, and whether they were doing a good job as a mother. Thus, I shifted the focus of this research somewhat from the original focus on the mother-daughter relationship to the question of 'what counts as a good mother' and how this is socially constructed, as I felt that what matters most to my interviewees should ultimately determine the focus of this research. Therefore, this thesis tells the story of how young women experience and navigate conflicting social expectations and tensions surrounding what it is to be 'a good mother' in the early years of motherhood in China and considers what this means for our understanding of contemporary parenting cultures.

1.2 Contextualisation of the Research

My participants in this research are mostly born in the 1980s, with their mothers born in the 1950s and 1960s in China. These two generations of women all experienced huge social and

economic change in China which also shaped their ideas of women as mothers. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, women were encouraged by the government to be part of the workplace (Short et al. 2002). In the late 1950s and 1960s, dualearner families became the prevalent family form in China (Robinson, 1985; Whyte, Parish, 1984; Short et al. 2002), while the mother's role as main caregiver remained largely unchanged (Evans, 2007; Ji et al.2017). After 1978, market reform in China had the effect of increasing women's work in the household, especially in relation to their practise of motherhood. As market reform took hold, the old collective State which previously provided a wide range of public provisions including low-cost child-care and other services that could help with domestic labour, shifted the burden of household labour and childrearing work back to women (Ji et al, 2017; Lu & Perry, 1997; Walder, 1986). In addition, the one-child policy, established in 1980, empowered urban 'singleton' daughters, gave them more attention and investment in education from their parents, and also raised expectations of women to have higher achievements in the workplace (Shi, 2017; Tsui & Rich, 2002). These expectations of women's participation in the workplace have now become the norm and are even taken for granted by young women today (Zhou, 2020). However, such high expectations of women in terms of both their work value and their household labour child-rearing have arguably only brought more stress on women and intensified their burden of 'doing it all' (Zhou, 2020). Due to the double stress on women from both work and family, and the absence of husbands in terms of participation in the child-rearing process, grandparents' intensive involvement in childcare contributes another change in child-rearing in contemporary urban China (Chen et al, 2011; Binah-Pollak, 2014). While the shift towards 'intensive mothering', which will be discussed further in the literature review is affecting new mothers in China (Jin and Yang, 2015), a turn towards 'intensive grandparents' is also taking place (Goh, 2009).   Therefore, to understand good mothering through these changes from the macro and domestic spheres in contemporary urban China, we need to explore not only socio-cultural changes, but also what is embedded in the networks of relationships.

Within existing research and literature about motherhood and ideas of 'good mothering' in western societies, scholars have extensively explored motherhood and the discussion of what it means to be a good mother, as will be discussed further in the following chapter. The discussion of 'intensive mothering' has been considered as a mainstream ideology shaping expectations surrounding motherhood and remaining a significant influence on how mothers

should raise their children, stressing the ideology of 'good mothering' as an expectation that mothers should be self-sacrificing and 'not a subject of her own needs and interests' (Hays, 1996; Bassin, 1994; Pederson, 2012). Western literature has also discussed how mothers cope with or interpret intensive mothering in their daily motherhood practises (Garey, 1999; Hattery, 2001; Ranson, 1999; Wall, 2001). In contrast with western literature on motherhood focusing on transformation of motherhood mainly in the 'western' societies, Chinese literature focuses more motherhood within the social and cultural context in China, as will be explored in the following chapter. The sociological study of motherhood and what it means to be a 'good mother' has received less attention in the context of China while it has its specific cultural and social context in relation to motherhood. For example, Martens and Casey (2016) have indicated that from the western anthropological and sociological perspectives, the everyday socio-economic production and reproduction could be examined through women's domestic consumption, through which small practise such as the money spend on bedroom decoration could have much more comprehensive meaning. Their discussion showed the commercialisation of everyday life and women's domestic consumptions. While considering the case in China, there has been sociological discussion of the largely increasing commercialisation of children's education (He, 2004), mothers are observed to spend increasing money on children's early childhood education due to the commercialisation of children's education in China. Different from focusing on spend for the household, women devoted huge amount of money in children's educational books, educational toys, and extracurricular courses in educational centre or online (Chi, Qian, 2016; Chow & Shen, 2006; Li, 2003). The emphasize of mothers' attention on children's education is both the production of social-economic changes and the specific Chinese cultural values' impactions.

In addition, in the country that value cultural views of 'what is count as a good child' and 'what is count as a good mother', there are also noticeable focus on the interpersonal relationships for children's education in a Confucian Chinese cultural context, as well as the different understandings of good parenting from different Chinese cultural views (He, 2004). However, the focus of most of these studies is not exploring motherhood or ideas and practises related to 'good mothering', but rather that more directly focusing on the changes of parenting ideas due to social and economic changes, or the focus of intergenerational relationships, and the conflicts between women and their parents-in-law. The discussion of gender discrimination

issues in China has also focused more on historical problems and socio-economic and cultural changes, rather than the discussion on how women experience and negotiate everyday childcare practises.

In literature on early childhood, Chinese scholars have explored questions related to early childhood education, the increase of private education centres for pre-school children and the increased competition for children to get into 'good' schools and to access better educational resources (Huang, 2013; Xu, 2015). While some of these studies have stated how mothers experience a sense of burden and devote significant amounts of time and money to the child-rearing process in this fiercely competitive environment, we currently know little about how these features influence mothers' ideas about what it is to be a good mother. Similarly, in discussion about intergenerational relationships, current scholars have focused more on intergenerational conflicts and the grandparents' increasing involvement in the child-rearing process (Wang, 2020; Yan, 2014; Fan, 2014), and ignored how the involvement of grandparents impacts mothers' responsibilities, and how this change of parenting division could influence a mother's idea of what a good mother should do.

In addition to the discussion of intergenerational relationships, the role of husbands in forming mothers' experiences and perspectives in the early years of motherhood is also significant. Scholars have indicated that even when Chinese women have husbands acting as the main financial provider, they do not receive enough help from them (Shi, 2018), which raises many more questions for discussion concerning married relationships when it comes to understanding how ideas of 'good mothering' are shaped and negotiated in everyday life when taken into consideration of the previewed situation of division of labour in the household and women's role in a marriage.

This thesis will therefore also explore motherhood in relation to gender perspectives in order to analyse what Chinese mothers of young children today are seeking to pass on in regard to gender views in their everyday practise. Thus, this aims to develop a sociological

understanding of motherhood in the Chinese social, economic, and cultural context, and provide new angles for exploring questions of motherhood and good mothering in China.

1.3 Research Aims and Questions

The aim of this thesis is to explore from a sociological perspective to analysis how historical, social, economic and cultural changes are influencing and shaping people's understanding towards motherhood. To analysis how these factors have been continuously shaping Chinese mothers' views on 'what it means to be a good mother' from their daily practise of motherhood, and how they navigate tensions surrounding this question in their everyday lives. In order to address this issue, the thesis is built around three research questions in order to explore how women practise motherhood in relation to their children's education, their interaction and negotiation with their relatives, and what influences they have received from older generations and what they seek to pass on to their children:

1. What do Chinese mothers of young children understand the term 'good mother' to mean in relation to their child- rearing practises?

How mothers understand what counts as a 'good mother' does not necessarily come from their direct answers to this question but is rather shown through how they practise motherhood in the daily child-rearing process, and how they deal with child-rearing related issues in everyday life practises. Thus, this question is about exploring how ideas about 'good motherhood' is demonstrated and formed through their daily life relating to child-rearing details. Thus, the focus of this question is on what these women do in relation to everyday child-rearing and their choices and practises in relation to their children's education. As children's education in China has become an area fraught with more parental anxiety in recent years, with fierce competition for educational resources, limited places in the public education system, and high entrance requirements of 'good' schools, Chinese mothers have become more anxious about

their children's education (Zhou, 2020). Faced with this situation in urban China, my interviewees all considered their engagements with education as a major aspect of the childrearing process and their choices and sense of responsibility in relation to education a significant focus for themselves as mothers. Therefore, this thesis explores how they comprehend what it means to be a good mother in the child-rearing process in relation to their engagements with and choices surrounding their children's education.

2. What does motherhood mean to Chinese mothers of young children in regard to their interactions with their own parents, parents-in-law, and husbands?

With increasing numbers of women in the workplace and simultaneously navigating increasingly high, time-consuming demands of the child-rearing process, it has become harder for mothers in China to maintain a balance between their work and family. This situation necessitates the involvement of grandparents and partners, especially when both parents have a career. Due to limitations of the sample, this study focuses only on heterosexual couples, who have preschool children. Therefore, this research question addresses mothers' interactions with and negotiations between mothers and older generations, and mothers with their husbands, and in each case, analysis of their daily stories about how they interact with each other in relation to child-rearing, provides a deeper understanding of how mothers of young children generate their understanding of what a mother should do and in what ways they might be considered a good mother.

3. What did Chinese mothers of young children receive from their own mothers and what are they seeking to pass on in relation to their understanding of being a good mother?

A prominent thread that emerged through the interviews related to the question of mother-daughter relationships, and specifically, the extent to which these mothers of young children are reproducing or challenging the ideas of gendered roles within family life as received from

their own parents. For mothers of young children, it is interesting to discuss to what extent did parenting norms in relation to gender have changed, and if so, whether consciously or not?

This thesis therefore examines participants' understandings of 'good mothering' through the stories my participants have learned from their own parents, and what kind of ideas of gender they are seeking to pass on. It also considers what implicit constructions of gender they are actually passing on to their children when they practise motherhood in daily life. As women themselves, do they seek to change the gendered bias they have received from their own parents when they try to raise their children? And will there be any differences in terms of how they treat their children according to the gender of their children?

In addressing these three questions, the research explores the question of 'what counts as a good mother' for Chinese mothers of young children, from the angle of their daily practise of motherhood in relation to their interactions with their children, parents, parents-in-law, and husbands in the child-rearing process, as well as what they have received from their parents about parenting, and what they seek to pass on in their own daily motherhood practises.

1.4 Thesis Outline

Following this introductory chapter, the next chapter explores key sociological literature in relation to the areas mentioned in the research questions outlined above. I begin by considering how motherhood has been theorised in western sociological literature and how the notion of being a 'good mother' has been explored. The concept of motherhood and mothering in literature focused on China are then explored, including issues relating to children's education, intergenerational relationships, and gender. The final part of the chapter considers how my research builds on and makes an original contribution to the existing literature.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design and process of conducting the research in China. I introduce my research methods and explain my use of thematic analysis. I then move on to discuss my position as a researcher and how I situate myself in the process of interviews. I also introduce my participants and outline my processes of sampling and recruitment, and how I conducted the interviews. During semi-structured interviews, my participants talked about many personal issues, so I will discuss my methods of coping with any incidents in the interview process, along with how I navigated ethical concerns and coping methods.

Chapter 4 is the first of four analytic chapters engaging with the data I collected in China. This chapter is mainly focused on how mothers engaged with early childhood education, which was a main concern and preoccupation for my participants, according to the interviews. I explore my participants' understanding of 'good mothering' from their stories of childrearing in accordance with decisions about children's education, and discuss the role of mothers in the social, economic, and cultural context of China from the angle of early childhood education. I explore these questions drawing on participants' narratives about what they have been investing in their children's education and what they have been planning for them. I also consider how they understand their role as a mother in the child-rearing process, and most of all, their understanding of what they perceive a good mother should do in this process in relation to education.

Chapter 5 turns to the question of intergenerational relationships and how my participants generated ideas of 'good mothering' through their conflicts and negotiations with older generations of parents and parents-in-law. As more grandparents are involved in the childrearing process, including either the mother's parents or parents-in-law, many of the participants co-reside with their children's grandparents, and most of them have obtained help from these grandparents in the child-rearing process. Thus, the question of what it means to be a 'good mother' in relation to the involvement of grandparents in the child-rearing process is the main focus of this chapter.

Chapter 6 focuses on the involvement of husbands in the child-rearing process and the part this plays in expectations and practises surrounding motherhood. Although most of the participants, like their husbands, are also working outside the home, all of my participants' husbands are the main financial 'provider' of the family in terms of household income. As this chapter explores, while husbands are still perceived as the main provider of the family, the burden of child-rearing remains greater for women, even with the grandparent's help. This chapter moves beyond raising issues relating to husbands' involvement in domestic labour to discuss mothers' understanding of motherhood and 'good mothering' through husband-wife relations in regard to child-rearing.

Chapter 7 explores what it means to be a 'good mother' from the perspective of gender and inheritance. The participants in this research are mostly women who have been struggling with work and family, and they have experienced gender bias to some degree in either their career or family life. Some of these participants have experienced serious gender discrimination from their parents while growing up. Thus, this chapter focuses on the particular gendered views they have received from their own parents, and how and what ideas in relation to gender they would like to pass on to their children in relation to what they consider to be good parenting. Therefore, what kind of gender view they seek to pass on to their children and what they do in daily life in relation to their role as a good mother is discussed in this chapter.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will engage with existing literature about the changing role of mothers, the transformation of intensive mothering in western sociological studies, and discussions about what it means to be a 'good mother'. As the majority of sociological literature on motherhood has emerged from western theoretical frameworks examining western societies, this chapter will first offer an overview of key themes in the sociology of motherhood in western studies before turning to examine the literature focusing on motherhood in the Chinese cultural context. This chapter will discuss according to the existing literatures from two main sections. The first section will talk about the changing role of mothers from the western studies, to look into the questions of changing views on family and parenting, the notion of 'good mother' in western literatures, the dominance of intensive mothering and the 'good mother' and individuality. The second section would discuss motherhood from the existing literatures in China, navigating transitions in gender in relation to motherhood, transformation of children's education in accordance with good mothering in China, and the changing view of 'what is count as a good mother in China'.

2.2 The Changing Role of Mothers: Perspectives from the West

Ideas and practises of parenting change through time for both parents and children. Ideas of mothering and what counts as 'good mothering' are therefore likewise also changing through

time. This section will consider the role of mothers in relation to western sociological literature and the main contemporary ideologies of 'good mothering' in western societies. In agricultural societies, children were not regarded as needing special care or attention from parents, nor was their future development understood to be closely linked with parenting behaviour (Bristow, Faircloth and Macvarish, 2014). The belief that parenting makes a profound difference in children's lives began to impact public perspectives in the 19th century. Children started to be seen as the responsibility of mothers and fathers rather than of a larger community (Furedi, 2002). The belief that parenting was crucial to children's future development has been fundamental since the Industrial Revolution, during which 'the family' started to separate from the wider economy and society (Hays, 1996). Then, from the 1970s onwards, parenting began to be viewed as 'goal oriented' interactions under the guidance of experts (Bristow, Faircloth and Macvarish, 2014) and good parenting came to be understood as a form of learnt interactions that parents are expected to follow when they as 'educators' raise their children, following scientific advice and expertise (Ramaekers and Suissa, 2011). In their work on individualisation, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) also described how there are all kinds of measures to improve parenting in everyday life such as parenting guides and parenting classes. Every aspect of everyday life has become an area potentially relating to parenting, with parenting advice being related to everything from feeding the children, talking with children, or playing with children (Bristow, Faircloth and Macvarish, 2014). Daly (2013) describes how these changing ideas about good parenting shape changing parental practises, such as discouraging spanking or shouting at children; constructing a notion of positive parenting, rather than just forms of discipline (Reece, 2013; Daly, 2013). Overall, this literature indicates that understandings about how parents should raise their children have been changing in profound ways over the last half-century (Hays, 1996: Furedi, 2002; Nelson, 2010). Nevertheless, parenting in almost all areas of everyday life is now considered as having a crucial influence on children's future health, happiness, and success (Bristow, Faircloth and Macvarish, 2014).

2.2.1 Changing Views on Family and Parenting

Parsons' (1956) account of family units as sources of social stability was influential in shaping sociological understandings of parenthood from the mid-1950s onwards. However, this

view of families as sources of stability was challenged by Lee (2001) who argued that with social, economic, and cultural changes, neither people's work nor their family life is stable anymore. Dawson describes how in pre-modern societies, social interactions were constrained by space and time, and tradition was in a dominant position, thus individual actions did not have to be analysed because choices were already prescribed by tradition and custom (Dawson, 2012). However, with modernity, intimate life became more flexible and individualised. In his influential account of processes of individualisation, Giddens (1991) argued that modernity created individuals in an increasingly post-traditional nature of society.   There is, in this account, growing reflexivity across all aspects of society, which means that individuals have to consider and make decisions about how to behave in society (Gross, 2002). In late modernity, which is characterised by a post-traditional culture, the individual becomes the new source of agency and responsibility (Gross, 2002). In this social environment that emphasised individual responsibility (Martinez and Garcia, 1997), economic rationalism pushed people to take personal responsibilities for their own success, happiness, and livelihood, which meant that mothers in this cultural environment had to be responsible for their own present and future well-being, as well as for that of their children (Ennis, 2014). In the time of late modernity, all aspects of our society are subject to individual examination and reflection, and individuals self-reflexively question what they should do, how they should act, and who they should be (Ennis, 2014). Therefore, intertwined with this broader cultural and social shift, understandings of parenthood also became more individualised with parents expected to take responsibility for how to parent through books, magazines and experts, as opposed to depending on traditional relationships for guidance.

These changes to family relationships that sociologists have described in Western societies also relate to other elements of modernisation. With industrialisation came migration to pursue work, which meant, as Pringle (1974) noted, that most people were no longer living near their relatives or friends. This increased mobility, Pringled argued (1974), led to the greater isolation of the modern urban nuclear family and changed the parental role within the context of western societies. Sociologists have also described the changing role of media and culture as significant in shaping parenting. As modern parents increasingly gained more knowledge about children-rearing from books, magazines, and TV shows, compared to previous generations (Lee et al. 2014), they are also paid more attention to children's welfare, both physically and mentally,

with some sociologists arguing that children today are perceived and constructed as more 'vulnerable' than before, both physically and emotionally (Lee et al. 2014). But parents also have more doubts about child-rearing (Lee, 2001). How we understand children and childhood has changed. We are not simply depending on our own experience of what a child is, but we are more broadly considering knowledge manufactured under modernism by the practitioner and academic entrepreneurs working in the fields of social media, education, anthropology, sociology, and social work (Lee, 2001). Our knowledge of children and childhood are framed by the images these fields provide for us. Knowledge about children and how to take care of them is therefore also professionalised (Rogers, 1992).

With the emphasis on parents' individualised responsibility in child-rearing and their position in shaping children's development and their future, Sociologically, mothers were also considered as the main force shaping children's understanding of the self and the world . In this process of child-rearing, mothers not only pass on their own experience and understanding, but they also pass on expectations and socially reinforced roles (Lawler, 2000, p3). Writing in the 1970s, Martin (1976) exemplified this narrative, arguing that the family, and especially the mother, are the dominant influence on a child's future understanding of the outside world and a child's future relationships. Within these narratives, mothers were also expected to help establish children's inner self and their understanding of the outside world. From existing research, we can see then that the mother's role in studies of western societies has been constructed as having a vital impact in determining a child's life and their future.

Overall, existing sociological literature, largely focused on western societies, has examined how motherhood has been constructed in terms of the increasing responsibility placed on a mother's role in child-rearing, and has highlighted changes in how children have been understood and how motherhood practises have evolved since the Industrial Revolution. In relation to how we understand the children's role and the meaning of childhood, sociologists have emphasised the somewhat contradictory position children have come to inhabit, in which they are considered both dependents and at the same time, active agents and independent individuals with social rights. Berger (1972) considered a child's position based on related laws and indicated that our laws reflect our attitude towards children.

Indeed, in laws of autonomy and freedom children are still considered as possessions rather than an independent person (Berger, 1972). Such independence only comes about in adulthood, which Leonard (2016) argued happens with the adoption of norms and values that can maintain social order, and in which family plays the crucial role. Childhood was thus regarded as dependent on the family rather than an isolated social entity. Only the 1990s onwards has the 'new' sociology of childhood emphasised that childhood is a social construction, constructed by historical, cultural and social factors. This perspective reflected wider social and policy changes in terms of seeing children not just as passively shaped by adults but rather as active agents that could also have an impact on social structures (Leonard, 2016). Nikolas Rose has furthered this point by indicating that children are increasingly considered as citizens with social rights, including their own rights in the context of family life (Rose, 1990). Mayall (2002) has also asserted that more rights should be given to children, and they shouldn't be considered as having minority social status. She also points out that the form of childhood that home and school offer is shaped through the ideology of adults' understanding, and children's rights in relation to equal participation in society are still neglected and rejected (Mayall, 2002). These changing ideas about the value of a child and what wider society considers as 'good children' are intertwined with what we consider as a 'good mother' and how mothering should be practised. In the sociological literature on mothers' roles in the family, ideas about changing definitions of what it means to be a 'good mother' are frequently being raised in relation to how social, economic, and cultural contexts influence mothers' understanding of how they should practise motherhood. Let us turn next to consider these ideas.

2.2.2 The Notion of the 'Good Mother' in Western Literature

As outlined above, existing sociological literature focused on western societies has emphasised how the mother's role, rather than the father's, has been constructed as vital for children's growth and development This emphasis on the mother's role is still dominant, despite changing expectations in accordance with historical, social, cultural, and economic transmissions, and influenced by how we see children's role and values. Sociologists agree that

more of the child-rearing duties are still falling on women and that this shapes understandings of what it means to be a 'good mother'. Discussion of what it means to be a 'good mother' has a long history, and although there are differences, often hotly contested, across cultural and social backgrounds, there are continuities as well.

English psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1965) first developed the influential concept of the 'good-enough mother'. He argues that perfect mothers do not exist, and most mothers can be considered as 'goodenough' mothers if they can provide an environment to promote children's development and put children's needs first in all major family plans (Winnicott, 1965). Chodorow (1978) articulated other requirements for mothers being 'good', suggesting that good-enough mothering 'requires relational capacities embedded in personality and a sense of self-inrelationship'. Similarly, Adams (1972) proposed, from a child's point of view, that children start to learn about parenthood from their own family. The frame of the basic figure of a good or bad mother in this account lies in childhood. Adams describes 'good mothers' as mothers who help children to establish their own inner principles and can learn to govern and train their own body and mind (Adams, 1972). Adams argues that people define a good mother as one who should not only provide a good environment for children, but also be their mentor; helping cultivate the child's inner self (Adams, 1972). 'Bad' mothers were increasingly constructed through these psychological narratives, which in turn, influenced wider cultural understandings of 'bad' parents as those who have harsh disciplinary styles and consider parenthood as a competition to train their own children (Adams, 1972). Exemplifying this approach in the 1980s, Cooper argued that most parents could be counted as 'good-enough' parents when they bring up their children with success and enjoyment, trying to put their children's needs first and promoting their development and independence, despite potential difficulties or conflicts (Cooper, 1985).

Alongside these psychological definitions of motherhood which have made a deep influence on wider social and cultural understandings of a mother's role, sociologists have emphasised that what it means to be a good mother should be considered as a social construction that is shaped by social changes. Through the changing ideologies and paradigms of sciences and professions dominant at the time, what is good for children has been defined, and according to which, what should parents do and the idea of the 'good mother' - is also constructed (Ambert,

1994). Parents are themselves part of these processes that reinforce socialised ideas of good parents and good children. Although many changes have taken place in women's social status and women's roles through cultural and economic changes, the social expectations of what counts as a good mother and good children also change through time, while many stereotypes of women and traditional expectations of female roles still exist. Thus, understanding what it means to be a good mother should be seen as demonstrating both continuity and change over time. Within contemporary western societies, mothers can be seen as at the centre of a web of experts and lay discourses concerning what kind of actions and thoughts are good for children's development and considered as 'good mothering' (Lupton, 2011), with 'intensive mothering' becoming the dominant, culturally approved model of motherhood (Bassin, 1994; Hays, 1996).

2.2.3 The Dominance of Intensive Mothering

The ideal of 'intensive mothering' expects mothers to spend intensive time, energy and money when rearing their children, with mothers portrayed as 'unselfish' and children imagined as 'vulnerable' creatures who need to be intensely nurtured (Beck & BeckGersheim, 1995, Christensen, 2000). Sociologists have emphasised how in recent years, there has been growing predominance of the discourse of intensive mothering in western cultural contexts, in which mothers are expected to take appropriate actions and responsibilities in caring for children's physical and intellectual development, managing risks identified that may affect children's health and general improvement. Hays (1996) and Bassin (1994) have portrayed intensive mothering as the dominant cultural ideology of mothering, in which mothers are expected to be self-sacrificing and 'not a subject of her own needs and interests'. Hays (1996) first identified and named the ideology of intensive mothering and explained the idea as a way of parenting that positions mothers as the central caregivers for children, stating that ideal child-rearing is intensively time consuming, guided by experts, and emotionally engrossing.

Many scholars have identified intensive mothering as the ascendent ideology in North America (Hays, 1996. Macdonald, 1998. Arendell, 2001). Hays (1996) argued that good child-rearing requires the day-to-day labour of nurturing the child, listening to the child, attempting to decipher the child's needs and desires, struggling to meet the child's wishes, and placing the

child's well-being ahead of their own convenience (Hays, 1996). The ideology of intensive mothering also insisted that no woman is complete unless she has children, with women best placed to assume the role of primary caregiver to their children (Douglas and Michaels, 2005). Developing this idea, many scholars have discussed the cultural contradiction of intensive mothering for working mothers (Garey, 1999; Hattery, 2001; Ranson, 1999; Wall, 2001). Hays (1996) found that employed mothers would tend to justify their paid work by emphasising its benefit for their children, thus echoing the ideology of intensive mothering that requires mothers to continuously put the needs of their children above their own. With the sharp increase of women in paid employment, there is more focus on women facing the contradiction of being an ideal mother and worker at the same time. Bianchi, Wight, and Raley, (2005) have pointed out that while cultural ideologies and social constructions of the family and workplace have not changed as quickly or as substantially as mothers themselves, mothers with male partners still perform about twice as much child-care as their partners.

Many sociologists agree that intensive mothering has become the mainstream ideology in North American culture (Garey, 1999; Hays, 1996). Both working mothers and stay-at-home mothers have internalised this ideology, while there are also sociological studies indicating that mothers tend to find a variety of ways to position and negotiate themselves within these ideological expectations (Hays, 1996; Garey, 1999). In relation to how women navigate tensions between intensive mothering and 'ideal worker' ideologies and construct their own ideas of 'good mothering', Garey (1995) argues that mothers 'weave' an identity that reflects their commitment to work with their commitment to intensive mothering expectations. Hattery (2001) further suggests that mothers modify the situational demands of their work and childcare arrangements to live up to intensive mothering expectations. Similarly, Karen Christopher (2012) claims that the mothers she interviewed in her research would construct a script of extensive mothering, in which they delegated substantial amounts of the day-to-day childcare to others and reframed good mothering as being 'in charge' of and ultimately responsible for their children's well-being (2012). While the form of intensive mothering is changing through time, it seems that this ideology of mothering is still the main influence of how mothers understand what counts as being a good mother. Alongside and feeding into these ideas of intensive motherhood, Lee, and her colleagues (Lee et al. 2014) argue that mothers are also

increasingly being conceived as the main determinant of their children's development and future, which is described in terms of the 'inflation of the parenting role' (ibid.).

Sociological studies also indicate that mothers are acutely aware of these intensified responsibilities and are concerned when conforming to the social norms of good motherhood (Cunningham-Burley 1990, Irvine and Cunningham-Burley 1991, Backett-Milburn 2000, Cunningham-Burley et al. 2006). In order to conform to the ideal social expectation of 'good mothering', mothers would devote time and attention to activities such as ensuring a 'healthy diet' for their children, reading parenting advice books, and exposing their children to specific educational resources designed to encourage intellectual development. As Hays (1996) observed, intensive mothering has risen in tandem with market society. Developing Hays' argument, Ennis suggested that the market society has, directly and indirectly, created specific cultural environments that drive intensive mothering norms (Ennis, 2014). Ideas and practises of intensive motherhood are, however, shaped by class and income, and Lupton (2011) emphasises that these are the strategies commonly taken by women from a socioeconomically advantaged background. Besides the responsibilities attributed to mothers in determining children's physical and mental health within contemporary parenting cultures, sociologists have also noted how in wider public and political discourses, the health, welfare and rearing of children have been linked to the destiny and responsibilities of the nation (Lawler, 2000). Accordingly, children's upbringing across western and other global contexts is legislatively governed from a child's birth. Registration at birth, the requirement of adequate education and social work intervention where there are family shortcomings all indicate that the formerly 'private' domain of the family has been opened up to wider social powers and allocated social duties. Through all of which, childhood itself is formed. The expectation of good citizens that results in good society is seen as starting from good children. And families, especially mothers, are seen as responsible for the duty of producing these good citizens (Lawler, 2000).

2.2.4 Good Mother and Individuality

Despite the dominant position of intensive mothering that many sociologists have emphasised, scholars have also drawn attention to the tensions between ideas of good

motherhood and wider cultural ideals of individuality (Ho, 2007; Santos, 2016). Ho (2007) points out that despite the still strong normative expectations on mothers, women's choices about family life are at the same time perceived to be more related to their individual beliefs, attitudes, and judgements about their roles (Ho, 2007). Santos (2016) also argues that intimate practises such as the mother-child relationship have become part of a global discourse which includes the idea of 'modern self' (Giddens, 1992) based on reflexivity and self-knowledge. For example, Blum's (1996) study of working-class African American mothers demonstrated that working-class black mothers for whom full-time intensive motherhood is impossible, developed the notion of independent mothering. This ethic identifies good mothering as not being defined by the mother's own irreplaceable presence, but by shared care arrangements, including support from relatives such as grandparents, aunts, fathers and even friends (Blum, 1996). Although sociologists such as Blum have demonstrated the ongoing importance of kinship and friendship networks in childcare practises within western societies, the predominant role of mothers is nevertheless concentrated on a sacrificing role rather than an independent image of self. As Wang points out, the word 'women' can be easily linked to some negative moralised terms, such as 'selfish', while gendered norms of 'mother' are usually associated with positive terms such as 'warmth' and 'selfless' (Wang, 2012).

Despite the emphasis that western literature places on the responsibility of the mother as an individual, sacrificing subject, this thesis will explore how what it means to be a good mother is something that is negotiated with other family members, and will therefore examine what constructs good mothering. This will require an understanding of expectations surrounding the duties of other family members in relation to child-rearing. Although sociologists have demonstrated that mothers in western societies continue to do most of the child-rearing, the role of other family members in constructing this role should not be neglected in terms of how this relates to this construction. Hakim argues that only a minority of women perceive themselves as work-centred, while the majority of women either devote their life to their families or shift priorities from family to work overtime (Hakim, 2004). Pfau-Effinger's research in 2012 indicated that for women in Western-European countries over the last two decades, especially for women who have children under 3 years old, the rate of women who choose family over career is still relatively high. The average employment rate for women with children under three years old is only 51.1% (Pfau-Effinger, 2012). Misra and Budig's (2014) cross national data

on western-European countries' mothers' employment rate showed that women's employment patterns were still largely driven by motherhood as employment rate of mothers in most European countries they have done their research were substantially lower than childless people or fathers. It was also pointed out that the stereotype of a good mother is still often typified as stay at home mum, whilst employed mothers seeking satisfaction outside of home are less committed to motherhood (Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002). How then does this western-focused literature, which has emphasised the intensification of motherhood and how women negotiate often conflicting demands in their everyday practises of motherhood, relate to what we currently know about motherhood in China?

2. 3 Motherhood in China's Social and Cultural Context

Discussions about good mothers can also be found in sociological literature focused on China. A key issue that is commonly raised, similar to the literature on motherhood in western societies, is that what is required of mothers is increasing both in the family and in the workplace. With more women participating in the workplace, mothers are simultaneously taking more responsibility for the education of their children, caring for elderly relatives, and providing a source of income for the family; thus, the burden and expectations on mothers are even heavier than before (Li, 2016). Workplaces' high requirements of women in terms of time and energy are also in conflict with the high demands of women in their family role (Li, 2016). In order to satisfy both sides, while women want to pursue jobs offering more exciting career prospects, they end up choosing more stable and comfortable jobs to fulfil the socially expected image of a good mother (Wang et al. 2016). From a Chinese cultural perspective, a good mother should be able to act as both a financial provider and an educator for their children (Lin & Cao), including passing on the Confucian moral virtue of filial piety (Sun, 2017) and socialising their children with a sense of loving the nation (Guo et al. 1997).

Different social and cultural values make mothering in China different from mothering in western societies. As noted above, for Chinese families, there is an especially crucial duty in the education of one's children to cultivate children in terms of an understanding of the needs

of society, to raise children who love the nation, love the party, and love the parents (Guan, 1994). And from a moral perspective, children must be raised to be respectful of their parents, maintaining good manners, love and loyalty for their country (Guo, Wu, Chen, Zhang, Qu, 1997). In addition, as a country deeply influenced by gendered Confucian values, a Chinese woman growing up in a traditional Chinese family would be taught or influenced by her family to depend on her father as a child, on her husband as an adult and on her son when she's old (Yeh, Yi, Tsao, Wan, 2013). In this process, gendered dependency is reinforced through the requirements of respect, gratitude, obedience, and care and support for parents (ibid.). As a daughter, it is her duty to cultivate filial piety to her parents, (Chen, 2002, p47) develop an attitude of obedience and avoid bringing any shame on her family. And even though changes have taken place in women's economic and social status, the internalised norms of filial obligation in childhood are arguably still reinforced with socially acceptable behavioural norms, normative expectations, and guilt (Hamilton, 2018, p21-64). Given these changes and

continuities in gender relations in China, in combination with the role of mothers as cultural educators, it seems particularly important to understand what values Chinese mothers of young children today choose to pass on. This issue will be explored in subsequent analytic chapters by examining Chinese mothers' understanding of what makes a good mother. In the following sections I will review the existing research literature on gender and motherhood in China, drawing attention to some areas of overlap, as well as divergence, with mothering in western contexts.

2.3.1 Historical Transformation of Parenting and Childhood in China

This section will introduce the key historical transformations China has experienced and how these shaped understanding and ways of parenting and childhood.

2.3.1.1 Late Qing Dynasty and Republic Era

The long existing Confucian ethos of filial piety; including the ancestor worship, the patrilineage and the notion of hierarchy; all contributed to the determination of authoritarian nature of parent-child relationship and depressed the status of women in imperial China (Naftali, 2016). In the Confucian mindset, the purpose of sexual intercourse is to produce descendants for the family (Chou, 2020). Before the 20th century, women have no equal rights in a marriage or household, while men could have a number of wives, whose fate were entirely controlled by the husband and his family (Evans, 1995). Children were seen as the continuation of the family bloodline and the extension of their ancestral legacies. In this case, children were at the very bottom of the family structure that were expected to be filial to their parents (Chou, 2020).

In the perceived old cultural context of China, the existing cultural and moral norm advocates that an individual ought to make sacrifices for the family and live up to the expectations of their parents (Oishi & Diener, 2003). In a traditional Chinese family, parents are perceived as the ultimate authority and children should demonstrate filial piety to their parents. (Kuan, 2011) Influenced by Confucianism values, parents in a traditional Chinese family have the dominant position in terms of making rules about how their children should express their feelings (Yan, 2010). In addition, there are certain cultural norms shaping expectations in relation to gender and emotion in China. As studies in the sociology of emotion have made clear, emotion rules are constructed differently for women and men. The cultural perspective suggests that emotion norms are a result of deeply held cultural understandings about women and men (J. Lively, 2013). In the specific context of China, women are perceived as weaker and should feel willing to stay at home and be satisfied with little accomplishments as reflected in the old saying 'It is a good natured in women if she has no talent.'

The late-Qing reformers like Qichao Liang and Youwei Kang aimed to rebuild and transform China into a modern nation state after the western countries' invasion in China. Reformers started to incorporate foreign evolutionary theory into neo-Confucian way of thinking. Reformers believe the nation could rise again through westernization through various aspects, one of them is the

emphasize that the success of western nations and Japan were built upon advanced educational systems (Chou, 2020). While education in China was traditionally held in high esteem in Chinese Confucian society as a gateway to the imperial examination for men and access to political power. While the reformers like Liang promoted to link education to China's survival, especially women's education and children's education (Chou, 2020). Liang disclosed his aim of enhancing quality for women's education so that women could provide quality teaching to their children. Therefore, the suggestion of promoting women's education was not for women themselves or encouraging them to take career outside, but for producing qualified mothers (Chou, 2020). The western colonialisation and reforms taken by patriots all have influenced on perceptions on children while women remain to be seen from traditional gender conventions and expected to take main roles in the domestic sphere, especially, as the role of mother.

From the May Fourth Movement (1919-1921), reformers started to bring up requirements on changing women's role and rights in marriage and family life. For example, the calling on free-choice and monogamous marriage against arranged marriage and patriarchal authority (Evans, 1995). Laws implemented by the Nationalist government in 1930 and 1935 also required monogamous marriage (Evans, 1995).

2.3.1.2 Mao Era: Communist Revolution and Cultural Revolution

The socio-political transformation, especially in 1911 and 1949, by the republican and socialist revolutions, as well as the modernization processes, have promoted in the changing perception of children, a 'modern' yet 'Chinese' concept of childhood (Naftali, 2016). The socialist revolution of 1949 implemented many child-related policies that led to the improvement of children's welfare and an upstage of both boys' and girls' social and family. The Maoist regime tried to destroy the old kinship hierarchy through the expansion of schooling and the employment of mass propaganda campaigns, to transform children from family members to dutiful citizens of the mew socialist state (Naftali, 2016).

By the 1950 Marriage Law, the Communist Party implemented laws stressing equal, freechoice, rights of divorce, and monogamous marriage as the only legal form of marriage in China. Throughout the 1950s, the image of marriage and family life were dominated by the collective enthusiasm for the 'new China' and the principles of hard work (Evans, 1995). Marriage became ideally an equal relationship that both husband and wife share responsibility for the family and for child-care (Evans, 1995). During the period of Cultural Revolution (1966-76), sexual interest was considered as unsound, and people's gendered tastes of hairstyle and dress were all uniformed into similar shape and colour (Evans, 1995).

However, throughout the Mao years and beyond into the 1990s, the dominant discourse of sexuality still put women's role largely linked with reproductive concerns (Evans, 2008). Despite the laws upheld the formal equality of women and men, women's image was still mainly defined by 'science' that pointing out the natural difference between female and male, stressing women as the weak part and women's self-realization mainly in marriage and their supporting and understanding to their husbands, and their responsibility for reproduction (Evans, 2008). Childcare and domestic work were believed as 'natural obligation' for women, and women were seen as in duty bond to get married and have children so that to feel 'complete and fulfilled' (Evans, 2008).

With the Communist government's consolidation of power in 1949, the image of 'women' was fixed by the classical Marxist formula. Women's equalization and liberation lay in the women's equal entry into the public sphere of production and labour, linking transformation of gender relations of power to women's changing position in the socioeconomic structure (Evans, 2008). In addition, tracing to the historical form and transformation of individualization in China, Scholars like Fei (1948) has indicated that in traditional China, individual identity could be seen as only exists in relationship like family or on behalf of the social groups. Under Maoist socialism, the family that linked to individual identity were almost all replaced by the party-state (Yan, 2002). Yan (2002) argued that the Mao era has led to a forced partially individualization process, as

individual was disembodied from traditional networks of family, kinship, community, and cultural values like Confucian, patriarchal, to participate into a state-sponsored public life and a nation's citizen. Therefore, women stared to be expected to both enter the workplace to echo on the propaganda of gender equality and remain their domestic role as wife and mother.

2.3.1.3 Reform and Opening

In the late 1970s China, following the introduction of the market forms, there's rise of individualization linked with market economy and privatization, with a steady and rapit growth of the private labour market, although mostly still managed under party-state (Yan, 2002). From the angle of policy implementation, the One Child Policy and the Open Door Policy, children's lives and the meaning of childhood have experienced major transformations. People started to have growing attention to children's personal rights and psychological health due to the rising attention on global, scientific models of education and child-rearing. Children were started to be view as deserving more attention. These changes have resulted in the increasing empowerment of Chinese children and their individualization at both home and school (Naftali, 2016). In the pre-modern small-scale peasant society, families worked collectively as the basic production unit rather than as a domain for child caring. Within this kind of social organisation, children's needs were often ignored, and ideas and practises of child-rearing were mostly based on parents' needs (Evens, 2008). Not until the country's industrialization were the ideas of 'children' and 'children's needs' evaluated (ibid). As the process of labour became commoditised, a division of labour occurred within the family, and the reproduction of human society was gradually stripped from productive labour and transformed into the private domain of the family. These changes were bound up with a change in children's social status: as children began to be excluded from productive labour, the value of children changed as well. In China, the family's emotional focus also shifted from the adults to the children (Shi, 2018). In addition, with the advance of industrialisation, the implementation of compulsory education and the expansion of university education, mothers as caretakers and fathers as financial providers were reinforced and the idea of intensive mothering in China was generated.

However, research into pregnant women's knowledge of raising children in the 1990s indicated that although women have mastered some knowledge about children's physical health, they knew quite little about children's mental development (Guo et al. 1997). Yang (1993) also argued that most of the parents in China in the 1990s still thought of their children as their own possession that they could train to honour the family someday or fulfil their unfinished dreams. If their children thought otherwise, they could be accused of disobedience towards their parents and be scolded or beaten by their parents (Yang, 1993). These normative ideas that 'Parents should have authority and children should obey' were interiorized (Hu, 1995). However, by the late 1990s, psychological articles started to pay attention to children's psychological needs and pointed out the consequences to families who were too strict and controlling (Sang, 1998; Mou, 1999). Nevertheless, they seemingly had relatively little impact on existing parenting styles during this period (Sang, 1998; Mou, 1999), although we know relatively little about the extent to which contemporary practises were shaped by these ideals, the extent to which ongoing conflicts on child-rearing across the generations remain, or how these ideas might be generating new ideas about what it means to be a good mother.

In addition, from the 1990s onwards, physical health was still viewed as important but there was a new emphasis on the development of children's intelligence and mental health. Evans illustrates that, in contemporary China, within family relationships, more importance was now attached to an individual's desire for emotional communication than in previous generations, and 'communicative intimacy' was increasingly sought by both mothers and daughters in relation to education around children's emotional health (Evans, 2010). Related research also notes that parents stopped seeing children's education as school's responsibility, and more began to view children's education as a family duty (Peters, Seeds, Goldstein & Coleman, 2008). In China, as noted before, it is important for families to teach children about the moral virtue of respecting the elderly, as well as loving the nation and the Chinese Communist Party (Guan, 1994). Due to the one-party system, the political orientation of children is reinforced through family education. Arguments also raised by Li (1990) about the state's political control on China's moral education and moral education using Confucianism values in personal everyday life and social life benefit

the government rather than the individual person (Li, 1990). However, it is also debated by Lee and Ho (2005) that in contemporary China, there is a clear reorientation of moral education way from values such as love the nation, love the party, and family education, to an emphasis on personal morals and individual wellbeing, such as psychological health, disassociated from party politics (Lee & Ho, 2005).

2.3.1.4 Global Market Economy

Since the 1990s, the emergence of a globalized consumer culture in the post-socialist China, has further promoted development of children's empowerment and individualization. Children were seen as independent consumers and key agents of cultural interpretation and social change through the consumer culture that providing new products, media, and services aimed at children's needs and interests (Naftali, 2016). Children, especially who live in the urban area, were provided with better living condition but also lived a growing commercialized and standardized childhood (Naftali, 2016). There were dramatic growth of familial consumption of children's products and services. These transformations also lead to new trends for children's identities, social practices, and changing understanding of adult-child relations (Naftali, 2016).

For what counts as good children in China, Wang (2012) argues that the image of a 'good child' is socialised and fixed, with publications and TV shows providing a clear, idealised model of good parenting. Nothing, however, is included about children's development of identity, individualism, or acknowledgement of self (Wang, 2012). The advice provided by the publications and TV shows have erased personality and individuality, suggesting that the way to raise children is a process of guiding and modifying a 'product' to socialised perfection. These concepts of parenting actually, to some extent, support the idea of 'children as parents' personal possessions' rather than separate individuals (Wang, 2012). Indeed, in a study by Yang, most of the parents reported knowing little of children's psychological health and admitted that a young

Chinese mother's value of good parenting was guided by child-rearing experts and the market (Yang, 1993).

2.3.1.5 Privatisation and Neoliberalism in China

Hays (1996) has pointed out that the ideas about appropriate mothering came from the competitive pursuit of individual interests. In attempting to deal with the deep uneasiness about self-interest, the unrealistic obligations were imposed on mothering. Giddens' (1991) idea on individualisation theory indicated the changes in intimate relationship. Giddens (1991) pointed out that modernity has changed intimate life. It created individuals in the increasingly post-traditional nature of society, leading to growing reflexivity across all aspects of society. This transformation forced individuals to make decisions for themselves about how to behave in society. Therefore, individual has become the new source of agency and responsibility. Mothers in this environment were also pushed to be responsible for themselves as well as for their children (ibid).

In western societies, the advent of neoliberalism in the late 20th century brought up huge changes through social, economic, and political aspects (Vandenbeld, 2014). First, neoliberalism promoted free-market, which brought up a series of market-oriented reform policies. Public services that previously benefited family and children were increasingly privatized. The privatization also involved with the lived experience of mothers. Mothers were started to be seen as one of the primary producers, consumers, and reproducers of the neoliberal world (Kruk, 2017). As everything become privitized, prople are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves, pushing mothers to take responsibility for their own children, and to take on primary role as caregiver (Bakker, 2007).

As for what neoliberalism looks like in the Chinese context. Due to China's unique political and economic situation, fully free-oriented market does not exist in China as much of the important area are still controlled by the nation (Peng, 2021). However, we could still see the evidence of influence from neoliberalism. The idea of 'good mothering' has still been naturalised and idealised by the commercialized educational market. Mother's role as caregiver and even the ideal concept of 'super mom' is remaining as the main expectation on mothering. The understanding of motherhood has becoming individualized, and child-rearing became privatized as main responsibility of mothers.

The stressing of personal development and people be responsible for their own life also echos policy of Suzhi Education implemented that expected children to have development in various aspects. Since the 20th century, besides the emphasis on nurturing Suzhi children with 'whole development', government policy has also stressed the promotion of Chinese traditional culture. Through processes of globalisation and neoliberalization, China experienced transformation from an agricultural society to industrial society, and from a planned economy to market economy. In contemporary China, the promotion of Chinese traditional culture, such as Confucian ideas of filial piety, are seen by the government as urgently needed to resolve social contradictions and social instability. The need to 'build a harmonious society' was stressed as the goal of China's development (Yu, 2010). A new kind of Confucian culture that is adapted to the new social and cultural situation is now advocated by the government, social media, and educational institutions, all of which have contributed to the growth of many traditional cultural educational centres for children from an early age, which link traditional culture with moral education and Suzhi education.

Like other region in the post-industrial world, children's lives in China were becoming more regimented to suit the demands of a neoliberal market economy while children's subjectivity are increasingly embedded in the normalizing regimes of modern psychological science (Naftali, 2016). From the 2000s onwards, the concept of a 'good mother' was believed to be one who was rational, who followed experts' advice, and who would consume appropriate commodities and

services in relation to childrearing in order to foster the happy child. The discourse of constructing an idealised motherhood transformed from emphasising the State's discourse to one of coexistence in which the State, commodities, experts, and gender all play a role in the idealisation of a 'good mother' (Tao, 2016). As a consequence, the child-rearing situation the current generation faces entails intensified and diversified requirements in terms of mothers' responsibilities, influenced by today's social and cultural changes. While the idea of 'super mum' (Zhong & Guo, 2018) which is acknowledged by some mothers with young children today is unrealistic given the lack of social and family support available (ibid).

In modern-day Chinese consumer society, as in western societies, parenting is influenced by the experts through market forces (Gong, Jackson, 2017). The birth and rearing of children are separated into smaller activities and commercialised by scientific experts (Hong, Zhu, Luo, 2021). An ideal 'good mother' is constructed with more and more responsibilities and requirements, from a child's physical care to their education and emotional response; all necessitating products or services that need to be learnt and purchased (Gong, Jackson, 2017) Therefore, the child-rearing process has arguably shifted from public to private, and back again in another formation (Shi, 2018). The cultural transformation brought by consumerism and neoliberalism has intensified mothers' responsibilities from various aspects both at home and at work, and the idea of a 'good mother' has become naturalised and beautified by the commercialised culture (Shi. 2018)   Although the commercialisation of child-rearing and the intensification of a mother's obligation has been discussed by scholars like Shi, we still know relatively little about how these wider social processes are lived, experienced, and negotiated by women in the social and cultural context in China.

Views about how children should be educated, and the criteria of a 'well-educated child' are crucial indications of perceptions of 'good' methods of parenting for the future success of the children in Chinese society. It was also noted that parents' beliefs and expectations of children as well as their ideas of responsibilities towards education of their children are a vital factor for their children's future achievements (Hoover, Kathleen & Jones, 1997; Liu & Wang, 2009. Sun, 2019).

The Nation has taken on an active role in disseminating 'scientific knowledge' about parenting, with wording changed from 'excellent birth, excellent rearing' to 'education for quality'. This policy has focused on ensuring children's psychological health and promoting creativity and enterprise which could be developed, as the experts say, by parents who govern themselves rather than the child (Kuan 2011).

An ideal 'good mother' is labelled with more and more responsibilities and requirements, from the physical care to educational and emotional, and all include products or services that need to be learnt and purchased. There are various courses for both mothers and children suitable for different age periods. Therefore, the child-rearing process has arguably transformed from the public to the private and now back to public again in another formation (Shi, 2018). The cultural transformation brought by consumerism and neoliberalism has intensified mothers' responsibilities from various aspects, both from family and work, and the idea of 'good mothering' has been naturalised and idealised by commercialised culture (Shi. 2018)

Chao (1995) and Chuang (2009) emphasise that changes in social, cultural, political and economic factors over time are closely linked with changing issues and challenges facing parents, as well as the changing requirements and understanding of both the notion of good parenting and children's socialisation. Child-rearing is a vital part in a society's reproduction process, and the family acts as a link between public and private life, through which individuals are influenced by the structural and cultural changes of the society (Shi, 2018). However, the mothers with young children today are not necessarily seeking to practise the same parenting ideas that were normative when they were growing up. Shi argues that what generates this change is more bound up with social changes than intergenerational transition (Shi, 2018). These different cultural dynamics, shaping how children are raised, how motherhood is being practised, and how mothers reflect on differing cultural values in relation to how their own parents sought to raise them will be explored further in the analytic chapters.

2.3.2 Cultural Values in Relation to Motherhood

A central value that is emphasised in traditional Chinese culture, and which feeds into understandings of motherhood, is that of holism. Different from western views, the Chinese philosophy of holism considers all parts as interlinked parts of a whole, which means that all parts exist only within wholes, and all parts are interdependent and interrelated rather than independent or autonomous (Liu and Wang, 2009). Yan and Kleinman argue that global processes of individualisation have led to a move away from holism, with changes in moral values from family-oriented collective values to individual fulfilment and development in China (Yan, 2010, Kleinman et al. 2011). However, Harriet Evans (2008) proposes that for Chinese families, it is still a privileged duty to fulfil filial piety, and therefore implies that individualism is more connected with personality in China rather than as an individual with distinct boundaries. Indeed, the Chinese meaning of 'seeking a fulfilling life' or 'being a successful human being' is more associated with interpersonal relationships not only for oneself, but in relation to one's 'responsibility' in a human network, including family duties (Evans, 2008) and in this process, the choices made may not be entirely of one's choosing (Sun, 2019). The meanings of individuality and individualism in a Chinese context are therefore different from those in western cultures; formed as hybrids from both western and Chinese perspectives, the pursuit of independence occurs simultaneously to the pursuit of holism. In relation to these philosophies, Evans (2008) argues that older women who were growing up in the 1950s or 1960s considered having children as something they 'had to do' to continue their husband's line, entailing filial duty to their in-laws. While young women today think that having a child is a way of fulfilling a duty by repaying their parents, especially mothers, who made their own sacrifices in bringing them up. Evans (2008) further argues that contemporary urban women's experiences of marriage and having children are all significantly framed by a mutually beneficial promise to their parents, especially their mothers. Croll (1995) also suggests that women born in the early 20th century were obedient and docile, proud of their tiny-lily feet and ambitious about being a good wife. However, women born in the late 20th century have experienced changes and revolutions, influenced by western ideas, and are looking for freedom and liberalism. Yet the role models they have available, Croll argues, are either western women or Chinese men, and therefore they don't have a clear idea of what a 'new woman' could be, resulting in a hybridity of western and Confucian ideas (Croll, 1995; Wu, 2019).

A further point that should be highlighted is that the holism value in Chinese family education stresses the importance of social networks, kinship networks and face, Mianzi in interpersonal relationships, Guanxi, (Yan, 2010, Kleinman et al. 2011, Evans, 2008). The concepts of interpersonal connections and face are fundamentally crucial to the understanding of interactions within the cultural context of China (Buckleyet al. 2006). To further explain, face, in Chinese culture, is directly related to the Confucian concept of morality, representing a prestige achieved through success in life and is assessed on the basis of what others think (Lindridge & Wang, 2008). Saving face and earning face are very important concepts for self and for the family. As Hwang and Han put it, 'One's sense of having or losing face can be defined as a person's socially contingent self-esteem in a particular situation (Hwang & Han, 2010).' Therefore, when related to family relationships, emotional reactions, including feelings of having or losing face, can be determined by the role obligations as defined by Confucian ethics (ibid). This is also an important part of negotiations between family members in the everyday discourse of traditional Chinese families (Gao, 1998), with the loss of face bringing shame to both individuals and their family (Yeung & Tung, 1996). The pressure, therefore, to save face and earn face is huge as it requires an individual to align their behaviour within the perspective and critics of the wider community (Ji, 2000).

Thus, for the new generation of Chinese daughters, the conflict between the 'old' and 'new' has become that between the 'I' of the individual and the 'we' of the family (Croll, 1995). It seems likely therefore that what they consider as the requirements of being a good mother would also be shaped by these conflicts and cultural changes, and in contemporary China, the two generations of daughters currently in their twenties and thirties, and mothers in their fifties, represent these two conflicted social progressions and different understanding of self (Urick, Hollensbe, Masterson, Lyons, 2016). If mothers represent the static tradition in which roles are prescribed and reinforced in their mind and actions, daughters are the representatives of society being constantly influenced and challenged by external resources such as knowledge and media. This constant influence leads to a continuous reshaping of their acknowledgement of self. This is not to argue that a mother's actions and thoughts are all necessarily representative of tradition, as their roles are changing too in contemporary Chinese society. However, influenced by their

previous experiences, mothers' actions and values remain more traditional in comparison with their daughters in relation to their understanding of motherhood. How then do these mothers and daughters negotiate with each other when we consider the conflict of ongoing traditions and continuous change in contemporary Chinese society? In this thesis I consider these issues by exploring how the current generation of mothers navigates relations with their own parents' generation in relation to child-rearing practises. I also reflect upon how the meaning of a good mother can be further explored and understood with reference to these kinds of intergenerational conflicts.

2.4 Conclusion

The role of parenting within different cultural contexts has long been discussed by sociologists and anthropologists (Chao & Tseng, 2002). Discussions about Chinese parenting styles have mostly focused on questions relating to Confucianism, and the cultivation of children's obedience to parents, in which filial piety, and collectivistic cultural orientations were often mentioned. Triandis (1995) has classified countries into two general models; individualistic and collectivistic orientations, and East Asian countries such as China have been divided into collectivistic countries due to the long cultural history of Confucianism. In interactions within a family, the most representative Confucianism norm is filial piety, that children are to be devoted and obedient to their parents (Chao & Tseng, 2002). Furthermore, it was believed that filial piety served as a guiding behavioural norm for processes of socialisation and intergenerational relationships (Chao & Tseng, 2002). However, this pattern of Confucianism and collectivistic orientation should be considered as just a framework for researchers to explore East Asian countries and not as a general understanding of what is going on in contemporary Asian families. Chuang (2009) has argued persuasively that studies about Chinese families should go beyond assumptions of a collectivistic framework and focus more on parenting processes (Chuang, 2009) and parenting beliefs (Chao, 1995). In the chapters that follow, I draw on this approach and consider specifically how middle-class Chinese mothers of young children understand and try to practise 'good mothering' in their daily lives.

From the existing sociological literature exploring motherhood in western societies and in China reviewed in this chapter, we can identify a number of overlapping themes including the ways in which social changes have produced a series of transitions in understandings of gender, childhood, and motherhood. This overview of existing studies concerning parenting in China highlights the importance of addressing the specific meanings of motherhood within this cultural context and how they interact with cultural values such as Confucianism and holism, as well as the way these values are expressed and mediated in relation to alternative values, such as trends towards individualisation. Existing research has shown, for example, how these cultural values have influenced Chinese women's choices of having children and their ways and beliefs about educating children. However, there has been little research focused on how Chinese mothers negotiate everyday life during child-rearing, and the ways in which these different cultural values are interwoven in particular ways in their childrearing and shape their understandings of what it is to be a good mother. In the following chapters, this thesis addresses three key aspects of this process: children's early childhood education, mothers' everyday mothering practises in relation to their husband and grandparents' involvement, and mothers' views about the inheritance of gendered expectations. In doing so, it develops understanding of how Chinese mothers of young children negotiate the meaning of 'good mothering' in everyday life.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, I will introduce in detail of how I designed my research questions and outlines of the interviews, how I conducted the recruiting process and the interviewing procedure in both Beijing and Xining. And I will also talk about what kind of difficulties or unexpected situations I have been experienced during my fieldwork and what kind of adjusting I have been made. All of these would be discussed in six sections. First section would talk about my choosing of research method, the advantage and limitation of this method. The second section will talk about the basic information of my research participants and how I recruited these interviewees. In the third section I will talk about the data gathering process and reflections during the procedure. How I conducted the interviews and how I made changes of the outline of interview questions in accordance to the circumstances. In the fourth section, I will emphasize on the ethical concerns and preparations I have made before, during and after the interviews. The fifth section is the data analysis section, which discuss in detail of how I would be analysing my data. The sixth section is the conclusion which will gather all the information above about what have been done in my field work and how I will analysis my interview data.

3.1 Choosing a Research Method

As mentioned in my previous chapter, my initial research focus was the mother-daughter relationship in their transition from daughters to being mothers themselves. Therefore, my original research questions were all focused on the mother-daughter relationship. However, after several interviews, I became aware that the main concern they were continuously talking about was their anxiety over whether they were good mothers and what it would mean to be a good mother after they became mothers themselves. Some of them even pointed out that after they had become mothers themselves, their main focus was placed entirely on their children

rather than their relationship with their own mothers. I therefore decided to expand my focus to not only concentrate on the mother-daughter relationship, but to also explore the other relation networks surrounding my interviewees, and to shift the emphasis of the research from the mother-daughter relationship to these mothers themselves, to help explore what seemed to matter to them as they spoke about their lives: the question of what it is to be a 'good mother'.

Analysing how mothers comprehend the meaning of motherhood and 'good mothering', we should first discuss from ontology and epistemology, what constitutes knowledge and how knowledge can be gained (Pascale, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Idealist ontology holds that we humans construct experiences of reality in our minds through thoughts and ideas, how reality maybe and how we may be experienced depends on how we interpret. From epistemology assumptions, how knowledge is produced in research, indicating that each epistemology rests on its own assumption regarding to the relationship between a researcher and the participants. Depending on a researcher's believe of what can be know from ontology perspective and how to know it from epistemology view, different decisions and data analysis will be made (Giacomini, 2010). Therefore, researcher's personal position, value, culture might all have influence on how the data was interpreted, and potential biases exists due to the interpretation of knowledge (Aigen, 1995). Therefore, when research about human-being and about their understanding or interpretations, researcher should be cautious about how their interpretation was constructed and in what way are way 'objective' or 'subjective' in the interpretation of the research data.

To get a full picture of Chinese mothers' understandings of motherhood in relation to their everyday practises and experiences, subjective understandings, and emotional exchanges in the context of family life requires qualitative research (Nicholas, 2006). As interviews are a helpful qualitative method for examining people's perceptions (Bryman, 2012, Punch 2014) and constructions of reality (Punch, 2014), I designed this research adopting qualitative methods, using semi-structured interviews in order to provide a greater insight into how the early years of motherhood are discussed and experienced in urban China. Qualitative research is well-suited as a methodology for approaching forms of individual interpretation and meaning (Walliman, 2016) and therefore appropriate for examining how the meanings of what it is to be a 'good

mother' are shaped and interpreted. Scholars such as Walliman (2016) have emphasised that studying family relationships is a complicated process since multiple dimensions of family life, and perceptions and emotions of family members should be taken into consideration. Scholars such as Larossa (1985) have also demonstrated that qualitative methods are especially helpful when investigating people's perspectives and their life from their own words, thus the complexity can be fully captured (LaRossa & Wolf, 1985, Ellen Berscheid, 1986, Zvonkovic, Sharp & Radina, 2012). I chose semi-structured interviews because there were certain questions that I wanted to discuss in order to allow me to explore the particular issues I wanted to focus on, while also permitting more freedom for my participants to express their views and experiences (Walliman, 2016) without being overly restrictive (Bryman, 2014). In addition, because I was not a mother with young children myself, I was uncertain whether I would cover all the questions. Therefore, using semistructured interviews with some open questions gave interviewees leeway to provide their own insights (Bryman, 2014). Semi-structured interviews also allowed the interview to be more flexible and for me to make changes according to interviewees' significant concerns relating to my research questions (Bryman, 2014). After I began to conduct interviews, this approach really gave me insights into what were the most pressing questions for my interviewees and the semi-structured interviews left me freedom to adapt questions according to the answers given by my interviewees. When I began to discover that my participants cared a lot about questions related to 'good mothering', I was able to change some of my interview questions accordingly after several interviews.

3.2 Research Participants and Recruitment

The participants in this study were Chinese mothers with children under the age of seven, whose own mothers were still alive. As per my participants' age range, initially my intention had been to recruit mothers with young children who were aged from 25 to 35 years old. However, after starting to recruit participants, I found that I had not taken account of their having married later than I expected. In reality, many of the women I had contact with had married relatively late and hadn't had their first child until their late thirties. Therefore, I removed the requirement relating to participants' age, so that instead, they were only required to have children currently under age seven. The children's age here was significant, because

when participants' children are over seven years old, there are more issues related with primary school and education, and many grandparents would move out from their children's house because their grandchildren do not need so many hours of childcare when they begin attending primary school. On this basis, I narrowed the research down to mothers with children under seven years old.

In order to ensure diversity and differences across different urban contexts in China, I planned to invite half of the interviewees from Beijing, the capital city of China, in which migrant long-term residents (7.64 million) make up 35% of the 21.5 million permanent population, according to Beijing Population Blue Book. In addition, I planned to invite half from Xining, a small city in the northwest of China situated on the Tibetan Plateau, in which a mobile population of 400,000 makes up just 17% of the overall population of 2.37 million. In addition, Beijing is considered to be a city with a fusion of complex global culture, in which migrant populations from various provinces and cities gather, while Xining is a small city at some distance from the capital city. I also ensured my participants who were currently living in Beijing or Xining, had been living in either one of the two cities for at least three years. The reason that I wanted to work with participants who had lived in Beijing or Xining for at least three years was because residents, especially in a capital city like Beijing with high mobility, are from other cities in China. However, three years is a substantial period of time and indicates they have adopted the city as their second hometown. I also chose these two cities in China because both include groups of mothers with young children from a large urban megacity and from a more recently urbanised northwest city in China. Although my participants were all middle-class women, who had children under seven years old at the time of conducting the interviews, there were nevertheless differences between them, such as the level of competition in the workplace and children's education, as well as the academic resources and living standards available to them. Therefore, interviewing women from these two cities enabled me to capture a range of different middle-class perspectives and show a more comprehensive picture of middle-class mothers' life in urban China than would be the case if I had chosen one city alone.

In addition, I made sure all participants had a college degree or above, and that their present family financial situation was considered middle class as first, middle class was most evident in middle class. Zhang's study on parenting in contemporary China also indicated the so-called tiger parenting were found most evident in middle-class. Second, middle class group would be more willing and able to adopt intensive mothering in time and financial aspects (Brown, 2022). Furthermore, the study about gender relationship and marriage (Chen, 2020) also pointed out empirical evidence of middle-class women being more influenced by neoliberal ideology on self-development and self-reflexivity on one's behaviour in the management of marriage life, when middle-class women choose to 'improve themselves' to manage their marriage. These links between middle-class women and gendered division of labour, intensive engagement in the child-rearing process is the reason I chose middle-class as a target group, to look into how they comprehend 'good mothering' under the socio-economic, cultural, and political context in contemporary China.

When I was in Beijing, I sent recruiting notices on my social media channels, including WeChat and my Blog. However, I had little interest initially. Due to this situation, I reached out to some of my friends in Beijing who are mothers with young children themselves and then carried out snowball sampling afterwards. This strategy successfully encouraged a significant number of women to come forward to participate in the research, to the extent that in the end, I had to turn down some volunteers. I noticed that many volunteers had some experience of conducting qualitative research themselves when they had been studying at university, and many had graduated from universities in the UK, including Amanda, Lorna, Xiong, Jing and Summer. As one of the interviewees, Kang, said 'if you've had a similar experience back in school, you are more willing to help others with their research, because you can understand what the research is for and be happy to make some contribution if you can.' I think maybe this is one reason why many women were happy to give up some of their time to participate in this research. As well as a point of connection between me and the participants, it is also worth considering whether the experience of studying abroad would also have some influence on their self-understanding. For example, how they viewed the relationship between self and family may have been affected. Indeed, as Amanda expressed it, somewhat differently from most participants, 'you should put yourself before children, parents and husband, because if you don't take care of yourself, you can't take care of your children and family.' In the end, I successfully

interviewed 17 volunteers in Beijing. All of these interviewees had face to face interviews with me, mostly taking place in a quiet café, a quiet space within their workplace, or their home; whichever was considered most convenient for the participants. For example, Fei is a doctor who is very busy every day, so she asked me to do the interview during her break at work in the hospital to save time.

While the recruitment process went relatively smoothly in Beijing, recruiting participants in Xining was even more challenging than I had anticipated. At first, many participants I reached out to or who had been contacted by my friends refused my invitation because they did not feel comfortable talking about their private life. This reluctance is reflected in the Chinese saying, 'Domestic shame should not be made public', and is something that matters more for people living in small cities as people are more connected and it is even easier to run into someone you know on the street. Furthermore, some other women turned down the invitation to participate due to their being concerned that the interview would be time consuming, as they juggled the demands of work and childrearing as outlined in the previous chapter. I came to appreciate that it would be hard to encourage people to talk about their private life with a stranger they do not know in a small city, and many of the women I reached out to considered interviews as either too risky or too complex. In addition, differences in educational background between participants in Beijing and Xining was perhaps an influence as well, since most of my Xining participants had a bachelor's rather than a master's degree, and also did not tend to share the experiences of my Beijing participants in terms of research participation. This was, therefore, not a point of connection for us. I did not purposefully reach out only to participants who had a bachelor's degree, but in a small city where the academic requirements are lower for the same level job compared with requirements for jobs in larger cities, most of my participants were working in fields such as education, banking, and public service, without a master's degree. In order to recruit volunteers in Xining, I therefore had to change my strategy, and beyond snowballing, I also posted recruitment information on a community website, but still got no response. In the end, I decided to adopt a 'gatekeeper' (Patterson, Maris, and Borshmann, 2011) recruitment approach, to reach potential participants. A gatekeeper is someone with more local reputation and authority, and with this person's approval and recommendation, my position as a researcher could, by association, be seen as more trustworthy. Here I followed Arcury and

Quandt (2004), who used a similar approach when they failed in snowball sampling to recruit participants who were either hesitant or refused to get involved.

Deciding to try this approach, I chose early education organisations as potentially able to facilitate this kind of gatekeeper approach, and so I went to some early education organisations to ask for their help. I had noticed there were often many mothers waiting in these kinds of educational centres for their children to finish classes, and that these periods spent waiting, with little to occupy them, might actually be a great opportunity to conduct interviews. I explained my research to the managers of these centres first and then asked them whether they could help introduce me to the mothers who were sitting outside the classroom. After listening to a short presentation explaining my research project and checking my student ID, the manager of one Early Education Centre kindly agreed to help me. Introduced by the manager, someone whom they knew and trusted, the mothers became more inclined to help. This change made me seem more reliable both on the personal level and academically, and as a result many participants were willing to take part in the research. Following their participation and realisation that the interviews were not as intimidating as they had imagined, many of these individuals then introduced more volunteers to me. The 'gate keeper' recruitment approach was therefore really successful in Xining. Moreover, because the manager knew the parents' situations who used their educational centre, she could reach out to the candidates who were suitable for my recruitment without me asking in advance for their basic information. In addition, the manager also helped by providing a private room for me to conduct the interview, so that the interview would not be interrupted by other parents in the educational centre, and the participants could also feel safer for them to share their stories with me.

In order to encourage participation, I also shortened the interview schedule time when recruiting interviewees. In my initial recruitment advertisements, I had stated that the interview could take between one and two hours, which many people thought was too long. So, when some of the participants told me that they could perhaps do the interview but not for such a lengthy time slot, I asked them how long they would prefer. Participants Yang and Hai both told me that they only had half an hour available. However, when they then started to talk about their family, their sadness and happiness, they ended up feeling as if it was a positive experience to be able to have someone to talk with about these things without being judged, and they

actually ended up talking for two hours with no complaint about the time. As a result, I stopped stipulating how much time participants should provide for this interview when I was recruiting volunteers. In addition, when these participants felt like they enjoyed participating in the interview, they were more willing to introduce me to further participants. Due to these strategies and snowballing, I eventually interviewed 17 participants in Xining.

Reflecting on my differing experiences of the recruiting process in Beijing and Xining, I also sensed the importance of guanxi in China. The definition of the term guanxi in general is the existence of people who either share a group status, have direct connection with each other, or are related to a common person (Bian, 1994). While in China, the definition would be much looser, guanxi is very important when Chinese interact with each other (Tsui & Farh, 1997). Since I had been living in Beijing for eight years from the age of eighteen years old, I had built up a lot of guanxi in Beijing. This sped up my snowball sampling and enabled me to be more accepted by participants as an insider, as we were linked to someone that we all have connection with. While in Xining, all the friends I had before university had mostly chosen to develop their careers in larger cities, leaving me with less guanxi with people aged around 20 to 30 years old. This was eventually overcome by building-up new guanxi with people from the early child education centre, my participants, their colleagues, and friends.

As mentioned above, I successfully interviewed 30 participants. In order to protect their privacy, I coded them with the name they prefer to be called. Some participants used Chinese names, and some English names, including Yang, Hai, Kang, Xiong, and Amanda. These are not their real names, so that their identity is protected. However, I chose to use pseudonyms rather than numbers, because names give more of a sense of my participants as people, with agency. I have listed all participants' pseudonyms, ages, city of residence, educational background, current job, children's age, and whether participants' mothers live in the same city in Table 'Basic Information of Participants in Beijing and in Xining'. This basic information chart provides useful context to the interviews, illustrating the differences and similarities between my participants.

Basic Information of Participants in Beijing and in Xining

	Name	Age	City	Education	Job	Children	Children Age	Caring arrangement
1	Lorna★	34	Beijing	Master	Bank Clerk	2	7&1	Baby-sitter/Sister
2	Jiao	33	Beijing	Bachelor	Education Front Desk	1	5	Mother
3	Fei	30	Beijing	Master	Doctor	1	1	Mother & Mother-inLaw
4	Xiong	31	Beijing	Master	Teacher M	1	2	Mother
5	Amanda★	30	Beijing	Master	Teacher H	1	4	Mother & Mother-inLaw
6	Jing	38	Beijing	Master	Stay-at-home	1	6	Self & Mother
7	Kang ★	41	Beijing	Master	Insurance	1	3	Self & Mother & In-Law
8	Lemon	34	Beijing	Master	Stay-at-home	1	2	Self
9	Xing	32	Beijing	Master	Research Engineer	1	2	Mother & Mother-inLaw
10	Jill#	33	Beijing	Master	Company	1	6 Month	Mother-in-Law
11	Xuan	36	Beijing	Master	Admissions Consultant	1	4	Mother & Mother-inLaw
12	Deng	41	Beijing	Master	Education Consultant	1	7	Mother-in-Law
13	Summer ★	46	Beijing	Master	Child Early Education	2	7&4	Mother
14	Ting#	38	Beijing	Bachelor	Secretary	1	1	Babysitter&In-Law&Aunt
15	Xiao	32	Beijing	Bachelor	Civil Servant	1	7	Self & Mother
16	Cai	40	Beijing	Master	OnlineEnglish Teacher	1	5	Self
17	Wu	38	Beijing	Master	Part-time Teacher	1	3	Self & Mother
18	Tie	29	Xining	Bachelor	Bank Manager	1	1	Mother-in-Law
19	Qing	30	Xining	Bachelor	Accountant	1	2	Mother & Mother-inLaw
20	Kun	39	Xining	Bachelor	HR	2	5&1	Mother-in-Law
21	Yang	40	Xining	PhD	Professor	2	8&3	Mother & Mother-inLaw
22	Guan	36	Xining	Bachelor	Auditor	2	5&6mon	Mother
23	Villa	40	Xining	Bachelor	Early Education	1	3	Self, 0-2 & Husband, 2-3
24	Lian*	28	Xining	Bachelor	Early Education	1	2	Self & Mother-in-Law
25	Karen	26	Xining	Bachelor	Front Desk	1	1	Mother-in-Law
26	Fang	42	Xining	Bachelor	Accountant	1	3	Mother
27	Jie*	35	Xining	Bachelor	Civil Servant	1	1	Mother-in-Law
28	Smile ★	36	Xining	Master	State-Owned Enterp.	1	3	Self & Husband
29	Wen	36	Xining	Bachelor	Civil Servant	1	3	Mother-in-Law & Mother

30	Hao	34	Xining	Master	Bank Clerk	1	4	Mother-in-Law & Mother
31	Dan	37	Xining	Bachelor	Civil Servant	1	3	Mother-in-Law & Mother
32	Sunny	34	Xining	Master	Civil Servant	1	3	Mother-in-Law & Mother
33	Hu*	40	Xining	Master	Civil Servant	2	3 & 1	Baby-Sitter & Sister
34	Bao	38	Xining	Bachelor	Company	1	4	Mother-in-Law

1. All names above are coded names or names participants preferred to use, so that participants' personal identities and anonymity are protected.

2. This chart provides basic information about participants at the time of the interview, including their ages, where they live, their educational background, their occupation, how many children they have, children's ages, and childcare arrangements.

3. The column 'Age' indicates that half of my participants are over 35 years old, showing that my initial assumption of only interviewing mothers with young children between 25 and 35 years old was wrong. Due to late marriage and late childbirth, many women with children under seven years old are over 35 years old, which has led to problems for some of the participants because their parents are too old to help take care of their grandchildren.

4. In the 'Job' column, 'Education Front Desk' refers to the Educational Company's Front Desk, 'Teacher M' means teacher working in Middle School, 'Teacher H' means teacher in High School, 'Stay-at-Home' indicates the participant is not working or is preparing to start up a business online while taking care of children at home, 'Insurance' to a saleswomen working in an insurance company, and 'Company' means staff working in private enterprise. The information in this column indicates that most of my participants with a higher educational qualification tend to choose professions that are perceived to be relatively stable such as teacher, bank clerk and civil servant.

5. The column 'Care' indicates the childcare arrangements for participants' children. 'Self' means that the mother had no additional childcare support; a situation for most stay-at-home mothers, 'Mother & Mother-in-Law' applies to mothers and mothers-in-law taking turns to help care for the children. In some special situations, relatives such as sisters or aunts also assumed a maternal role to help take care of the children

6. The names with '*' means that these participants mentioned their mothers have serious gender discrimination, living in families only want boys, and get no support or little love from their own mothers.

7. The names with '#' means that these participants have alienated relationship with their mother, growing up without much care and attention from their mothers.

8. To take cultural influence and education into consideration, the names with '★' means they had experience of study abroad, mostly in UK and Europe.

3.3 Data Gathering and Reflections

In fieldwork, the process of questioning interviewees is the most crucial part of unveiling participants' understanding of their own lives and the perspectives of others (Agee, 2009). As stated by Berger, the positions of interviewers can often be an influence on their respondents (2015). When reflecting on my position in terms of how my participants perceived me, some of the interviewees considered me as an outsider because I am neither married nor have children. Their sense of me as an outsider who does not have a similar life experience as a mother led some of my participants to express that I may not really understand them or their experiences and struggles. Many of my participants asked me why I was doing this research about married women instead of exploring the experiences of unmarried women without children, whose experiences might perhaps be closer to my own. Whenever this happened, I always responded of helping her to take care of my little nephew and attending early education classes with him, thereby sharing with my participants why I was interested in married women with young children and indicating that despite the fact I don't have children, we would nevertheless have some similar experiences as a point of connection. This experience of caring for my nephew helped to shift their perception of me from that of a complete outsider since I presented myself as having shared some similar experiences. Yet at the same time, my position as an outsider also brought with it some advantages as well, since without being a mother myself, I could also present my position as an outsider to avoid my participants thinking that I would have any assumptions about their experiences so that they would explain things to me without assuming

my prior knowledge. It also allowed me greater clarity in terms of my role as a researcher, with no sense of role confusion (Asselin, 2003; Kanuha, 2000; Berger, 2015)

Outsider/insider status is not fixed and can shift in relation to different aspects of the interview (Mulling, 1999; Merriam, Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, Muhamad, 2001; Kerstetter, 2012). Although I did not share with my participants the experience of being a mother or married, there were different aspects of my identity and experiences that created their perception of me as an insider in other ways. I was born in Xining and lived in Xining for eighteen years before I went to university. Afterwards, I studied and worked in Beijing for eight years before I went to university in the UK, all of which positioned me as an insider in some sense for participants from both Xining and Beijing. I had shared similar life experiences and spoke with a similar accent, and this sharing of language also moved my position of researcher from an outsider to an insider (Asselin, 2003), and allowed me to be accepted more quickly and fully by interviewees (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Especially in Xining, where some participants use a particular local accent, I could understand and communicate using the Xining accent, which felt more familiar and comfortable for participants.

To prevent my participants from feeling that I was unfamiliar with their experience of motherhood, I also tried to prepare myself in terms of my own understanding, since, as Berger points out, participants will be more willing to share if they have a sense of resonance with the interviewer (Berger, 2015). Therefore, prior to conducting the interviews I asked family members and friends who had children how they felt about their experiences and what kind of problems they may have faced. I also gained further knowledge from relevant videos, online forums, and articles before conducting my field work. For example, I have two cousins who have children, as well as one who is married with no children, so I asked them how they deal with marriage, how they interact with their mothers and mothers-in-law, and what kind of problems they face or that they think other people experience with raising children. Sometimes, however, it was other points of shared experience that helped to establish rapport. For instance, my first interviewee, Lorna, found herself much more comfortable talking with me after she found out we had both studied in Scotland before, and she felt more familiar with me after we had talked about the cities and universities we both knew in the UK. Although it was tim e

consuming to establish these points of connection at the start of the interview. Overall, it was a useful approach in order to help participants to feel more relaxed and therefore willing to open up about their personal experiences.

While I was conducting the interviews, I made sure that I always sought to make the participants feel comfortable and welcome. During the interview, I either asked questions or just quietly listened to my participants as they spoke, without appearing to judge or criticise anyone's behaviour. I also tried to not influence my participants' opinions or feelings by stating any of my own assumptions or displaying particular emotional responses. For example, although I knew from reading articles online and watching TV shows that there are many conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, I consciously sought not to make assumptions about who might be right and who might be wrong in these conflicts. Rather, I would only ask my participants details of what had happened in these kinds of situations, how they dealt with it, and how they felt about it.

While collecting data in Beijing and Xining, it was also a reflective process to develop and refine my topic guide for the interviews. It was pointed out by Chin (2016) that there are no perfectly designed interview schedules or topic guides, but rather a process of constantly adapting and redesigning. Therefore, it was important to reflect on how and why my topic guide for conducting the interviews evolved during the process of my research and why the focus of research also evolved during the fieldwork. As discussed in the Introduction, when I began this project, my initial focus was on how mothers with young children think about 'good mothering' and how they interact with their own mothers especially in relation to raising children. However, during the first few interviews, I found out that the cultural rule of 'filial piety', the virtue of sharing, and respect for seniority influenced my interviewees' picture of good parenting as well. For instance, Lorna stressed that her biggest concern in her children's education was teaching them to respect seniority, not just elderly people such as their grandparents, but also cousins who were older than them. She thought that showing respect to people who are older is an indispensable cultural rule. However, alongside this value of deference to elders, whenever her children were mistreated by older cousins when they fought over a toy, she could not decide how she should teach her children. Should they fight back and resist their cousins or

compromise? Moreover, when she failed to reprimand the cousins in order to maintain face in front of her relatives, her children could not understand why she treated them differently. Worse than this, when the cousins cried and her children asked why, she said she couldn't really explain to them. I therefore began to pay more attention to whether these values and norms of Chinese traditional culture and interrelationships between relatives were issues that concerned other interviewees as well.

In addition, many of my participants mentioned their husbands' attitude and role in childrearing as a key factor that was affecting their life choices and their understanding of motherhood, and sometimes this relationship also influenced their relationship with their mother. For instance, Xiong mentioned that her mother's relationship with her husband deeply influenced her interactions with her mother. Whenever her mother complained about her husband while they were all living together in order to take care of the baby, Xiong said that it was really hard for her, since on one hand, she felt like she should not argue with her mother due to her efforts in taking care of the baby, but at the same time she also hated it when her mother would say negative things about her husband, especially when it influenced her feelings for her husband as well. Overall, this led to more fighting between them. Furthermore, participants such as Fang and Yang mentioned that they felt tired when they were the only ones taking care of the children, while husbands thought they only had to play with the children occasionally. This question of how relationships with husbands played a role in what it means to be a 'good mother' is the focus of Chapter six.

Moreover, when we talked about questions in relation to gender, many of my participants mentioned particular experiences of gender discrimination from their own parents, which made me interested in examining whether these experiences would influence their ideas on parenting, and whether they would try to change these kinds of gendered view during the child-rearing process. And if so, how?. Therefore, I expanded my questions on these aspects, and I also began to notice more consciously what their narratives about their child-rearing practises revealed about how they behaved in daily life, and whether there were tensions between these accounts and their stated beliefs about how they hoped to pass on particular ideas about gender. These differences between what participants said that they believed they were passing on to their

children in terms of ideas about gender and how gender norms were interwoven within their everyday practises is the focus of analysis in Chapter 7. Overall, when particular concerns were frequently mentioned by several participants, I would refine my interview questions in order to ensure I would not miss any details. And as I did this, I also further refined my guiding research objectives in order to analyse further elements that fed into influencing the idea of what it means to be a 'good mother' for my participants. The outline of the interview schedule is included   in Appendix 1. As a semi-structured interview, some of the questions that I asked in practise responded to the particular circumstances and responses of my participants.

During my interviews with the participants, most of the participants in Beijing arranged a meeting with me during their lunch break or right after they finished their working day, meaning that only a few of them brought their children along with them to the interview. In contrast in Xining, since I approached several participants when they brought their children to children's early educational centres, there were more situations of children being present while I was conducting the interviews. As far as I could tell, the children's presence did not seem to influence my participants' response to my questions, although during the interviews, they would often take some time to comfort their children if they seemed bored or upset and try to keep them occupied. For example, for Xiong, she said that she would normally prevent her son from drinking cold or too sweet beverages, but while we were conducting the interview in a café, and her son asked her for a drink, she agreed to this in order to keep him quiet while she was talking to me. At the same time, when the children sometimes interrupted their mothers or me as we were speaking, these kinds of interruptions offered insights into how the participants translated their stated parenting philosophy into practise.

As well as allowing insight into the dynamics of mother-child interactions, conducting faceto-face interviews also had the advantage of allowing me to observe how my participants were responding to the interview interaction and therefore more rapidly build up trust between researcher and participant through observation of facial expression and body language (Opdenakker, 2006). For example, when individuals started shifting to sit in a more comfortable position, or laughed and gave me a positive response, I could see how the trust between us was being co-created. These kinds of 'emotional context' (Polland, 1995) of 'body language' and

the atmosphere of the meeting could also be recorded in the field notes I made following face-to-face interviews. During face-to-face interviews, participants often responded to my questions quickly, although because these answers were swift and spontaneous, this required me to concentrate on the answers given, the questions that I should be asking according to both my semi-structured interview topic guide and follow up to the participants' responses in order to formulate questions that were at the level of depth and detail I needed (Opdenakker, 2006). The advantage, however, was that with the questions judged appropriately, I was able to obtain more specific and detailed answers and my participants felt more positive about their participation in the interview. For instance, when I was interviewing my first participant, Lorna, because her lunch break was coming to an end, we had to draw the interview to a close, and Lorna suggested that we could do the rest of the interview through WeChat; a common chatting app in China. Thus, I tried to address some questions to her on WeChat, but her responses and the dynamic between us was very different from her face-to-face interview. When we interviewed face-to-face, the conversation flowed easily, but when she was answering my questions via WeChat text message, she only offered one to two sentences for each question. As she might have been messaging me during work or while she was doing other things, I had no idea of the situation that my participant was in. In addition, it was very hard to create a good interview ambience through these kinds of online modes of communication (Opdenakker, 2006). Due to this experience of an unsatisfactory online interview, we had to go back to conducting a face-to-face interview. This experience made me really appreciate the advantages of face-to-face interviews, especially in relation to discussing personal feelings and the details of everyday life. It is worth noting that conducting these interviews face-to-face was time-consuming, especially in Beijing, when on days when I scheduled two interviews in one day, I might spend more than four to five hours on public transportation due to the city's size.

Moreover, while I did not collect any data about the children themselves, face-to-face interviews also helped me observe how mothers actually behaved when they were with their children, when they brought their children along with them to interviews or when they took care of their children in an early child education centre. For example, when I scheduled interviews with mothers when they were waiting for their child to finish a particular class, I could also have the opportunity to observe and chat with mothers who were waiting or playing with their children. In addition, I also gained further insights from being the auntie of my two years old

nephew, taking him to early education classes as his guardians, observing how other mothers were interacting with their children during class. These insights will be referred to specifically in Chapter Three, which discusses mothers' understanding and action toward their children during early years education.

In order to get beyond my participants talking about what they believed they had been doing, I always asked further questions that invited them to describe more details of specific events, and how they had behaved in relation to particular detailed things, such as, 'When your child shows unwillingness to play the piano, what did you do? Why?' or 'When you think your mother is wrong when she is helping take care of the baby, what do you do?' Sometimes participants' understanding of definitions of particular things was different from each other, and therefore further questions were vital to ensure accuracy. For instance, when I asked one participant whether her child should go to any early education classes, she firmly said no. However, when I further asked if her children were attending any classes such as piano, maths, or painting, she said 'of course, all three'. As Maccoby and Martin (1983) suggested, asking participants to narrate more specific affairs instead of just summarising beliefs and attitudes during an interview, helps to gather more valuable insight into parental attitudes and lived experiences.

3.4 Ethical Concerns

Before conducting the interviews in China, I carefully considered any ethical issues that might potentially arise in order to minimise any risk of harm to my participants. The aim of this project was to investigate women's everyday lives, with detailed discussion of interactions between participants and their mothers and parents-in-law, and how they felt about their relationship with their mothers and the emotional changes they experienced. Prior to the interviews, in case any participants might have experienced emotional discomfort or distress in talking about their experiences and relationships, I had prepared information from the psychological helpline at the local hospital, and psychological clinics, together with details of appropriate websites that could provide support if necessary. When conducting the interviews,

some of my participants did experience some emotional fluctuation and discomfort, and I was able to comfort them whenever it happened. However, I did not in practise need to signpost further support, as they all described their feelings as natural emotions when talking about the past and bringing up difficult times and experiences. Nobody felt overly disturbed talking about these memories and expressed satisfaction that they would have someone to talk to about their feelings with after the interview through their existing social networks of support.

Before the interview, participants were asked to give signed consent, were informed about the three main research questions and were also able to see the interview questions in advance if they requested. They were also informed that if they felt uncomfortable during the interview, they could stop the interview immediately. In addition, I informed participants that their privacy would be protected. I explained my strategy of coding to every participant at the beginning of the interview, and only used the name they preferred to be called during the interview and in the coding of the data. As some of my participants were very concerned about their privacy and preferred to use the pseudonym they provided in WeChat, I also carefully explained that all the interviews' audio recordings would be carefully stored, only accessible to me, and would be destroyed after use to assure they remained confidential.

Other than ethical concerns relating to the perspective of participants, there are also a number of risks that social researchers may face (Morse, 2001; Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, 2001). In my situation, there were no significant risks for potential physical harm, but I did need to deal with my own emotions in the field. During the interviews, many of my participants experienced emotional moments when they were talking about their sentimental memories. For example, when talking about the day they became mothers, some would cry. After listening to different kinds of emotional stories from my interviewees, I was myself inevitably affected. Scholars such as Barbaley (2002) and Widdowfield (2000) have pointed out that although the scientific method has traditionally excluded emotions from the research procedure, emotions are in fact integral to the research process, and I therefore myself to experience emotion as a necessary part of the interview. During the interviews, it seemed natural to view the participant as the interviewee, and myself as the researcher. However, the actual interactions between us could not be kept as strict as this binary relationship implies, and there were always surprises

through our encounters, as the research data is not only questions and answers, but a creation that is cooperatively produced by both participant and the interviewer (Chin, 2016). The data was the material generated through this interactive context, and my participants were individuals with agency, with whom I interacted in the fieldwork. Therefore, emotions were inevitable during this process, and this emotional investment along with empathy was necessary (Chin,2016), as a certain amount of emotional investment helped my participants gain a trust in me and allowed me to become a person with whom they were willing to share their story. In addition, so that I could act as someone who understood, I seriously considered how much of my opinion I shared with my participants with regards to my own beliefs and kept in mind that whatever my interviewees shared with me, I should always respect.

3.5 Data Analysis

Overall, I interviewed 34 participants, and the average length of the interview was between one and two hours. When I transcribed the data, it seemed at first a daunting task and too complex for me. It took me several days to complete the transcription of each interview, and I listened to the entire interview again after I finished each transcription to ensure there were no mistakes. This checking process was especially useful for me to begin to build a complete picture of the interview. Transcription was therefore a really important first step in the data analysis process and valuable initial insights were generated during this first step of translating the data into text (Hamilton, 2017). Although the transcription process was timeconsuming and challenging, I insisted on doing all the transcription by myself, one reason being because of my ethical commitment that I would be the only person who would listen to the digital recording, and another reason being that the transcribing process would help develop my familiarity with the data , which could also help me identify regulations and variations of the data, and to establish more connections between data and my original research questions during the process of analysis (Hemmings, 2009). After transcribing the data, one interview would often exceed 15000 words. Therefore, I decided to use NVivo to organise my data.

When developing my approach to data analysis, I adopted thematic analysis in order to analyse my data systematically. Because I have done my interviews in Beijing and Xining, causing over three months' time and every recording have at least two to three hours. The huge amount of interview data is complicated and feels like a challenge to be organized and analysed properly. While thematic analysis provided a clear way of organising my data. Looking through my data, I would label all the themes I think worth analysing and made it more convenient to see through my interview data, and aim for different themes I could be look into later. Analysis of data is an ongoing procedure throughout the research process with the conceptual frameworks emerging before the fieldwork, to the generation of themes and patterns during the interview and data analysis phases (Becker, 1966; Braun and Clarke, 2006). Using thematic analysis provided three main benefits for this project. First, it helped me to immerse myself in the data and enabled me to develop deeper insights. During the re-reading of transcripts and listening to audio recordings, I took note of particular details related to my research questions. Second, this approach offered a clear method for coding my data and conceptualising them, identifying similarities, and conducting comparisons. Third, this approach helped me develop a clear theoretical framework and identify main themes, subthemes, and the connections between these themes and subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Through the process of searching for and identifying key themes from the data, the framework of the whole thesis began to emerge gradually.

When analysing the significant quantity of data I had collected, I uploaded   all my interview transcripts into NVivo and read them carefully while listening to the audio recording, putting nodes on sentences I noticed to have a connection with my research questions, and labelling them with simple words such as, 'patriarchal', 'gender in private sphere', 'gender in public sphere', 'individualisation', 'reflexivity', 'division of labour', 'emotion work', 'self-identity', 'filial piety', and 'transition'. I also identified and labelled content directly relevant to my four research questions, for instance, 'understanding of good mothering', 'practise mothering', 'adopt mothering identity', in order to identify basic information of participants, like, 'age', 'single child', 'two children'. For example, when Fang said that she felt like she did more of the labour in terms of taking care of her child than her husband, I would label this 'division of labour'. After going through and organising my data in NVivo, I categorised all nodes into four main themes according to my research questions: understanding of the mother's

role, practise of motherhood, intergenerational interaction, changing understanding of self. The software also helped me to see more clearly the contents with more than one node. Thus, the similarities and differences could be identified more efficiently. In the later writing of the analysis chapters, the themes of understanding of mother's role and practise of motherhood helped me developed the analysis into mothers' engagement in children's education and how they comprehend motherhood in the process of childcare and children's education. The themes of intergenerational relationships and subthemes of understanding of the mother's role in relation to intergenerational relationship leads to the second analysis chapter about older generation's participation in the child-rearing process, and its influence on how mothers construct their role as a 'good mother'. In the theme of changing understanding of self, mothers have raised opinions about marriage and about how they see themselves as wife, how they see their partner, as husband and as father. They also talked about their self-experience as children themselves and as mothers. This theme generated into two analysis chapters, one is the chapter about husband's involvement in child-rearing and its influence on mother's understanding of motherhood. The other chapter generated from this theme is the chapter about how mothers themselves experienced gendered position in domestic sphere and workplace, and what they seek to pass onto their own children in relation to gender perspectives.

I also used my field notes to help me organise the data and input nodes while using NVivo. When I was conducting interviews, the audio recordings couldn't show the expressions on participants' faces and their body language when we were talking, which as noted above is a significant advantage of face-to-face interviews since voice, facial expression, and body language each provide a lot of extra information (Opdenakker, 2006). Therefore, fieldnotes helped me to capture these details in the interviews. For instance, when participants mentioned their mothers' absence through their transition to motherhood, although some of them said they did not mind, they looked sad and upset while saying this. Taking field notes also helped me to reflect on problems I encountered during the interviews, keeping track of what might be missing in my research questions and what might be more appropriate ways to ask some questions. Furthermore, when participants brought up some topics that were not directly linked to my research questions, but were obvious major concerns for them, I would take notes to consider whether there might potentially be connections between these problems and my research questions later and considered whether trying to add these questions in the next interview would be advantageous. Keywords in my field notes also provided me with a way to

stay familiar with my data a while after conducting the interviews, and these keywords were also used to input nodes into NVivo to identify more subthemes. Through the process of thematic analysis, I identified several main themes and sub-themes from the data and then sought to connect these themes to the original key concepts I had articulated in the initial research questions (Dey, 1993; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Emond, 2005).

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, through the data collection process which contained lots of laughter and tears, I successfully interviewed 34 participants, 17 in Beijing and 17 in Xining. During the data collection process, I faced many difficulties in Beijing. Although the recruiting process went smoothly, it was a megacity, and I generally needed to spend at least three hours travelling just to interview one participant.. In Xining, in contrast, the process of recruiting participants was much more challenging. When I approached people in such a small city like Xining, it was really hard to gain trust and hard to encourage people to get involved in my research. In the end, I managed to solve this problem by using the 'gatekeeper' approach, and with the introductions from a manager in an early childhood educational centre, I became a more trustworthy researcher in the eyes of mothers in these centres. This ensured that I was eventually able to successfully recruit many participants using the combination of 'gatekeeper' and snowballing. After gathering and transcribing data, I used thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes from the data and make thematic connections from the data in relation to my initial research questions. Through the process of organising and analysing the data, I fulfilled my methodological commitment to cantering my participants' experience, examining and exploring both unique stories and common threads that were woven across these women's experiences as mothers. All my analysis of data draws from the themes identified throughout the process of transcribing and coding. Eventually, the analysis of data generated four main rich themes that I will discuss further over the following four chapters.

From this field work, I have gathered really interesting data from my generous participants, sharing their detailed daily life of practising motherhood and how they negotiate to became 'better mothers'. To learn from this procedure of data collection, I have some regrets, such as, I changed my focus of study in the procedure of the interviews. If I could look into 'good mothering' from the start of the field work instead of transferring from 'mother-daughter relationship', I would have prepared more detailed interview questions in accordance with my later focus, and more precise the data would be with more thorough preparation. But on the other hand, the transformation of my focus also indicated that how these Chinese mothers' experience of practising motherhood in China is different from what I have learnt from existing literatures, which is also the main reason for me the change the focus of this thesis. In addition, the procedure of collecting data would also have more improvements if I could prepare more in the ethical form. Furthermore, if I could adopt method of observation as well as interview, more valuable data could be collected during this field trip. However, as I was applying for ethical approval, I didn't listed observation as one of the research methods I'm going to use, therefore, I have to quit the idea of using observation in my later field work due to ethical concerns. If I'm doing similar research next time, I would definitely include observation to expand possibilities of interesting data that worth further discussion.

Moreover, I have struggled a lot at the first period of this field trip as I found it really hard to recruit participants. As an outsider who have staying in UK more than in China recent years, and as a single woman who could not feel the same as the mothers I interviewed. I got asked a lot about why I'm doing this research and I also got rejected a lot as people are unwilling to share their private stories or devote too much time in the interviews. If I have the chance to do similar research, I will adopt the method of 'gatekeeper' in the first place, as this method could transfer my position as an outsider quickly to an insider that looks more trustworthy and professional at the same time. This would narrow down my time of struggle and hesitation and give me more opportunity to communicate with more participants.

4. Maternal Engagement in Children's Early Childhood Education

In this chapter, the mothers emphasize on children's education will be discussed further according to the analysis of the interview data. The detailed analysis will be discussed in five main sections. The first section is an overall introduction of what is going on in China's early childhood education and the mothers' devotion in children's education in contemporary China. The second section would talk about mother's focus on children's formal education, which refers to the academic performance of children including children's grades in school and grades in extracurricular. The third section will talk about mothers emphasize on children's informal education from an Chinese cultural value, showing mothers' concern of educating their children into 'good human being' with good manner and excellent interpersonal skill. The fourth section will talk about mothers' reflection on their parenting methods, and their belief of love their children with 'constraint' and 'discipline' as responsibilities of a 'good mother' in everyday practising of motherhood. And the last section is the conclusion of the whole chapter, showing what is motherhood being understood by Chinese middle class heterosexual mothers with young children from the angle of children's education from early years.

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two we saw how the intensification of motherhood has been becoming a dominant cultural ideology for parenting in western societies (Hays, 1996). Within intensive mothering cultures, mothers are expected to put their children's needs above their own. Although, while mothers struggle between their work and their childcare arrangements to live up to the intensified mothering expectations, they would be better reframing and modifying what counts as 'good mothering' (Hattery, 2001)　as the ideology of 'intensive mothering' remains the mainstream influence on how mothers understand 'good mothering' (Christopher,

2012), and expectations still require mothers to devote an intensive amount of time, energy, and money to the child rearing process in western cultural contexts (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, Christensen, 2000). As explored in the literature review, sociological literature on parenting cultures in the west have emphasised the shift towards cultures of 'intensive mothering'. In China, ideas about what it means to be a 'good mother' have likewise, since the 2000s, emphasised the importance of following experts' advice and buying commodities and services in relation to child-rearing in order to foster the happy child. The discourse of constructing idealised motherhood has transformed from emphasising the state's discourse to the current discourse in which diversity, the State, commodities, experts, and gender all play a role in the idealisation of 'good mother' (Tao, 2016). In China, the child-rearing situation this generation is confronted with is the intensified and diversified requirements on mothers' responsibilities that are influenced by today's social and cultural changes. The idea of 'super mum' (Zhong, Guo, 2018) is on some level acknowledged and accepted by young mother s today. How then does this intensification relate to how mothers experience parental responsibilities related to children's education and emotional care in China?

As the following chapters will explore, there are similarities between parenting cultures in the west and in China, particularly in relation to ideas of the intensification of motherhood. However, this chapter will provide original insight into how cultures of 'intensive mothering' find distinctive expression in China in relation to children's education and expectations for children's high educational attainment in relation to early childhood educational activities in which a high percentage of children are signed up for extra-curricular courses. As discussed in Chapter Two, what is considered to be good for children's development and what is considered as 'good mothering' are socially and culturally related. Recent research has shown the active involvement of parents in the education of their children in China, demonstrating that middleclass parents are heavily invested in their children's extracurricular training in order to accomplish high expectations for their children's future (Zou, Anderson, & Komla, 2013). However, we know relatively little about how this relates to ideas about motherhood or what it means to be a good mother in everyday life. Therefore, this chapter will explore the ways in which broader ideas of 'intensive mothering', that have been described within western societies, are also feeding into middle-class everyday parenting practises in China, with expectations around time, energy and money in childrearing only increasing.

It is also important to consider differences that have already been identified in parenting styles in relation to decisions surrounding children's education, for example, demands for children's 'excellence' as we see exemplified by 'tiger mothers', and the ways in which ideas of love are closely related to Chinese cultural parental responsibility (Guo, 2013). Many scholars have pointed out specific differences in the understanding of parenting from the western view and the Chinese cultural context (Sha & Li, 2017; Lau & Yeung, 1997; Liu, Ng, Weatherall, & Loong, 2000; Quoss & Zhao, 1995), these changes in parents' engagement with education are related to broader shifts in the global educational landscape. Through recent social and economic changes due to neoliberalism, social stratification, and inequality in overall wealth and opportunity to access high-quality education, parents' investment in education is much more important than before (Connell & Dados, 2014; Teese, 2000, 2007; Piketty & Goldhammer, 2014). Hence, studies of parental engagement in the west have explored how changes in families' practises of socialisation, especially through the recent emergence of neoliberalism, have increasingly compelled parents to understand their affective engagement in relation to children's academic success (Aldeen & Windle, 2017). Research based on large-scale surveys in China show that the degree of participation in education by the mother is significantly greater than the father's participation, echoing media reports and studies based on statistics (Liu, 2019). Indeed, in a survey by Yu it was reported that the motherhood responsibility in children's education is more intense than that of fathers, whilst the third Chinese Women's Status survey showed that 38.8% of mothers independently assumed responsibility for their children, with the father's proportion being only 8.9% (Yu, 2018). In addition, qualitative interview-based research by Yisheng, Jin and others found that childhood education was the responsibility mainly of mothers, and the degree of fathers' participation was low, intermittent, and incidental. The time and energy of mothers' investment in childhood are generally, it is fair to say, significantly greater than that of fathers. This underscores the point that 'children's education is linked with motherhood' as well as the 'competition of motherhood' when it comes to children's academic achievement (Liu, 2019). These studies suggest that it has become a prevalent phenomenon that children's educational achievements in China are perceived as closely linked with mothers' involvement and investment of time and energy. The phenomenon of mothers' high involvement in children's early childhood education and the indication that most work associated with   children's education still falls on mothers indicates

that ideas of gender equality in relation to parental involvement in education are relatively stalled, and there is still widespread acceptance that mothers take on the bulk of responsibilities.

While existing literature suggests that ideas of intensive mothering have been influential, not only in western countries but also in China, in shaping middle-class parenting cultures, we currently know little about how this finds expression in women's everyday lives. There is also a lack of knowledge about how women's engagement with, and responsibilities for, early childhood education relates to and shapes ideas of what it is to be a good mother for middleclass women in China. Seeking to address these gaps, this chapter considers how the mothers in my study are 'intensively' devoted to their children's education, not only in terms of formal academic education, but also in relation to informal education that ultimately aims to shape their children into better human-beings. I argue overall that what counts as a 'good mother' for these women is shaped by ideas of 'intensive mothering' that are intimately bound up with an understanding of the mother's role in relation to education in early childhood in the contemporary Chinese context within both formal and informal education. Hence, this chapter reveals how what it is to be a 'good mother' in relation to children's early childhood education means seeking to ensure 'success' both academically and in life, in particular within middle-class Chinese social and cultural contexts.

4.2 Mother's Focus on Children's Academic Success: Formal Education

From previous literatures and the interviews I conducted both in Beijing and Xining, mothers took education really serious as one of the main task of mothers. Mothers would not only send their children to educational centres or learn more skills like music, computer, language or sport, they are acting as teachers themselves outside of school as well. Like what Kang said in the interview, she needs to teach her daughter English and math everyday after she get off work, and she felt like teaching her daughter and sending her to educational centre is necessary as a mother's responsibility. Providing better educational resource and ensure your children 'would not lose from the starter' is many mothers' belief of what a 'good mother' should do in the interviews.

4.2.1 Pouring Educational Resources on Children

From the interviews, I found that Chinese mothers not only invest intensively in children's formal academic education, but they are also prepared for their children's academic success from a very young age, prior to their entering formal education. The emphasis and investment in educational success is evident from my interviews in Beijing and Xining showing mothers in China have been spending significant amounts of energy, time, and money in investing in children's early childhood education and that they are signing up their children for activities from age one in order to maximise their children's future educational opportunities. For example, when I spoke to Fei, whose daughter was only one year old, I asked about whether she had already planned for her daughter's future study. Fei indicated that she already had her vision about what subjects her daughter should learn once she was a little older:

> I think when she grows up a little, I will send her to maths and English classes. Others do not matter; she can learn anything she wants. If it is for me, I want her to learn dancing.
>
> Fei [Beijing, 30 Years Old, Master's Degree, Doctor, One Child]

Although Fei's daughter was less than one year old, Fei already had a schedule for her, especially stressing the importance of maths and English. And although she believed she could provide her daughter freedom of choice in what she would like to learn, she hoped it would be dancing. Other mothers I interviewed also mentioned signing their children up for several extracurricular courses, with the most frequently mentioned being English, Maths, Piano, and Dancing. Signing up for these curricula was a common circumstance for my interviewees:

> Amanda [From Beijing, 30 Years Old, Master's, Teacher, One Child]: I have a specific aim of what she should learn. I hope she can keep practising

75

piano and if she can stick to dancing, that would be good as well. But I found out she is not that flexible like other little girls; so, I've practically given up on dancing. I don't know whether I could insist on her playing piano, but I really want her to.

Jing [From Beijing, 38 Years Old, Master, Stay-at-home Mum, One Child]: I send my daughter to English and maths classes every day. Soon she will go to primary school so these classes will prepare her for it, and I think she likes them. She also studies piano and technology class. I think if you have 24 hours a day, you cannot let your child have nothing to do. I do not think it is a tough thing for children to learn stuff, but they need to learn things they are interested in. Her kindergarten has ten classes for them, like music, ballet, street dance, sports, art.

Cai [From Beijing, 40 Years Old, Master's, Online English Teacher, One Child]: my daughter goes to art, drawing and piano class, and the kindergarten she attends is specialised in teaching piano lessons. She also goes to English classes. All the children I know attend English classes.

From these women's words, we see that aside from participants whose child is under one year old, these mothers, like my other participants, send their children to at least two to three early years classes, including early classes that stress the importance of maths and English to prepare their children for primary school. They also sign their children up for other early years classes such as piano, dancing, and drawing, trying to cultivate their children to know at least one or two extra-curricular skills. This phenomenon of sending children to various early years educational courses was described as a very common situation, especially in urban contexts, by the mothers I interviewed. Despite their regional differences, mothers in both Qinghai and Beijing chose to sign their children up for early education classes as they believed it was necessary for their children's development and they were willing to invest significant resources in terms of time and money on this. Xiaoshan Lin (2019) argued that the core purpose of

spending money on childhood education in today's urban families is to 'purchase hope'. Parents regard the means of promoting the child's education as a means of promoting the success of the child in the future, and social class status is enhanced through the accumulation of cultural capital. As children's education becomes invested as a symbol of hope for the future of the family, fully investing time, energy, and money has become an intensified responsibility for mothers. When I visited an early education centre in Qinghai, I saw many mothers waiting outside the classroom for hours for their children to finish their classes and they would watch their children's behaviour during class through the window. The price of these classes is typically high compared to the local average income, and the mothers waiting outside would usually spend their whole weekends with their children at these kinds of educational centres. Mothers in both Beijing and Qinghai take children's education seriously, and the decisions they make in relation to their children's education are not only influenced by the commercialisation of children's education and the growth of these early childhood educational centres, but also because of their sense that giving their children these kinds of advantages will enable them to have access to better schools as they grow up.

4.2.2 Educational Expectation on Children's Academic Performance

Through the interviews, these mothers' significant investment in children's education in terms of time and resources was evident, and they described the rise of these early childhood educational centres and their emphasis on pouring educational resources onto their children as a means of enabling their access to 'better' schools. Many schools have high entrance requirements asking children to not only have basic knowledge in traditional curriculum subjects such as English and maths, but also prefer children with specialist skills in music, sports and other areas:

> Kang [From Beijing, 41 Years Old, Master's Degree, Insurance, One Child]: Now China has these kinds of classes for preschool children, and children stay there from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. They also provide lunch and dinner; teaching

and training your children from pre-school. It's like putting your children in prison, but your children improve quickly, so many parents are willing to spend a fortune on this. Many parents who care about grades will prefer this, but many Chaoyang (District in Beijing) parents will prefer various extracurricular classes, such as skating, figure skating, and hockey. Many parents send their children to the US to study hockey. And in my company, there is one colleague who let her daughter learn the French horn. Playing the French horn is a lot of effort. I heard it is very difficult, but you are basically the chief if you make it. The school she went to is considered to be very good. In Chaoyang there are different types of classes. If you want to go to a good class, you need to have some skills, but everyone can play piano and violin, so you need to have something special. This is the education situation right now.

From Kang's words, we see how children are being exposed to a range of educational resources. Due to fierce competition for access to the 'best' schools and the broader situation of middle-class children attending many kinds of early educational curricula, mothers not only feel responsible for sending their children to many different types of classes, but also try to help their children master as least one skill that is in some way special or more impressive than the more commonly taken courses such as piano or violin. As Kang elaborated further on these themes, we gain further insight into how mothers consider their responsibilities to provide for their children academically:

Interviewer: What will your child learn?

Kang: Our family is currently choosing violin; I want to train her to play violin

Interviewer: The violin is also difficult

Kang: It's very hard, right! The violin is difficult. I learned the violin when I was a child. I know how painful the violin is. Actually, the guzheng may be relatively comfortable, but the violin is a little tired. The most common

practising time per day is over five hours and if you want to be a professional, it's upwards of ten hours per day. The violin can't be learnt without this. At present, the resource I can provide her (child) is the elementary school that pays more attention to string music. The school has a symphony orchestra. My husband's sister's child plays the cello in it. I went to this school before. When I was there, I saw a little boy in that school who was already very good at playing the violin. He was still practising piano there. His parents were very strict with him and asked him to master all the other instruments as they believe if you learn to do this, the rest will follow. He was about seven years old, and he was already playing very well. It seems that he must start practising at the age of three, and it is like this in China now, and it feels very urgent. Nowadays, most of them are taking training courses like, logical thinking, reasoning, and brain training. Those who practise with their hands can no longer be appreciated, and those who practise with their hands only fall behind. Painting and dancing can only cultivate temperament. To really survive in society in the future, it may require more in terms of brain

From Kang's description of the types of skills and qualifications she felt a child should have, based on her own mothering experience and the story of others she knew, we see how she articulates a sense that under conditions of fierce educational competition in China, parents feel that their children need to develop not only multiple skills in music and sports, but should also take courses related to logical thinking and brain training. As these expectations on children intensify, as in the case of one boy who started to learn instruments from age three, the expectation on mothers to provide their children with as many educational resources as possible is also intensified. The 'good mother' therefore becomes one who fulfils these responsibilities. Kang as a 'good mother', focused most of her energy on to her children's education. She even changed jobs just to have more flexible time to be with her children, which is a huge sacrifice for her.   Seeing her says that: 'I haven't been staying outside for this long after I have my daughter! This is the first time I have some me time after work!', I sensed the intensified requirements on mothers' devotion in children's education and to the whole child-rearing process, and Kang's huge sacrifice after she became a mother.

The mothers I spoke to saw these extracurricular activities as necessary for the development of their children, resonating with broader discourses of the 'malleable infant', which Vincent and Ball (2006) have described in relation to western contexts. Children's intellectual and physical development is considered as open to continual improvement, and it is the responsibility of caregivers, and especially mothers, to provide the right guidance. Mothers are thus, as my participants' narratives indicate, expected to respond to this idea by helping their children to achieve their full potential by providing them with as many opportunities as they can to develop physically and intellectually, including actions such as sending them to various extra-curricular activities and providing their children with access to as many educational resources as possible to stimulate their development. Another point that came into notice was that I found out that although mothers in Beijing and Xining both send their children to all kinds of extra-curriculums and learn different skills, Beijing mothers like Kang seems to be more keen on adopting this kind of intensive mothering idea, as they experienced more pressure from the fierce competition of educational resource. Like Kang said: 'the school entrance

requirements became strict than ever, it requires children to have various skills so that they can have access to these school and normal skills like piano sometimes became not enough anymore, you have to specialized in something others don't to earn your chances.' Under pressured environment and a more developed and commercialized educational markets, mothers in Beijing seems more devoted into children's education compared to mothers in Xining. Beijing mothers like Kang usually tried to have a clear schedule of what their children should learn and which school their children should fight to enter. While in Xining, a small city where the school entrance requirements are less harsh than Beijing, and most public schools do not require interviews before entrance, or acquire children to have various skills in order to access to better educational resources. However, mothers in Xining still assigned their children with various courses. Like what Fang said:

> You can see early educational centres everywhere, and everybody around you send their children to these institutions, you feel like if you don't do the same, your children would fall behind or lose something due to this. Sometimes you have to send your children to learn more skills. And enter

various courses could also help with his communication skill so that he could get along with his classmates or later when he enters the workplace.

We could see that mothers in Xining were clearly also influenced by the commercialized market of children's education and the adoption of intensive mothering, but without the fierce competition for school entrance, at least for primary school, their adoption of intensive way of mothering is more bound by the commercialized educational market, and less devoted in time and energy, although still a lot of energy being contributed to children's education, but less compared to mothers in Beijing. But they have a common view that if they immerse their children in all kinds of educational resources, they could definitely be more developed.

The notion of the 'malleable infant' also resonates with Confucian culture shared by Chinese praise education and the belief that social achievement comes from continuous endeavour and good education and can lead to upward social mobility ((Liu et al. 2020). The mothers I spoke with expressed their belief in the idea of the 'malleable baby', and they therefore devoted much energy to their children's early education and to stimulating their children's intelligence and cognitive capacities from an early age. In contrast with some western ideas of ability as innate and hard to change (Stevenson & Stigler, 1994), Chinese parents generally choose to encourage their children to work harder on academic achievements and are willing to make effort and sacrifice with regard to children's education. Ekblad (1986) also points out that the Chinese orientation toward children's socialisation is more moralistic rather than psychological, shaped by the influence of Confucianism. The individual is believed, in a Confucian worldview, to have infinite potential for their own achievement, which can be fulfilled through diligent and hard work (Ekblad, 1986, Suzuki, 1980, Kelly & Tseng, 1992).

The emphasis on parents' responsibility for children's education in China is widely accepted across the range of social class status and parents are expected to invest and make sacrifices for children's development, including education. Drawing on Confucian cultural ideals, parents are expected to take full responsibility for their children's development and the training of their behaviours, acting in a pedagogical role to regulate, discipline, train and educate children (Kelly & Tseng, 1992). While existing studies have demonstrated that most Chinese

parents have high educational expectations for their children and consider it as their responsibility to provide their children with a good education (Liu & Xie, 2015) and hard work is stressed in Chinese culture as a way to success (Li & Wang, 2004; Guo, 2013), the experiences of the women I interviewed suggest that for many middle-class families, attending extra-curricular classes has become the standard expectation for urban families, and a 'good mother' is understood as one who secures her children's future academic excellence through these means. Thus, rather than constantly engaging with her children herself at weekends for example, the 'good mother' here has responsibility for sourcing and employing others to resource her children with the requisite cultural capital, while she herself often spends time waiting outside her children's classes for them to finish. In addition, due to the uneven distribution of education resources and educational opportunities, competition to invest in children's education is constantly intensifying, and there are standard expectations and hopes to produce high quality children. Furthermore, commercial forces also shape consumption values and promote these extracurricular activities as not only complementing school, but more importantly, delivering excellence, which in turn, influence wider ideals that children should be attending more courses than above the expected standard. And without a detailed plan for their children's educational development, a mother is seen as 'not good enough' (Chen, 2021). As the education market continues to expand and stimulate demand, anxieties surrounding education are constantly being created for mothers to achieve their responsibility as 'good mothers' in response to these social and cultural changes.

4.3 Children's Paths to Becoming a 'Good Human-being': Informal Education

As well as responsibilities for securing their children's academic excellence, Chinese mothers are also responsible for helping children to develop a sense of self and endorsing cultural values. Confucianism remains an important influence on expectations of what it is to be a good child, and the understanding of the self that the mother is expected to help develop is always linked with the social and cultural surroundings. Let us turn then to look at how mothers understand their role as mothers in relation to these more informal pedagogical ideas.

4.3.1 Conscious Passing on Confucian Ideas of the 'Well-behaved Human-being'

We have considered above how mothers are trying to devote as many educational resources to their children as possible, and that seeking to enable their children's academic accomplishments is considered as an important aspect of their responsibility as mothers. Yet regardless of their children's actual achievements in formal education, most mothers stress the importance of their pedagogical role as mothers in terms of shaping their children's good moral character and behaviour according to social and Confucian cultural rules. Supporting their children's capacity for following moral rules and good behaviour are taken seriously by mothers in relation to their understanding of what it is to be a 'good mother'. Lorna's emphasis on national identity below, shows her sense of distinctively Chinese cultural values when she discusses her role as an educator of her children, stressing importance of teaching her children traditional Chinese Confucian values, such as a sense of respect for older generations:

> Lorna [From Beijing, 34 Years Old, Master's, Bank Clerk, Two Children]: You should understand that we are Chinese, so when we educate our children, there's certain rules like you need to respect people older than you.

As well as emphasising the importance of inculcating these moral 'rules', mothers also sent their children to educational institutions to learn these cultural values. There are many educational institutions in China aimed at pre-school children which seek to enable them to experience and learn Chinese traditional culture, such as cultural norms of respect for older generations and Chinese traditional arts, such as calligraphy. These kinds of institutions take Confucian cultural values and Chinese traditional culture and civilisation as their key educational focus and emphasise the value of children learning from Chinese traditional culture, for example, learning manners and developing good behaviours through engaging with ancient stories and poetry. This kind of emphasis is also widespread in early childhood education institutions.

During the past century, the early childhood education curriculum in China has undergone a series of transformations, shaped by the interaction between local cultural and global forces (Li & Chen, 2017). Against this backdrop, my participants described how they hoped to draw on what they considered to be the valuable elements of 'traditional' Chinese culture and discard aspects that they felt were no longer suitable, in response to changes within society which emphasised authority and granted autonomy in different situations. Summer, for example, expressed this sensibility:

> Summer [From Beijing, 46 Years Old, Master, Child Education, Two Children]: I paid a lot of attention to rules like respecting the elderly. From the age of four years old, every Saturday and Sunday, my two daughters have gone to a Confucius Institute, teaching Chinese traditional culture. With more pressure on children to gain more skills and higher grades, it is easy to neglect children's moral development. We have to focus on quality education, guide children's mental health, and teach them how to be a good human being first. And this kind of institution is teaching Chinese traditional culture but using western teaching modes, to encourage children to participate and interact through play.

While my participants agreed with an emphasis on their children having autonomy, which they perceive as bound up with western ideas of parenting, at the same time, they still believe that there are valuable aspects of traditional Chinese culture which should not be neglected. Besides the study of Chinese traditional arts, such as Guzheng or Erhu, this form of education focuses on the child becoming a 'good human-being' with basic moral traits. When comparing the anxiety and confusion associated with various scientific child-rearing advice with the government's promotion on Chinese traditional culture as an essential aspect of child rearing, several of my participants expressed their doubts or feelings of inadequacy in relation to advice from experts and mass media. However, few expressed doubts in relation to their sense of duty to raise a 'morally correct' child, understood in terms of ideas of what it means to be a 'good human-being' in traditional Chinese culture. Thus, although mothers are devoting their time, energy, and money to child-rearing, and demonstrating the intensification of mothering taking

place in China that is also widespread across western contexts, their basic criterion for childrearing relates to particular traditional Chinese cultural values.

4.3.2 Emphasis on Interpersonal Relationships

In western cultures, the family is often considered as a place responsible for helping children to establish their understanding of self and ability to lead an independent life in which individuality is achieved (Kagitcibasi, 2013). The development of self is often seen as linked in western culture with children's autonomy, since conformity is believed to be driven by externally imposed social rules, while the self is guided by behaviours from an individual's own inner standard. An analysis of western magazines about parenting found that from 300 child-rearing advice articles, individualistic cultural values have shifted attention from public participation to private self-expression, diminishing children's public autonomy, such as restricted freedom of movement, while more autonomy was granted to free expression in private spaces and more emphasis was being placed by parents on the formation of self (Markella & Rutherford, 2009).   As already described in Chapter Two, the ways in which ideas about parental authority and children's autonomy are seen as related has influenced discourses about children's socialisation (Dixon et al. 2008). Thus, in many western literatures about parenting, the parent-child relationship is understood as a relationship that should help to promote children's development of self, and this self is the formation of autonomy and individualism, while parental authority is a way to promote children's independence rather than dependence and compliance (Mullin, 2014). In this sense, ideas of individualism in western culture have contributed to an understanding of parenting as the accomplishment of a separate and independent self. In contrast, as outlined in Chapter Two, Chinese society is underpinned by an understanding that everyone is interdependent with each other, and all are connected within particular social networks (Wang & Zheng, 2016). The formulation of self, and therefore the child, thus acknowledges and develops relations and interaction with others, both within the family and outside, in relation to rules such as the obligation of filial piety. Indeed, without the proper acknowledgement of social relationships or certain social roles in relation to the family and other social networks, the true self cannot be achieved (Wang & Zheng, 2016).

Although these ideas have changed over time, ideas about how parents should be raising their children are still shaped by Confucian values (Chao, 1995). Thus, children in China are expected to become competent adults who understand social norms and are able to exercise self-restraint and develop good interpersonal relationships (Chen, 2000, Chen et al., 2003, Liu et al., 2005, Wu, 1996). This was something that several of my participants emphasised. Yang, for example, described this as follows:

> Yang [From Xining, 40 Years Old, PhD, Professor, Two Children]: I think the most important thing for child-rearing is not good grades, but good physical and mental health. And you need to teach your child the basic skills to live independently and to deal with things and relationships with others.

Compared with western parenting expectations to rear children with the capacity to be independent, my participants articulated a greater emphasis on parenting in the context of China in terms of their role in developing their children's responsibility for their surroundings, such as love for the nation, love for their parents, and learning how to deal with interpersonal relationships and social relationships (Guan, 1994). The mothers spoke about how they used their authority in order to develop children's ability to live well in society as interdependent human beings, rather than being an independent individual. They also stressed how they sought to enable their children to achieve better interpersonal relationships as part of their understanding of what it meant to be a good parent. Kang, for example, said:

> Kang: When you grow up, the ability to deal with interpersonal relationships is very necessary as this is your emotional intelligence that can protect you and help you succeed in social life. If you do not have a good personality, you will not have friends. We are Chinese, and interpersonal relationships are very important when you grow up and enter society.

Overall, in relation to children's informal education, my participants' narratives suggest that they consider teaching their children to *Zuo Ren* (Be a Good Human Being) is the most

important aspect of their pedagogical role as a mother. For most Chinese mothers in the interviews, the basic goal they have is to establish their child to be a good human being who has a good moral character and ability to communicate and socialise with other people. These parenting ideas are consistent with the idea of the self in Chinese social and cultural context, in which people are seen as fundamentally interconnected and living interdependently. Raising children who know how to be a human being with good moral traits and ability to develop good interpersonal relationships was thus a common goal for the mothers I spoke to.

We could see that different from the previous study of Chinese education's focus on children's academic performance, some mothers even believe being a 'good human being' is much more important than grades in school. To be a well-behaved human being and a person would have the capacity of dealing with interpersonal relationship is seen by mothers as a necessary skills mother must teach their children in order to survive in the future. From another angle, the burden falls on mothers also increased due to this change of focus in children's education. Mothers would have to concern about not only children's formal education, but also their informal education so that they could have a better chance to 'survive and have a better life in the future'.

4.4 Self-reflection on Motherhood Responsibility in Children's Education

Alongside their focus on their children's academic performance and their informal education, my participants would constantly reflect on their parenting methods and their sense of progress during the process of practising motherhood. In the process of educating their children, they developed somewhat different mothering styles, among which there are some similarities, as I will explore below: the idea that a mother's love should have rules and disciplines, that love should be given with constraint, and their searching for the balance of authority and autonomy when they act as educators for their children.

4.4.1 Love and Discipline

This section will talk about how mothers view control and discipline as a way of love. Different from the traditional authoritarian figure of mothers, mothers see the ways of 'scolding' or 'controlling' children as a way of 'being good and responsible mother'. In the previous literatures, the parenting style such as 'scolding' the children or 'spanking' the children are seen as authoritarian that children are the ones who obey, and parents are the ones make decision and commands (Grusec, 2002). Different from the old image of parents as authority, although mothers sometimes using extreme ways of punishing their children, they are trying to push their children to have capacity of be a more self-regulated and independent person who should have their own thoughts and perspectives. Mothers consider spanking and scolding as a way of 'constraint love' rather than a way of punishing their own children. Like what have been mentioned in the literature review chapter about the influence of neoliberalism in China, a personal development of individual ability, and expectation of people being responsible for their own decision and development (Bakker, 2007) has also show an empirical evidence in my interviews of what mothers seek to raise their children into.

4.4.1.1 Spanking and Scolding as a Way of 'Love'

As described above, Confucianism still deeply influences contemporary Chinese society and parenting cultures. One way in which this is expressed is in terms of an emphasis on the process of achieving goals as parents through terms such as 'training' and *guan (*Control*)* to establish rules and discipline (Chao, 1994; Shenghong & Dan, 2004; Luo, MeMonda & Song, 2013). In some extreme cases, sometimes parents would discipline their children in order to try to create obedience, and sometimes mothers would choose to spank their children. In the interviews, these women expressed a belief that spanking was an effective way of training and educating children:

Xiong [From Beijing, 31 Years Old, Master's, Teacher, One Child]: I think that even if I spank my child, it will just be slightly. I will not really hit him, because I think if it is like when you lose temper, and you don't do it very often, it will have no effect on him. When he does things wrong, I threaten to spank him, but do not really spank him. I will set up some rules for him before he is three years old, or else it will be harder later. But you should let him know what kind of things make you angry.

Guan also described spanking her child, and articulated a sense that spanking was more widely accepted as the norm in rural areas of China:

Guan [From Xining, 36 Years Old, Bachelor's, Auditor, Two Children]: My son is very naughty. Sometimes I spank him. My husband also spanks my son when he gets angry. His family all think children need to be spanked. Especially his family, who are from a rural area, where it is common for them to spank children.

Similar to Xiong, Guan said that she would force her son to listen to her and behave by letting him know in what situations she would be angry at him and would punish him. He was, she said, aware that if his mother was angry, she would spank him and as a result he learnt to behave when his mother is angry. Although it was not common for the mothers to spank their children as Guan did, most of them described having threatened to spank their children as Xiong did or giving them a light spanking when they thought they had to. Participants' descriptions indicated that there were situations in which mothers would force their children to do what they believed was good for them, sometimes shouting at their children or spanking them. Yet these methods were seen by these participants as appropriate methods that mothers should use to educate their child to be a good person. Guan said, spanking children was not considered as inappropriate for parents as a form of discipline.

This reflects traditional sayings echoing these cultural norms such as 'to spank and scold is the emblem of love' and 'a kind mother makes a wastrel', indicating a broader Chinese cultural understanding of a good mother as one who is willing to take harsh measures to ensure her child's good future. This idea is expressed in a widespread ancient story about good parenting, about a great person called Mencius (Men Zi) who grew up to be a reputable Confucian. When he was a child, his mother moved three times in order that her son had better opportunities for a good education. From ancient times, China has been seen as a country that believes that education is very important for children and mothers have long been believed to be responsible for the education and training of their children. In order to train your children to become a good human being and have a good future, expressing love through methods that could be seen as 'control' or 'forceful' from western perspectives would be seen as being a good, responsible mother in China.

A story shared by Hu, a young Chinese mother in Xining reveals a clearer picture of Chinese understandings of love as interwoven with an understanding of *guan* (Control) and *jiao* (Teaching) of a child as central obligations for parents. Thus, spanking and scolding are interpreted as ways of expressing love:

> Interviewer: Do you spank your child?
>
> Hu: Yes. I would spank him when he made a mistake. I always do it while he is making the mistake, not afterwards, because he can only understand at the time. If you tell him afterwards, it is useless, as he will not understand.
>
> Interviewer: So, for example, would you spank him in front of other people?
>
> Hu: It depends. Because his grandparents used to take care of him before and they spoiled him with no rules. For example, they let my child climb on the table while eating. He was only one year old, and he didn't know how to walk but his grandparents habitually let him crawl on the dining table. Since he didn't understand, he thought he could crawl on the table for his own convenience. Then when he could walk at around two years old, he

would still climb up habitually. Thus, he was spanked several times by me. And one time, he climbed onto the dining table when we were visiting other people, and I spanked him in front of others, because that was the situation at the time. He must be spanked at that time, so he was spanked

Interviewer: Do you think it will affect him psychologically?

Hu: Well, I don't know. Like I said, thinking about it from his position is very hard. This is a difficult problem for many people. I don't know what effect it will have on his mental health, but my understanding is just that he had to be corrected at that time, because this happened many times. It took about four to five months to correct his behaviour, and he was spanked about five or six times. He is not crawling on the table now, and now sits there properly

Interviewer: So, do you think it is an effective way?

Hu: The effect, yes, it is effective at present, but if you say it will affect him, I think it will not, but I don't know. As I have said, I can't think from his perspective. This is a very difficult question.

Interviewer: Are you worried about causing any harm to him?

Hu: No, I'm not worried about it as I feel that if things like this can have an impact on him, then how about all the difficulties he may confront in life in the future?

Considering Hu's story from her perspective, when she spanked her child to change his habit of crawling onto the dining table, she believed she was not harming her son by spanking him, but that it was all for his own good. She highlights this by saying, 'it is effective at present', because 'he must be corrected'. However, her words 'he may not understand' suggest some sense of uncertainty about whether spanking will harm her son mentally, but she still believes she is doing the right thing as a responsible mother and that she is disciplining her son to form better habits and to be stronger in facing future challenges he might encounter. Therefore, although in western cultures, spanking children and corporal punishment are widely recognised

as harmful approaches to parenting, many of my participants understood these practises as expressions of parental love and part of their responsibility to set up clear rules and boundaries that would ultimately benefit their children's future. Thus, these more disciplinarian modes of mothering were believed to be important in determining their children's future in society. As Hu described, she could not understand from her son's perspective whether what she was doing was good or bad, but she did believe that what she is doing is for the best of her son both in the present and for his future.

4.4.1.2 Rules are Rules

The interviews also revealed other instances of how mothers sought to establish rules for their children. Besides seeking to develop good habits in their children, they also set up rules in regard to their children's education, both informal, such as developing a hobby, and formal, such as their child's performance in school. We can see this, for example, in Cai's story of negotiating with her child in relation to piano practise:

> Cai: When she does not want to practise piano, she bargains with me and will say can I just practise this part two times? I will say, no, you need to play three times. Or when we reschedule piano practise from 7 o'clock to 9 o'clock, she still asks if she can skip it today. I will shout at her at critical moments; this is my recent parenting method. I think at the beginning, I could be patient and talk with her, but if she does not listen, I have to force her. She has to practise. But I think compared to other families, when children have to practise for hours, we are already lacking discipline, but I am satisfied when she practises for 20 minutes a day. I think even a very intelligent and hardworking child has times when they do not want to practise. So, I do not think she does not like piano, she is just lazy. I found this on a forum when a person asked the teacher whether it is too late for her to learn an instrument, the response was, yes, because your parents can't

spank you anymore. My child's piano teacher also spanks her own child when her child does not want to practise.

Here we see that some of the mothers I interviewed were willing to give their children more freedom to express their feelings than other families. Cai and Lorna both mentioned that 'compared with other families', they believed they were placing less pressure and rules on their children than other families they know. Furthermore, they were giving their children room to negotiate, like Cai, who described how she negotiated with her daughter about practising the piano. However, Cai stressed that her daughter still has to practise piano every day and although she would allow some negotiation on issues such as how long she needed to practise, she still believed the best way was to force her daughter as the authority by shouting at her. Moreover, although the negotiation indicates Cai's effort to allow her daughter some autonomy, she still believed that when she as mother decides whether something is necessary and cannot be negotiated if 'there is no reason'. Therefore, we see how the basic rules were still set by Cai in relation to how she considered herself as educator and that she was ultimately in a position to decide what was best for her daughter. Observing families around her, she concluded that the better way to help children learn an instrument is through authority and punishment. Overall, the process of Cai trying to persuade her daughter to practise the piano entails both her granting autonomy and imposing authority. Alongside such instances of granting limited autonomy, most of the mothers I spoke to still believed authority was the better way to solve conflict and believed their decision would be better for their children. Lorna also expressed this view:

Lorna: Most of the time, I am not that strict, but if your child does not have self-control, you cannot expect your child to know how to arrange time, or start doing homework first, or play piano. It is the nature of children that they only want to play. So how to form a good habit is for parents to force them to do the correct thing.

Mothers like Lorna and Cai viewed themselves as mothers who were not that strict in their role as supporting their children's education, both formally and informally. Nevertheless, they

93

were also conscious that they would force their children to follow rules that they set, as they believe it is their duty to implement what, in their view, are better choices for their children than those that their children might make for themselves. Although they believed that their children should express their own feelings and have their own thoughts, they also felt that their children had not formed good enough habits of self-control as they were still children, and as their mothers, it was ultimately their responsibility to make rules and instil discipline.

Although most of the time, when the negotiation proved fruitless, mothers often chose to force their children into obeying their rules, they are not trying to punish their children, but to push them into being self-regulated person. Some participants also reflected on how they might find better ways to implement these rules rather than shouting at their children or giving punishments, in this process, mothers are trying to figure out more effective strategies to teach their children to form good habits and learn to stick to their choices instead of giving up when there are difficulties:

> Jing [From Beijing, 38 Years Old, Master's, Stay-at-Home Mum, One Child]: When I think it is the thing she must do, and she is not doing it, I will yell at her. But later on, I realised it was not right, and I bought a book called 'Guide your children from the Positive Side', and I try to use strategies from the book.

> Lemon [From Beijing, 34 Years Old, Master's, Stay-at-Home Mum, One Child]: I know I have many shortcomings when raising my son, but it is hard to change. For instance, I always shout at him and use rhetorical questions. I actually don't think he understands at all, but I think it will influence him.

From Jing and Lemon's reflection on their mothering practises, we see these mothers trying to find better ways to implement discipline as they raise their children, but they do not let go of their rules when they believe it is right for their children. When it came to educating their children, they all had a sense of basic boundaries, but at the same time they would try to

understand their children's perspectives, as Lemon did, when she thought her son didn't understand why she was shouting at him, and as a result she tries to engage with her son in more gentle and reasonable ways. In the process of Lemon reflecting on her own behaviour and her observation of her son's reaction to her educational methods, Lemon was trying to explore a better way of negotiating and communicating with her son rather than just act as an authority figure.

In addition, not only did mothers I interviewed consider themselves as having an educational role in raising their children, but the schools also commonly set assignments for parents to fulfil, reinforcing their role as not only parents but also educators. My participants described how schools have transferred many responsibilities onto parents, shaping this sense of their pedagogical role. For cases like Kang, who voluntarily teach her daughter as an educator, some of the mothers felt forced to act as a role of teacher because school has giving parents tasks to regulate and teach their children after school time:

> Xiao: The school also asks parents to control (*guan*) their children. When anything happens, the teacher always calls me and asks me to guide (*guan*) my child and examine my child's homework. If on the following day, the homework handed in still has any mistakes, the teacher calls and blames the parent immediately. School has passed the buck to parents.

> Cai [From Beijing, 40 Years Old, Master, Online English Teacher, One Child]: Kindergarten will give children a lot of assignments that can only be accomplished by parents.

Xiao and Cai's experience reveals that not only did mothers have a sense of the importance of their pedagogical role for their children, kindergartens and primary schools also helped shape this idea of parents as having core responsibilities in relation to education, which also reinforced mothers' roles as educators in daily life. And like Cai said about the complexity of the tasks

given by the school, grandparents could not help with the task even when they are willing to. Like Cai said: 'The school ask every child to make a huge poster about whether changes after school, they have to write things on paper, and drawing things on paper. Moreover, a lot of information need to be download online, which is really hard for the grandparents, and the children could not do it on their own. Eventually, the tasks all fall onto mothers to finish'. Cai's story has shown an increasing emphasize of mothers acting as educators for their children after school time, and due to the knowledge gap and the complexity of tasks, most of the work are still doing by mothers. The Mothers' duties are increasing due to their multiple positions as children's mothers, friends, and educators, which all lead to the intensification of motherhood during the child-rearing process.

My participants' stories reveal how mothers set up rules for their children in relation to their sense of themselves as responsible for the education of their children in different ways. For children under seven years old, although mothers were trying to communicate with their children during negotiations, children were still considered less capable of understanding and communicating with adults. As Lemon and Lorna said, children were believed by mothers to have 'no self-control' and 'unable to understand what happened'. From this perspective mothers were prone to use more radical ways to force children to do things on their schedule when they thought it was necessary. In the mother-child relationships, mothers are still understood to be the ones who make commands and requests, no matter whether it is by negotiation or through means such as shouting, glaring, or criticising. Children, in this view, are the ones who comply and accept. As Xiao articulated, 'I think I'm your mother, so you have to be obedient'. But mothers also reflected on their mothering practises and tried to find better ways to establish rules and discipline for their children. They would learn from childrearing guidance books and experts, and also reflect on their own experiences as children themselves when they were young, so that they could protect their children's mental health, maintain a good mother-child relationship, as well as establish rules and disciplines they insist will be beneficial to their children.

4.4.2 Love with control

From the stories above, we see that mothers I interviewed expressed an understanding of a mother's love as intertwined with discipline and rules. As well as setting up rules when educating their children, they also mentioned their reflection on practising motherhood, how to love with constraint and learning to control themselves, referring both to their temper when their children did something wrong, and the urge to help when their children failed to learn something. A responsible mother was seen as a mother who could control themselves to love with responsibility and constraint. This was a theme that Sunny discussed:

> Sunny [From Xining, 34 Years Old, Master, Civil Servant, One Child]: when I raise my child, I want to make some changes as I think my parents raised me with excessive control. I did not realise it when I was a child. I only started to notice it this year. I think they controlled me without saying explicitly what they wanted me to do in life, but I listened, and that is why I do not have my own views. I think they controlled me in the name of love.

In contrast with Sunny's parents, Sunny believed she controlled herself in order to give her children more freedom of choice in life. Reflecting on her own childhood experiences, she wanted to make changes in her own mothering practises. If for her, love and control were linked together for the older generation to constrain the children, love and control are linked together for her to control herself from interfering with her child's own life decisions. Also reflecting on their parents' anger, some mothers also described their sense of the importance of controlling their temper for the good of their children:

> Kang: When I was in primary school, my mother taught me maths, and it was the part I would not learn before middle school. Thus, I could not understand it when she tried to illustrate something several times, and she got angry and spanked me. She was very arbitrary to me. I felt afraid when

she was teaching me maths. So, I try very hard to control my temper when I teach my daughter.

Interviewer: Do you think you will spank your child?

Kang: No! Spanking children makes no difference. What is hard to solve are problems rather than losing your temper.

Instead of losing her temper with or spanking her children when they were doing things wrong, Kang tried her best to reflect on her own childhood experience and articulated the belief that it would be better to control one's temper rather than lose it when you educate your children. From Kang's perspective, being a mother means to control and sacrifice one's own feelings and temper for the good of their children. Mothers have become a more 'benevolent' role, who should put the children's feeling in front of her own. Xiao's story similarly showed her transition in parenting methods, showing a changing process from venting her feelings to now trying to restrain herself from losing her temper and trying to treat her child as an equal:

Xiao [From Beijing, 32 Years Old, Bachelor, Civil Servant, One Child]: When my son does things wrong, like spilling something, I will criticise him immediately and even glare at him. But now I will restrain myself. I have not thought about it before, I just thought I am your mother, so you have to be obedient.

Xiao also reflected on her own behaviours as mother and reconsidered whether it is good for her children if she loses her temper on her son. In the procedure of educating her son, Xiao is also trying to figure out new ways of negotiation rather than just being an authority mother. Some of my participants also mentioned how when trying to teach their children to learn specific things, they could find it hard to control their temper when their children could not understand or learnt very slowly. Kang mentioned a story about how mothers today try to control their own love in order to educate better children:

Kang: My husband was spoiled by his parents, and he grew up having no basic ability to live on his own. Before we got married, he didn't know how to make the bed. Therefore, after I had my daughter, I couldn't let them spoil her into becoming the same person. When I taught her to put on trousers on her own, it was a really long journey, you have to wait patiently to see her numerous failures and slow motions to do it wrong again and again, but you need to hold your urge to put on her trousers for her. You need to control yourself so that she can learn. If you help her, it seems that you save time at first, but you actually take away her chance of learning on her own, and then you raise a spoiled child.

Kang's idea of responsible mothering demonstrates, I would argue, the changing notion of what it means to be a 'good mother' for my interviewees. We see that mothers are trying to seek changes to be a better mother while educating their children. Many of them mentioned they have continued the way their parents educated them first, when their children were doing things wrong, they would choose to scold or even spank their children, and it could sometimes be hard to hold their temper. However, many also mentioned their desire to make changes and to try to control their tempers, and their desire to adopt more gentle and democratic methods which respected their children's autonomy, such as negotiation and giving suggestions rather than making commands. To be a 'good mother', they are trying to constraint their own feelings and care more about their children's feelings. The word 'control' in parenting which used to refer to the parenting style, is now also referring to the 'control of self' from mothers' perspectives. Echo with neoliberalism's influence in parenting style in China in the previous literature chapter, the impact of neoliberalism has pushed people to take responsibility for themselves (Kruk, 2017). This includes the transformation of parenting and mother-child relationships. From the interviews, we could see that not only did the children's individual development being stressed, and mother's responsibility on their own children's development was obvious evidential. The role of mother is also required to improve themselves as mother in various ways to be a 'better mother'. The 'control of self' mothers in my research stressed is also empirical evidence of

neoliberalism's impact on changing views of motherhood in China, forcing mothers to improve themselves to practice 'better' and more 'scientific' motherhood in the chid-rearing process.

4.4.3 Authority and Autonomy

As noted above, during the process of educating their children, many mothers were trying to abandon the authoritarian parenting style of their own parents and trying to seek a different balance of authority and autonomy. Previous studies have described notions of compliance and self-control as more consistently emphasised by Chinese mothers compared with mothers from western cultural contexts (Chao, 1995, Chao & Tseng, 2002). While there are still expectations of compliance in childhood in the west, research focused on North America has demonstrated that children are more likely to protest against maternal interventions in North America than in China, where they lean more towards compliance and self-control in both early childhood (Chen et al., 2003) and adolescence (Yau & Smetana, 1996, 2003). Existing research about adolescent-mother conflicts in China also indicates the unbalanced nature of the parent-child relationship in China, as mothers and children usually hold different perspectives on the content of the conflicts, resulting in the unequal relationship between the authority figure and the child. Mothers with authority in the relationship have been described as being prone to ignore the conflict or not see it as seriously as their children, focusing more on their own will than how their children actually think about the conflict (Gaddini & Chen, 2012). However, my participants' experiences complicate this picture, revealing how some parents sought to respect their children's thoughts and feelings while maintaining their authority. When I spoke to Jiao, for example, she exemplified this kind of approach:

> Jiao [From Beijing, 33 Years Old, Bachelor's, Education Front Desk, One Child]: My parents are the ones with authority; their words were the right words. For example, sometimes my son spills things like water on the ground. My parents would have criticised him immediately, but I first to see if it happened by accident or on purpose. If by accident, then I will clear it up with my son and tell him he should be more careful next time. Because

if it's an accident, he is also scared. When I was young, even if I didn't do it on purpose I was still criticised, and I don't want to do the same. When I was a child, my parents often spanked me when I did things wrong, both mother and father. My mother thinks I should obey her because they are the parents.

Xiao and Lemon also described their somewhat differing childhood experiences:

Xiao: I think it is just because of my personality. I think I have a strong personality, that is why. I think because when I was a child, my mother didn't force me or try to be authoritative, so I felt like I could do anything I wanted, and I also feel the same is the case for my son. He needs to do what I think is right, but I am trying to change.

Lemon: When I was little, my mother was an aggressive person, I do not know if she influenced me. She would control me when she thought my behaviour went beyond her rules. And when I was crying, she just left me alone. But I read articles about raising children nowadays, and I think when your child is crying, you should not just let him cry alone, you should placate him and talk about things. So, I now comfort him in this kind of situation. I tell him, I know how he is feeling, I have been through this as well, but we should deal with it this way.

Most mothers in the interviews described how they were raised as children and had empathy for their own children when they experienced the same situation. Jiao, for example, recalled a memory of when she had broken some dishes, and reflected on her son's feelings, drawing on how she had felt and said that she now tries to act as the mother she wishes she could have had. Many of the mothers wanted to move away from their parents' more authoritarian and aggressive styles of parenting, and they would reflect on how they would try to grant children more autonomy and freedom to express their feelings, more patience in how

they communicated with their children, and seek to guide them into particular ways of behaving instead of forcing them.

    At one weekend, I took my little nephew to his cooking class for children aged three-four years old in an early education centre. The aim of the class was to increase parent-children communication and interaction and help children to have the experience of baking cookies by themselves under the guidance of two teachers, including touching and smelling the materials, stirring the materials together and waiting for the cookies to be cooked by the oven in the classroom. During the process of touching and smelling the ingredients, other mothers were busy trying to stop their children from spilling or touching the batter, and it seemed that mothers were here to control their children rather than communicate. With mothers' regulation of their children, and even mixing up the powder by themselves instead of the children themselves, the course was conducting in progress. At first, I tried to regulate my three-year-old nephew like what other mothers did, but he wouldn't listen to me. So, I let him go to follow the teacher's illustration step by step only by himself. Different from other children, who have mothers to help them, my nephew made a mess in his little bow and on the table, and he was the slowest of all students. I noticed that because the class was only half an hour, the teachers could not wait for children to learn to stir by themselves, so the mothers mostly ended up grabbing their children's hand and stirring for them or taking the bowl from children and making the cookies for them instead. When everyone handed in their final work, they were all perfect and smooth, but none of it was done by their children, which had been the initial aim of the class. At the end of the class, the children were all given one cookie, but these were made previously by teachers rather than the children themselves, due to the brevity of the class. My one-day custody experience let me have an opportunity to experience the conflicted feeling of mothers who are trying to act as 'good mother'. In this cooking course, I felt pressured when my nephew couldn't keep up with the procedure or when he messed up the table, and I questioned myself whether I should help him do it or let him finish by himself, which way is better for him? And which way should I react to be a responsible custody? I believed all the mothers who choose to help their children have experienced similar feelings as I felt during the cooking class, and they choose to help their children as 'good' and 'responsible' mothers from their perspective.

In this class, the children did not really learn how to do things by themselves or experience the time to wait for what they have worked for from my view. A cooking class for children should be messy, but the desks remained clean with the 'help' of mothers. A sense of underlying competition urged mothers to take control. Although they understood that they should try to give children more autonomy, they ignored their children's feelings and thoughts without realising it when they took over the work that should be done by their children because they felt pressured by this 30-minute cooking class. As a result, the mothers became authoritarian without realising it themselves, and the teachers, as professionals of early child education, did not seem to be conscious of the failed aim of the class. While this class had been set up to teach children to learn on their own, in this competitive environment with peer pressure, mothers did the opposite of what they were trying to accomplish.

Both from the interviews and my observations, mothers chose to act in relation to what they believed was good for their children, although when they were trying to give their children more autonomy, they sometimes lost their original aim during the process. When mothers educate their children, they are shaped by particular Chinese cultural views. They articulate an understanding of actions that 'control' their children as bound up with their beliefs that it is their responsibility as parents to teach and regulate their children in contrast with the western privilege of children's autonomy. Compelling children into doing things such as studying is not considered as authoritarian, but rather as fulfilling the responsibility of a 'good mother'. Therefore, although sometimes they were doing the opposite of giving children autonomy as they claimed, they believed they were doing the right thing as responsible parents. Chao (1994) has provided insight into this cultural perspective on Chinese mothers' behaviours, such as pushing children to study harder. Distinct from the western concepts of 'authoritarian' or 'controlling', Chao argues that it is due to the different cultural systems that the understanding of good parenting is different. Hence Chao suggests a new concept of 'training' as the alternative expression of 'controlling' or 'authoritarian', arguing that the idea of 'training', such as teaching or educating children into the social and culturally appropriate or expected behaviours is derived from the Chinese term of '*Chiao shun*' (filial piety) (Chao, 1994; Wu & Tseng, 1985). The most important part of training that is the responsibility of Chinese parents is children's academic achievement and the ability of children's performance in school is one of the standards that measure whether parental engagement is successful (Wu & Tseng, 1985).

Therefore, when it comes to the education of children, especially formal education in school, mothers' focus on academic performance still influences their choices on authority and autonomy, but in informal education in daily life, more autonomy seems to be given to children and more reflections are being made by mothers who seek to balance authority with autonomy.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a picture of the intensive engagement of mothers in their children's early childhood education within the socio-cultural context in China. Early childhood education has become more and more essential as part of parental responsibility and an important investment in terms of accruing cultural capital for the maintenance of social status and upward social mobility. In addition, due to the cultural and social context in China, Chinese mothers also interpret 'good mothering' to mean responsibility for both children's future development and children's characteristics of being a good human-being. With fiercer competition in terms of access to educational resources in China, families are investing more time and resources in children's education, so that children don't 'lose at the starting line'. At the same time, mothers' responsibilities in terms of educating and training their children are articulated in terms of Confucian ideas, emphasising personal hard-working and academic achievements as of future success. These different elements all construct and reinforce the gendered division of labour in the household and contribute to the ideology of 'intensive mothering'.

With fierce competition in terms of educational resources, educational services based on public school systems cannot fully meet the needs of parents anymore, and a large number of institutions that provide extra-curricular classes and in particular early years classes have prospered and developed due to these changes. My participants' accounts of their practises of mothering indicate their beliefs that through investing in these classes and courses it is their responsibility as mothers to guide their children to a more successful future and to become more successful human beings. Their narratives also indicate how their understanding of what it is to be a good parent departs in some ways from western ideals of cultivating children's autonomy through 'intensive mothering'. This chapter has provided original insight into how

mothers believe that through training, control, regulation, and teaching, they can fulfil their responsibility as a 'good mother'. But at the same time, they also continuously reflect on their practise of motherhood when they are educating their children and try to be a 'good mother' with discipline and with constraint of their own love, to try to seek balance between their role as mother and their mother-child relationship as equal. Overall, this advances our understanding of motherhood and parenting cultures in China through revealing the significance of middle-class mothers' engagement with ideas of education, both formal and informal, in the early years of childhood and how they understand their own roles and responsibilities in relation to education. Through examining how they describe their everyday practises in relation to their children's education, we see how their understandings of what it is to be a good mother combine western ideas with Chinese Confucianism ideology, as they search and struggle to balance their love as a mother and love as a teacher for their children; trying to educate their children with discipline and constraint.

With all these tasks mothers trying to fulfil such as 'constraint of their love to spoil the children' or 'control of their temper to criticize one's children'. The image of mother is not only different roles as parents, friends or teacher to the children, they are also the changing and learning process of requirements on self in the process of trying to be a 'good mother'. The requirements on 'how to be a good mother' are becoming more and more precise and detailed in everyday motherhood practises, and the role of 'good mother' is more strict to themselves before they are strict to their own children in contemporary Chinese context. From the stories above, we could see that motherhood in China is constructed both by remaining ideology of Chinese traditional emphasize on being a 'good human being', and political promotion of the traditional cultural and moral expectations on children, as well as Suzhi education that expected children to have an overall development. On the other hand, motherhood also influenced deeply by the global economy's influence on educational market and the ideology of neoliberalism pursuing personal development and responsibility for oneself. In the influence of both Chinese and western ideas on mothering, mothers adopted an evidentially intensive way of mothering especially on children's education, trying to develop themselves as 'better mothers' who raise 'well developed', and 'well behaved' Chinese citizens.

5. Intergenerational Interactions within Child-Rearing

This chapter explores motherhood from the intergenerational relationship in relation to childrearing. As the increasing number of grandparents getting involved in the children's care especially in early years, the intergenerational relationship has been discussed by many existing literatures. However, little have empirical study in everyday life of how intergenerational relationship and the involvement of grandparents would have influence on the understanding of motherhood, which would be talked in detail in this chapter. There are five main sections in this chapter. The first section would introduce the existing literatures on the study of intergenerational relationships and its relationship with motherhood and childrearing. The second section will explore the generational gap between generations in the process of child-rearing, showing the difficulties, limitations and conflictions with the participation of grandparent in the raise of the grandchildren, explaining the reason of low expectation on what grandparents could do in child-rearing. The third section will analyse the reason of grandparents' involvement from the financial constraints and the Chinese cultural value. Explaining how the decision were made and conflictions were negotiated between mothers and grandparents and how the power distributed when they take care of the children together. The fourth section would further indicate the different ways of interaction between mothers and grandparents due to the special cultural context in China, in which further details of what kind of cultural value still exists and what have been changing through mothers' reflections in accordance to Chinese cultural values, and how these changes would infect mothers' understanding of 'good mothering'. The last section is the conclusion section, in which it will discuss from what have been presented in this chapter about how the involvement of grandparents actually intensified motherhood and increased mothers' burden in the domestic sphere.

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed 'good mothering' from the perspective of early childhood education, and in this chapter, I turn to explore what makes a 'good mother' in the context of intergenerational relationships in relation to child-rearing. In previous studies of parenting in China, discussions of Chinese parenting style have been mostly related to the discussion of Confucianism and the cultivation of children's obedience to parents, in which filial piety, and collectivistic cultural orientations are often mentioned. For example, Triandis (1995) has classified countries into two general models, individualistic and collectivistic orientations, and categorised Asian countries such as China as a collectivistic country due to the long cultural history of Confucianism. Moreover, within interactions in the context of the family, the most representative Confucian norm is understood to be filial piety: the idea that children are to be devoted and obedient to their parents (Chao & Tseng, 2002). Chao and Tseng believed that filial piety serves as a behaviour guidance of socialisation and intergenerational relationship (Chao & Tseng, 2002), they pointed out that this pattern of Confucianism and collectivistic orientation should be considered as just a framework for researchers to explore Asian countries but not as a general understanding of what is going on now with Asian families, which I agree looking from this research about how Chinese mothers with young children interact with their parents or parents-in-law during the process of child-rearing, the complexity of how they interact is beyond the frame of filial piety and collectivistic, which has been pointed out by Chuang (2009), who have argued that the studies about Chinese families should go beyond the assumption of collectivistic framework and focus more on parenting process (Chuang, 2009) and parenting belief (Chao, 1995).

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, all of the participants in my research describe child-rearing as a complicated and challenging process which requires significant devotion i   n the role of the mother. As with the common phenomenon of grandparents being involved in the child-rearing process, like the majority of interviewees, who either receive help from their parents or parents-in-law, many grandparents live with and help to take care of their grandchildren when the parents are working. I always assumed that the burden of being a 'good mother' could be reduced by grandparents' assistance, due to their high involvement. However,

I was surprised to discover that many of the participants expressed a feeling of 'doing it on their own', or that they did 'almost all the work' when they talked about their child-rearing experience. In discussing their children's development, they tended to position themselves as the only person who could help with the children's growth. In this chapter I will suggest that participants' accounts of being a 'good mother' during their interaction with their children's grandparents illuminates both the meaning of motherhood and intergenerational relationships in contemporary urban China

5.2 Generational Gap in Child-Rearing

In the involvement of grandparents in the child-rearing process, the conflict of ideas on parenting and the acceptance of new ideology are inevitably different from mothers and the older generations. Conflicts in these areas were constantly mentioned by interviewees. Due to the rapid changes the development in electrical devices, it is hard for the older generation to keep on with the information and technology the younger generation have contact with, which would lead to more conflictions on their perspectives on child-rearing and also, it will influence grandparents' ability to help during the child-rearing process.

5.2.1 Scientific Super Mum and Old-Fashioned Grandparents

When talking about whether they wanted to change the parenting styles they had experienced from their own parents, my participants always said, 'Of course!'. Clear agreement was shared by the majority of my participants that today's childrearing is a more complicated process compared to parenting in the grandparents' generations:

> Sunny [From Xining, 34 Years Old, Master's, Civil Servant, One Child]: Yes, I will definitely want to change it. Our generation has knowledge, and the amount of information you come into contact with is different from that

of our parents. I will definitely follow the so-called scientific parenting experiment now to raise my children.

For the reason outlined above, Sunny stressed different information sources as the main reason for the difference between contemporary child-rearing compared with that of her parents' generation. Today's parenting methods are believed to be more 'scientific', as well as more complicated with uncertainty and confusion, with the word 'experiment' being used by Sunny. As a result of research on collective ideology and complexity of child-rearing, contrary to seeking help from grandparents, mothers choose to turn to mass media and institutions they believe to be more scientific.

The most persuasive examples of the way in which mothers today, who believe more in scientific institutions than the older generations, are making their decisions around sitting their month, the first vital period for both mothers and infants after giving birth. This period was historically given great importance by Chinese families, as it was believed to be the key period for mothers to recover from giving birth and also to learn the skills of taking care of a child from experienced family members. It basically required women who have just given birth lie in bed and rest for one month, during this one month, the mother would need thorough care, usually from the older generation, husbands, or professional institutions, to ensure mothers ate well, their body get well protected and get full recovery during this month. This period relied mainly on the child's grandparents, generally the husband's mother, or sometimes from the natal family. However, more and more mothers today are inclined to choose a maternity *Yuesao* (matron) or confinement centre. As Jie described:

> Jie [From Xining, 35 Years Old, Bachelor, Civil Servant, One Child]: Our family's concept is more traditional. My parents believe that I should spend my confinement at my mother-in-law's house, but I still went to the confinement centre. I know that my mother-in-law will be good to the child and will not harm the child, but we will always have different concepts or parenting ideas. For example, the older generation will say don't hold your child if the child cries, but as far as I know, the child crying just means it

wants you to hold it. So, because of these conceptual problems, and because I was afraid of any possible incompatibility, or some postpartum depression that might make me accidentally hurt my mother-in-law, or she might hurt me, I went to the confinement centre. In this way, my mother-in-law only needed to come and have a look every day, and the confinement centre provides six meals a day with no duplicates, and after all, they are very scientific. There are professional nurses and doctors. They also have a green channel so that I can be sent directly to the hospital if there are any problems.

When Jie was talking about the green channel in hospital that take care of women and children after giving birth of her child. She was really excited, and she preferred to choose the confinement centre rather than the traditional path of her mother-in-law taking care of her for three reasons; she believed that it was more scientific for the child, it provides better care for mothers, and it could avoid any unnecessary conflict with her mother-in-law. 'When I was in bad condition, it would be better to avoid conflictions with my parents-in-law. And the hospital could provide you with more healthy and professional help you need to recover.' Said Jie. She emphasised that the two generations have different parenting ideas and she expressed concern about having disagreements with her mother-in-law. She felt like the Confinement centre was a place with a better method for taking care of mothers and infants by providing scientific meals and professional nurses and doctors. A sense of trust in the older generation's life experience has been replaced by a belief in science. Furthermore, the changing view of child-rearing may also bring more conflicts between two generations, as Jie assumed that she and her mother-in-law may hurt each other's feelings due to disagreement, which is one of the reasons she chose the confinement centre. Similar patterns were found across the data:

Interviewer: Did the grandparents take care of you when you were in your 'sitting month'?

Wen [From Xining, 36 Years Old, Bachelor's, Civil Servant, One Child]: No, I invited a maternity *Yuesao* (matron). Grandparents may sometimes

have outdated concepts and are not very good at raising children. The maternity matron will teach you how to raise a new-born. I think it's better.

Jie and Wen are mothers who believe the older generation have different understandings of the best way to raise children, which are not in accordance with their own expectations. In contrast, interviewees such as Hu offered a different point of view, positioning grandparents' parenting style as 'not very good' or even 'harmful' to children sometimes. Either way, childrearing institutions or professionals were considered better for both children and mothers, while grandparents are labelled as being 'outdated' and 'less scientific'. Hu's case is one of the extreme examples where the two generations have irreconcilable conflicts which I will explore briefly here and then return to later in the chapter.

Hu: [From Xining, 36 Years Old, Master, Civil Servant, Two Children] He (Father-in-law) is always like this, he keeps challenging you, and then I let my husband deal with it. I said, 'you should solve this problem'. My husband told his father that if you really think you have money, you can now satisfy him with one gun or ten guns. In the future, when he wants a computer worth thousand, can you buy him one? He wants a one-million-dollar car; do you have this financial capability? If you do not have this financial ability, don't do harm to us anymore.

A typical explanation that participants gave for their concerns about the older generation's involvement is that child-rearing has become a demanding job with higher standards, where, as described in the previous chapter, children should be raised with quality and unique skills. The understanding of good children has changed from their parents' time, as well as the challenges children face in the future. A different type of parenting is therefore required in response to these social and cultural changes. We can see this in Hao and Kun's discussion of child-rearing:

Hao [From Xining, 34 Years Old, Master's, Bank Clerk, One Child]: if you want a child, it's not because there is someone to help you with the child. You have to raise the child well. It's not as easy as when our parents raised us. Nowadays, you have to raise your children with quality, which is very difficult.

Kun [From Xining, 39 Years Old, Bachelor, Human Resource, Two Children]:
Raising a child is not as simple as it used to be. It's not just about feeding the children. Raising children nowadays, even if we do not talk about comparing with others, is all about Discussing what the future will look like. Artificial intelligence has replaced many types of jobs. If you say that my child is stupid, it doesn't matter. Well, it didn't matter in old times as long as you are willing to work in some mechanically repetitive jobs. You could still find a subsistence job in the past, but these jobs will be replaced in the future. If you don't let your children learn things, they won't have a place in the future. How can they survive in the future?

According to Kun and Hao, although grandparents can offer to take care of the grandchildren, as Hao states, it requires more than just 'someone to help take care of the child'. Mothers cite anxieties about children not being able to have a good future as a reason to invest more energy, time, and money into the cultivation of a qualified child, who can face future challenges.

Moreover, we see that the mothers usually refer to the grandparents as 'helpers' who are not enough if a child is to be raised with quality. As Kun puts it, grandparents' ways of parenting as 'just feeding the children', is too simple for child-rearing requirements today. Nowadays, breastfeeding and child-rearing are believed as much more of just keep the children physically healthy, it was seen as need huge amount of professional knowledge and information in order to fulfil this task. Therefore, grandparents' view of keep the children healthy in the physical way is not enough for mothers today, and with the high requirements on how to raise a

'intelligent and healthy children' became most of mothers' responsibility as the lack of knowledge and capacity of grandparents even though they have highly involved in the childrearing process.

5.2.2 Low Expectations of Grandparents in Child-Rearing

Many of the women I spoke to express their perception of parenting as more informed by scientific expertise and the older generation as outdated as they are more focused on simply attending to the physical health of the children, using expressions such as 'just feeding the children' as mentioned above. Surprisingly, given the widespread view of grandparents in Chinese society playing a significant role in child-rearing, not only are they considered outdated, but the expectations of grandparents' involvement in the child-rearing process is low. The expectation that mothers, rather grandparents, are responsible for practising good parenting was often expressed. I cite the example of Hao and Deng.

> Hao [From Xining, 34 Years Old, Master, Bank Clerk, One Child, Receives Help from both Natal Family and Parents-in-law]: Recently, his (child's) father was on a business trip, and I was not around either. His kindergarten required that every solar term, children needed to make posters related to the solar terms and folklores, and they had to be printed or drawn. His grandparents would never know how to do it. I have to make it on the computer, and send it to his grandparents' WeChat, then they could go to the print shop and ask the person working there to get it printed for them. In addition, my child had a maths class every Tuesday and Thursday, and his homework needed uploading through an app. His grandparents do not know how to do it, so every time he just wrote the homework and sent it to me first.

When the kindergarten required homework that needed help from parents, Hao showed no intention of teaching her parents, even though some of the tasks were simple, such as 'uploading homework through an app'. Hao would rather help upload her son's homework two times a week than teach her parents how to do so. Her assumption is 'they would never know how to do it'. The expectation and requirements on grandparents are far from what is expected from mothers, even though, in many cases, children spend much of their time with grandparents when both their parents are working. This example is from Hao, whose son is recently living with the grandparents from her natal family. Considering the example of Deng who is raising her daughter with the help from her mother-in-law, she described experiencing frequent conflicts with her mother-in-law. I was therefore very surprised when I found out she did not seek help from her natal family to support her as well:

> Interviewer: Will you talk about child-rearing experiences with your own mother?
>
> Deng [From Beijing, 41 Years Old, Master's, Education Consultant, One Child, Receives Help from Mother-in-Law]: Usually I do not, I just look at books or the internet. Because I think now, we can get information from various ways, so when she's not around I think it is not necessary to ask her (Deng's Mother). I would usually just search online when my daughter was sick. I manage almost everything for my daughter.

Deng chose to seek information from books and the internet rather than from her mother-inlaw who lives with her, or her own mother. With or without the involvement of grandparents in the child-rearing process, mothers rarely seek help from grandparents and expect little from them. As Deng stated, seeking help from elderly parents is considered as 'not necessary', and although she lives with her mother-in-law, she felt like she did the majority of work as a caregiver by saying she believes she managed 'almost everything' for her daughter. Existing research about parenting knowledge of first-time parents based in western societies indicates that most new parents have difficulty obtaining clear and trustworthy information. The numerous parenting resources and information relating to child development from the internet, books, mass media, friends, and family, can result in parents feeling overwhelmed and uncertain

about the quality of the resource. New parents were reported to have relied more on the internet for information and parenting guidance in western societies (Bartlett & Guzman & Ramos-Olazagasti, 2018), whilst in the Chinese cultural context, in which, as we have already considered in the previous chapters, there is a greater emphasis on collectivist and family networks. We might, therefore, expect that more information and guidance would be sought by mothers from other family members, such as grandparents, by mothers with young children, as they are highly involved in the child-rearing process. However, in spite of the more 'collective' cultural context of China, the participants in this research demonstrated similar orientations towards information sources as those which have been highlighted in scholarship on parenting cultures in western societies. Grandparents are rarely expected to help solve child-rearing problems or practise good parenting according to the women I spoke to. Moreover, the help provided by grandparents is mostly to cover the absence of parents when both parents have to work, and mothers usually expect nothing much from the grandparents aside from physical care, such as 'feeding the child'.

5.3 Financial Constraints and Reluctant Involvement

As outlined above, most participants described the grandparents' parenting style as different from today's expectations, outdated and prone to conflicts. Meanwhile they also have low expectations of the grandparents during the child-rearing process. Yet at the same time, even in families where the two generations have serious conflicts, grandparents are heavily involved in providing childcare. Many participants such as Kun and Deng ascribe this phenomenon to financial constraint:

> Kun [From Xining, 39 Years Old, Bachelor's, Human Resource, Two Children]: Raising children now really requires a lot of money as well. From the early-stage, milk powder, complementary food, clothes, and various courses from age three, put great financial pressure on families like ours. Just raising children and paying various insurances, as well as living expenses basically take up every month's salary. There is really no way to

hire a nanny or be a full-time mother. You can only bring the elderly into your life. Like my mother-in-law, who likes to travel, now has to stay in my house five days a week. In return we give her some alone time and rest on weekends.

Interviewer (Ask Deng): Have you considered not living with your mother-inlaw?

Deng [From Beijing, 41 Years Old, Master, Education Consultant, One Child]: Of course, I have. But we could not afford to buy another house in Beijing. I have to get used to it.

From both Kun and Deng's descriptions, on the one hand, child-rearing consumes monetary resources, with great financial investment from the moment the child is born. As Kun pointed out, with the burden of raising a child, the living expenses are basically the full amount of every month's salary. This financial burden often forces both parents to work without formal institutional childcare arrangements such as a nursery or nanny. While the majority of the money is being invested in children's living and education, leaving the family no choice but to ask grandparents to be involved in child-rearing. The higher requirements on children to be raised with quality and according to scientific expertise, make it harder for working parents to seek help from paid professionals or institutions, thus forcing the grandparents to take part of the responsibilities of child-rearing, which for some families, is a reluctant choice, for both parents and grandparents. Furthermore, this financial burden is even more challenging for participants living in Beijing, the capital city of China, in which the price of housing is higher than most other cities in China, and like Deng said, most families 'could not afford a second house', which means living with the grandparents has become a common phenomenon, especially for families who have preschool children.

In this modern-day consumer society, parenting is influenced and advised by the experts through market forces, which is also evident from the interviews. The birth and rearing of children are separated into small tasks and commercialised by 'scientific experts. For instance,

Jie and Hao both turned to a specialised agency for maternal advice, and they believe it is a more scientific way compared to their parents' help. More mothers, like Deng, choose to read parenting books, watch TV Shows or search online for parenting skills, as they believe parenting should be learnt from scientific institutions rather than from the older generations' experiences. However, no equivalent expectations were put on grandparents when they were coparenting the children.

The child-rearing situation this generation faces involves intensified and diversified requirements on mothers, influenced by today's social and cultural changes. The idea of 'super mum' (Zhong, Guo, 2018) is on some level acknowledged and accepted by mothers with young children today, which is also evidential in the interviews with most of the mothers taking on the majority of responsibility for children's education and emotional care; all with the absence of husbands' help and the limited help from grandparents, due to the knowledge and cultural gaps between generations. The discourse of 'widowed child-rearing' is also distinctive for mothers with young children in the process of child-rearing (Guo, 2019) despite the high-level involvement of grandparents in the child-rearing process. Furthermore, not only did mothers receive limited help from the grandparents, the expectation on grandparents is far from what is expected from mothers, and therefore, for some families, the co-rearing situation has actually paradoxically increased the burden on mothers as they also have to deal with intergenerational relationships. The rest of this chapter will demonstrate this in the context of additional burden due to financial constraints, as per the cases for Kun and Deng mentioned above.

5.3.1 Strict Mothers and Loving Grandparents

This section would talk more about the different parenting style from the two generations. The older generation were indicated by interviewees to adopted a less intense parenting style that care most about children's physical health. And for mothers today, their understanding of what counts as a good mother became much more comprehensive and the mothers' role appears to be 'stricter' in comparison to the image of 'loving grandparents'.

Kun [From Xining, 39 Years Old, Bachelor, Human Resource, Two Children]: My parents were just raising me freely, and they didn't have any requirements on my study or any other aspects.

Deng [From Beijing, 41 Years Old, Master's, Education Consultant, One Child]: They barely cared about my education or other things; I think I grew up freely and they had no requirements of me and gave me little pressure.

The examples of Kun and Deng offer insight into the kind of parenting style the grandparents believed in when they were raising their own children. The most frequently mentioned words are 'freely', 'no requirements' and 'little pressure'. Most participants were raised with little expectation from their parents, which contrasts clearly with the dominant contemporary parenting culture, where parents, especially mothers, as discussed in the previous chapter, are expected to be educators who can help their children to become compatible with future challenges and equipped with various skills. The different understanding of parenting is also considered as one of the main reasons why mothers have disagreements with grandparents.

Furthermore, due to the significant differences between the two generations' comprehension of what constitutes good parenting, many mothers articulated to me a sense of confusion of not knowing the standards of a 'good mother', as they felt they had not been taught this by their own parents in a way that they could agree with, and as Kang stated, she did 'not know how to be a parent'. Her example is an instance of mothers being left to explore motherhood without the effective help they feel they need from their parents' generation. Left with great pressure and a sense of uncertainty, Kang felt that she needed to invest time and seek out answers about what it means to be a good mother from books, professionals, and mass media, rather than from her own parents. Reflecting on her own sense of uncertainty about what it means to be a 'good mother', Kang described how she had come to believe that the mother's role is irreplaceable despite the help she received from grandparents in terms of childrearing.

Kang [From Beijing, 41 Years Old, Master, Insurance Sales, One Child]: I just felt lost. I do not know how to tell them, because if they don't talk to me, I don't know how to tell them, I can't tell myself. I think this also influenced me a lot when I was raising my child. The problem is, I do not know how to be a parent. This is a terrible thing. I am particularly panicked at this point. I do not know how to be a person who can guide her life. So, I read a lot of childrearing books such as 'A letter for my child'. I want to know what kind of precise reminders parents should give their children at important points in their lives, because this is very important. I have put a lot of effort into educating my child, and I firmly believe that no one in this world can replace a mother's role.

Hu's case is an extreme situation where the two generations have many conflicts due to different understandings of parenting, which resonates with the research about strict mothers and loving grandparents, stating the grandparent's side as more prone to spoiling and the mother's side as stricter on children's education. We can see more details of this from Hu's story about her conflicts with her father-in-law on the cultivation of children's good behaviours.

Hu [From Xining, 40 Years Old, Master's, Civil Servant, One Child]: There are many conflicts! Let me tell you the simplest one. They are unconditionally accustomed to his [my child's] bad behaviours, and they also lead and cultivate his bad behaviours. The first thing I want to talk about is crawling on the table. That day we were having a meal with a lot of relatives, and he climbed onto the table to grab something he wanted to eat, but I really didn't blame the child at that time. Why? Because he didn't understand at all. He only knew that his grandparents allowed him to do so. He did not consider others at all, but I still corrected him. This matter was indeed what led to the serious conflict that occurred later. When my child was celebrating his third birthday, that is, this summer, his bad behaviour had stopped after living with me, but because it was his third birthday, I invited his grandparents. We held the birthday party in a restaurant, and I

was pregnant with my second child. I was experiencing serious morning sickness, so I asked my mother to cook for me for maybe 20 days. Thus, my mother and my sisters were also there at the time. There were a lot of people. At the beginning, my child didn't display that bad behaviour anymore. The dishes were starting to be served. Before everyone moved their chopsticks, I told my child, 'No matter which dish you would like to eat, not everyone's has arrived yet, so you need to wait a little bit, but you can move your chopsticks after everyone else does.' My child was not happy at first, but after what I said, he calmed down, and there was no bad behaviour at all. However, what did his grandfather do? He put the dish directly in front of my child with everyone watching. Well, the child couldn't control himself when his favourite dish was already in front of him, so he just grabbed it! I got very angry with his grandpa, but I couldn't lash out at him, so I put down my chopsticks heavily on the table and said to my child, 'I told you before, I said you shouldn't eat until everyone has started eating!' He was three years old at that time, and he was already able to talk and communicate with you normally. Just because of this conflict, his grandpa directly threw away the chopsticks, smashed the plates and left the restaurant.

From this lengthy story I could feel the anger from Hu when she told me how she felt about her father-in-law's behaviour, and this conflict was mainly because of their different understandings of parenting. From Hu's side, she believes children should be educated so that they can learn what kind of behaviour is good and appropriate and what kind of behaviour is bad and inconsiderate. She views waiting for one's elders to start eating as an important quality in good children, while from the grandparents' perspective it is acceptable for a child not to wait and is not viewed as a big deal. Hu stressed several times how she had made efforts to encourage her child to adopt what was, in her view, good behaviour, while grandparents were doing the opposite and indulging their grandchild with behaviours that Hu considered to be inappropriate. In this process, Hu felt angry as well as helpless, as her efforts were being, in her eyes, destroyed by the grandfather in one swift move, yet she could not show her rage and disagreement with her father-in-law, due to her role as not only her child's mother, but also her father-in-law's daughter, who should show respect to the elderly. Within this story, we can

therefore see how disagreement about two generations' understanding of parenting could actually increase mothers' work in terms of not only educating their children but also due to the gendered burden of having to deal with and diplomatically navigate intergenerational relationships in the context of expectations of deference to one's elders.

5.3.2 Decision-making on Child-rearing

This burden was discussed in many interviews and was largely related to fights about decision-making on child-rearing related issues, where both grandparents and mothers believed they should make decisions for children's education and development.

> Interviewer: Who usually makes decisions about the child?
>
> Wen [From Xining, 36 Years Old, Bachelor's, Civil Servant, One Child]: Basically, me and my husband decide the matters about our children. Our thoughts are definitely more important than grandparents' thoughts, because sometimes their thoughts are some of the older ideas after all. Anyway, it depends on what is going on, and if it is not particularly bad, I can accept it too.

Wen's example indicates that even though the majority of mothers in the interview believe they should be the one making decisions about children's education and care, the grandparents' opinion might still have some influence, and to avoid conflicts, like Wen, they may be accepted if not 'particularly bad'. Due to the old patriarchy pattern of Chinese family, the showing of respect to the elderly is influencing how mothers negotiate with grandparent and the power distribution in the family:

> Interviewer: What is your educational concept?

121

Kun [From Xining, 39 Years Old, Bachelor, Human Resource, Two Children]:

Well, I try to cultivate the child's own personality and character development, so extra-curricular classes are usually discussed with the child, and I also enrolled him in roller skating classes, art, electronic piano which he likes, and plan to apply for programming courses as well.

Interviewer: Does your mother-in-law agree with your educational philosophy?

Kun: My mother-in-law disagrees. My mother-in-law always says that I have used up all my child's spare time. She thinks that the child is so young now and that he should only play. However, imagine if he waits until the first grade to apply for classes, then she will feel that the child is already under such a heavy pressure to study that we have to let our child rest at weekends and not let him go to interesting classes. The educational philosophy of the two generations is very different. But luckily, she simply disagrees, that is, despite nagging, the initiative is still with me. I have the final say as we are also the ones going to pick up and drop off on weekends. During the weekends, the elderly will not be asked to pick up children from extra-curricular courses.

Kun's case is also an example of disagreement between herself and her mother-in-law towards her children's educational issues, as she believes it is necessary for children to attend different courses such as art, electronic piano, and skating, which could help with her 'children's development' and 'cultivation of personality' while her mother-in-law believes it is a waste of children's spare time. Their compromise is Kun takes responsibility for children's pick up and drop off at the extracurricular activities. Wen's compromise with the grandparents' disagreement is to comply with the grandparents. Either way, mothers have to devote more energy and time whether from the mental or the physical aspects in order to maintain a harmonious relationship with the grandparents while trying, at the same time, to educate their children.

Deng [From Beijing, 41 Years Old, Master, Education Consultant, One Child, Receives Help from Mother-in-Law]: After I had my child, I found out that the mother does most of the work in a family. My husband is willing to help me out a little, but my mother-in-law won't let him. I had a really hard time during the first few years after I had my daughter. Later when I started to talk back, I felt much better and got much more used to living with my mother-in-law.

Kang [From Beijing, 41 Years Old, Master's, Insurance Sales, One Child]: For all aspects of the child's initial education and his enlightenment, mothers have an unshakable responsibility. You should be 100% dedicated. Yes, because she is a life, the only thing she counts on is you, and so you have to be worthy of her, worthy of her childhood, and make the greatest efforts for her, such as searching for resources, even if it is a change in my own personality. But it may be that I am the only one who is working hard on this, I feel like the whole family is holding it back.

The division of labour and the change of children's value in the family has been changing from the industrialization (Shi, 2018). Till contemporary China, children's value and importance has been magnified, which also lead to a more gendered division of labour in the household, despite the highly involvement of grandparents in the process of child-rearing like the situations of my participants, Through the interviews we can see many disagreements may occur between generations when co-rearing children, or when mothers are living together with the grandparents. In the process of negotiation and compromise, the main division of labour in child-rearing is grandparents providing basic physical care and mothers providing emotional care and education. Considering further the division of labour and power relations between generations, it seems that in the process of intergenerational cooperation in parenting, the division of labour and power structure of 'strict mothers and loving grandparents' was formed within the family. Mothers have the power of discourse and decision-making, guiding the

growth of children, and undertaking the educational responsibilities of social nurturing. Grandparents enter the children's family as 'helpers' and undertake a large number of children's physical nurturing tasks and family care work but have no power to make decisions in family affairs. Different from the traditional institutionalised family power structures, 'strict mothers and loving grandparents' is a non-institutionalised, flexible power relationship, subject to coordination and negotiation among family members, and highly dependent on the establishment and maintenance of specific intergenerational intimate relationships (Xiao, 2014). This was, at least, the case from the perspective of my participants, Deng, and Kang. Most of them feel like their husbands and grandparents, who are all involved in the child-rearing process, are giving them little support in terms of practising motherhood.

With the different understandings of good parenting and the inevitable disagreement on childrearing methods, many interviewees expressed feelings of 'doing it on their own', or as Kun said, the family 'holding her back'. The burden came from differences and disagreements and increased, rather than reduced, the mothers' devotion in the child-rearing process. As we can see from Kun's stories, she has put a lot of energy into helping her child develop, by finding hobbies, choosing extracurricular activities, studying how to communicate with children, and generating her own ideas about how her children should be socialised. She has devoted a lot of her energy into child-rearing, but she still doesn't get her mother-in-law's support due to different parenting ideas. It is also a noteworthy example of 'strict mother and loving grandparents', putting mothers as the leading role in the family, responsible for the children's development and future, while grandparents are only expected to take care of the grandchildren's basic needs. From Wen and Kun's perspectives, both mothers feel they have the right to make the main decisions about their children's development, but when disagreements occur, they try to compromise and avoid any further conflicts. Compromise is a normal way of showing respect in the role of daughter when there's disagreement on decision-making. Moreover, during the negotiation process, not only is the work on educating children increased for mothers, but the burden to deal with intergenerational relationships is also increased.

We can see the reason for mothers being perceived as strict, and grandparents being perceived as loving is due to their different parenting ideas; when they are practising these

different parenting ideas on the same children, there are unavoidable disagreements. And a small number of families from my interviews could have a clear division of mothers as decision makers and grandparents as helpers as mothers are not only acting as the role of their children's mother but also as children of the grandparents. From a cultural view, obedience should be shown to parents by their children as part of the obligation of filial piety, meaning that mothers with young children feel like they cannot step back from child-rearing, and instead have to compromise on some less important things, as Wen said, 'she can accept it if it's not particularly bad'. When the older generation is not insistent on following traditional cultural norms and is willing to accept the occasional compromise as a sign of respect, the balance in family relationships is maintained. However, when the elderly is more insistent about the traditional cultural role as parents and require more decision-making authority on child-rearing matters, or more obedience from mothers when they have different opinions, the conflict intensifies and makes it harder for mothers to deal with intergenerational relationships co-rearing the children. As illustrated by Hu and Deng's examples of families with more intergenerational conflicts, contradictions between roles of both mother and daughter push mothers to make more compromise to grandparents on child-rearing related issues and maintain their silence in order to show obedience. For instance, despite Deng's mother-in-law being mean to her all the time, she never 'talks back' as she believes it is the right way for a daughter to show respect. But when she found out it could have a bad influence on her daughter, she had to put in more effort to change her daughter's thoughts. The conflict between two generations leads Deng to devote more effort to children's development, dealing with the influence on children from two generations with different parenting understandings and motherhood practises, with little support from the older generation where there's disagreement. This pushes mothers to be strict, feeling they have done 'most of the work in the family', even though she is also a working mother.

5.4 Symbolic Methods of Generational Interaction

This section will talk about the special ways of interactions between mothers and grandparents due to the specific cultural context in China. A part of the traditional patriarchy relations still exists while on the other hand mothers are exploring new ways of interacting with

the older generation instead of sticking to the old filial piety relationship. On one hand, mothers still knuckle under during certain situations to try to remain harmony in the family, especially when coresident with the grandparents, on the other hand, mothers started to realize the gendered pressure on women and tried to change the situation using strategies like changing their view of filial piety to the respect of elderly rather than obey with the elderly. This section will discuss further about how they communicate and negotiate in relation to child-rearing and how it has influence on mother's perspectives on 'good mother'.

5.4.1 Third Party and Lack of Communication

Although many mothers co-reside with the grandparents for the convenience of taking care of the children, or due to financial necessity, the lack of communication between mothers and grandparents is startlingly common for participants in the interviews, and husbands are often involved as a third party that helps them communicate. If the husbands are absent from the intergenerational relationship between mothers and parents-in-law, there will be more conflicts from the view of my participants. Mostly, mothers choose to remain silent or communicate through their husbands according to my interviewees, rather than discuss directly with the older generation, which is more significant in families where mothers coreside with their parents-in-law.

> Sunny [From Xining, 34 Years Old, Master, Civil Servant, One Child]: I feel anxiety, especially when my child has just started kindergarten. It means that my child needs to adapt to a new environment, and the feeling as a mother is different. At that time, I had some conflicts with my mother-in-law which I never did before. My mother-in-law scolded me very angrily and said, 'Is it wrong to help you raise your child?' But in fact, I didn't express dissatisfaction with her. I was just anxious about my child, but maybe she felt that I was blaming her, which caused a lot of conflicts, but in fact it was just because the child had just left home and went to a new environment. My child was crying every day, and I felt very anxious. He

126

was not comfortable. He was afraid. Later, I transferred him to another kindergarten a year later. He went much better. The teacher was gentler. Before that, he barely went to kindergarten that year, and he was sick all the time. I think he was infected by other children in class.

Sunny is an example of how mothers are lack of communication with the grandparents. I many situations, especially when it is the grandparents-in-law who is coresident with the mothers. The mothers would feel like it is much harder to express their feelings to mother-inlaw in comparison to their own mothers. The believe they could say anything to their own mother, but when it comes to their mother-in-law, they are afraid that there will be misunderstandings or conflictions once they expressed their true feelings. Therefore, for the harmony of the family, they usually choose to keep silence or communicate with the parentsin-law through their husbands. From Sunny's perspective, she was experiencing anxiety toward her child's milestone of moving into kindergarten, but this anxiety, in the eyes of her mother-in-law, was understood as a complaint which led to more conflicts. Hao's behaviour of getting up early in the morning and coming back early at night was of respect and appreciation for her parents' help with her child. Although she felt 'restrained' and experienced a 'lack of private space' when she had to live with her parents or parent-in-law she still forced herself to get up early and go back home early after work because she felt, as she put it, 'Although parents will not scold you, such as sleeping late in the morning and going home late at night, there will still be some complaints or criticisms in their heart.' Hao's actions are a symbol of how mothers with young children show their respect and appreciation to the grandparents' contribution in the child-rearing process. From what Sunny and Hao stated, on the one hand we can see some symbolic actions mothers and grandparents make during the child-rearing process, on the other hand, we also see that in Chinese families, communication, and interactions between two generations are more symbolic rather than oral. The traditional cultural norms tell the younger generation to obey the elderly, but the influence of new parenting styles puts these mothers in conflicted positions about whether to stick to their own understanding of 'good mothering' or practise what is expected of their roles as good children when dealing with the elderly. Through disagreements, they tend to explain respect for the elderly mostly as a silent compromise, meanwhile continuing to practise motherhood in the ways they believe without the help from

the older generation. Respect is demonstrated in more of a more symbolic way and communication between mothers and grandparents is less explicit.

> Hao: There was one night my child was sleeping with my mother-in-law and he kept crying. After a while, there was no sound. I thought she was good with children, but the next day, when the nanny came, she told the nanny and me that she breastfed the child in order to stop him crying last night. The nanny and I were so shocked but because I could not say anything, the nanny scolded her. I don't know, maybe my husband has brought it up.

From Hao's story we also see that despite her non-acceptance of her mother-in-law's behaviour, she could not say anything straight to her because she needs to show respect to her mother-in-law, but she is happy when the nanny scolds her. The lack of verbal communication appeared to be a common relationship status between daughters and grandparents from the interviews, and when a problem occurs, most participants choose to compromise or rely on the third party such as their husband or the nanny. There's a thin wall between mothers and parents-in-law as from the cultural view, daughters should be the one who is showing respect and filial piety of the older generation,   but when coresident with the older generation, the lack of understanding and differences in the ways of child-rearing in conjunction with the fear to break the harmony of the family, little communication and negotiation are conducted face to face or directly between mothers and parents-in-law. In the process of intergenerational negotiation in regard to child-rearing, many other intermedia ways are expected by mothers to express their true feelings and thoughts from other people, in this case, from husbands, or nanny.

5.4.2 Boundaries and Personal Spaces

Hao is a participant who has not lived in her own house for six years, with her parents and parents-in-law helping take care of the child, she lives where her child lives. Her feelings towards living with the elderly are that she has 'little living space' for herself and feels

constrained when doing things that she wants to do. The loss of being just 'oneself' and the long period of just being a mother have taken up all her space and time. The help of the grandparents has naturally reinforced her maternal role as sacrifice and devotion with the loss of all her time and space. She presents her sacrifice of self as for the good of the children.

Hao [From Xining, 34 Years Old, Master's, Bank Clerk, One Child]: My child was born in 2013. My parents and my father and mother-in-law take turns to take care of the child. For example, one month he is with my parents and one month with my parents-in-law. I always follow the child. So, I live wherever my child lives. We have never lived in our own house since the birth of the child. My husband always goes on business trips. It's better for me to follow my child than live alone with him (child).

Interviewer (Ask Hao): Do you think there is less personal space then?

Hao: Yes, there is no living space of my own. In fact, I really want to live by myself and do some things I want to do, because after all, whether you are at your mother-in-law's house or your own parents' house, you are always restrained. At the mother-in-law's house, even though my mother-in-law and father-in-law don't say anything, you can still feel their complaints or discontent. For instance, it's impossible to sleep late. I could sleep beyond 8 o'clock in the morning, or sometimes until 9 o'clock at most, but my father-inlaw is a very hardworking person. He gets up at 6 o'clock every morning. Going back to your parents' place, you think that your parents have already helped you a lot with your children, so you have to share some of the burden. My husband and I have discussed that when our child enters elementary school, he can go to school by himself, then we will move to our own home. Although parents will not scold you for sleeping late in the morning and going home late at night, there will still be some complaints or criticisms in their heart. I think I'm just enduring it until our child goes to elementary school. In the third grade, when he can go to elementary school independently, I will drive them (grandparents) all away (Laughing).

We can see from Hao's story that she is showing respect and gratitude by 'coming home early' and 'getting up early', without directly expressing gratitude for her grandparents' sacrifice. Instead, she sacrifices her own needs and shows her appreciation by regulating herself despite her unwillingness to do so. She was very happy when she pictured a life not living with the grandparents, but until then, she is living without much of her own time and space, making her life all about her child, and regulating herself to be a good daughter. The guilt of not being able to 'share the burden of taking care of children' and practising being a good daughter have made her regulate her life to become a more devoted mother who returns home to help take care of children right after work, even though she is longing for some time and space for herself.

5.4.3 New Understandings of the Good Daughter and Filial Piety

From the previous sections, we could see that there are much more conflictions between mothers and the older generations during the children-rearing process. Mothers are exhausted just to deal with their relationship with the older generation especially when they coresident. Not only did mothers and grandparents have different views on parenting, but they also lack effective communication between each other. Sometimes, mothers always choose to be the silent one in order to keep the harmony of the family, which also could be seen from the sections above. In Deng's case, she chose to be silent for years when she lives with her mother-in-law. She complained to me that all the housework and child-rearing work are doing by herself even when her mother-in-law was living with her. And Deng's mother-in-law was treating her like an outsider of the family or the nanny of the family for years before she realized she should stand up for herself as the older generation is not right in everything, and she should stand up for herself before her daughter was influenced by the same biased gender view from her mother-in-law:

Deng [From Beijing, 41 Years Old, Master, Education Consultant, One Child, Receives Help from Mother-in-Law]: Years ago, I never talked back when my mother-in-law said things about me. But recently I think I need to defend myself because my daughter is growing up. The elderly sometimes carries a lot of prejudice, and my child is a girl, so if she does the same as me and chokes down a mother-in-law's insult, I don't believe it is good for my daughter. Thus, sometimes I talk back. I want her to understand that I can tolerate it but sometimes I need to say that it's not ok. The elderly, especially like my mother-in-law who is a very domineering person, wish that everyone listens to her, but the world is not going about her, and other people have their own thoughts and considerations as well. Sometimes, my daughter says to me that I'm wrong to talk back to my mother-in-law. I explain to her why I did that. For example, my mother-in-law thinks we should only spend new year with her instead of my parents, so I will ask my daughter if she thinks it's right that when she gets married in the future, she could never spend new year with me and her father. I ask if she will be willing to treat us like that? I think when you are in this environment which is not very good, you need to talk things through with your child. Of course, I can swallow her insults, but I think it is not good for my daughter. I don't want her to think that it is a reasonable thing when it's not. I'm actually not used to accusing the elderly, but I believe I need to teach my daughter what is right. You do not have the right even if you are the elderly; everyone should have their right to distinguish right and wrong, and everyone makes mistakes or wrong decisions, so you should have the right to talk about it if you disagree. I taught my daughter that she can talk to me when she disagrees with me, and we can find a better way. My daughter sometimes thinks I don't respect my mother-in-law. I told her that I didn't mean that. I think we should take care of the elderly and show consideration, but it does not mean that everything they say is right. I think that elderly don't know the world anymore and some of her thoughts are unacceptable.

In contrast to traditional Chinese cultural norms that children should be obedient to the elderly, mothers like Deng encounter difficulties balancing their filial piety as children and their responsibility as mothers when they have disagreements or conflicts. Before Deng had her daughter, she was perfectly fulfilling her filial piety duties as a daughter to her mother-in-law and 'choking down her mother-in-law's insult'. Her relationship with her mother-in-law was already problematic, but it never occurred to her to talk back when she disagreed. But after she had her daughter, she wished that her daughter could have the courage to stand up when she was wronged or when she has different perspectives, which pushed her to fight back as she felt it is better for her daughter. Previous research about traditional Chinese culture has claimed that belief in children's obedience and compliance to parents' wills and filial piety as a lifelong obligation are widespread. (Chen & Luster, 2002. Evans, 2008. Kuan, 2011. Sun, 2017) Whereas my research suggests a more nuanced view, as the majority of mothers with young children in the interviews were starting to interpret filial piety as the avoidance of conflicts rather than obedience.

From Deng's perspective, she tried to put up with her mother-in-law for years due to her belief filial piety beliefs and the responsibility she felt about respecting the elderly. But when it started to influence her children's understanding of family relationships and her self-identity she felt she needed to defend herself so that she could help her daughter generate the correct perspective on important aspects such as women's roles, family relationships and interpersonal relationships. She couldn't allow perspectives or traditional cultural norms such as boys are better than girls, 'a daughter married is like water spilt' year should only be spent with the husband's, to be perpetuated. Thus, through these conflicts between two generations, many participants have generated their new understanding of filial piety as not a fully obedient relationship but a more equal relationship where the younger generation should take care of the elderly but do not need to obey the elderly in every aspect. In these interactions between Deng and her mother-in-law for example, Deng has generated a new understanding of filial piety and respect, instead of compromise and obedience, and she believes she is fulfilling the role as a good daughter by 'taking care of the elderly and showing considerations without being obedient to everything the elderly says since everyone can make mistakes'. By doing so, Deng made more effort to take care of the elderly physically, but mentally she tried to change the influence of her mother-in-law on her daughter. Therefore, in the family where grandparents are highly involved in child-rearing, Deng put in more energy trying to balance her role as daughter and

as mother, as well as investing more in children's education when two generations both have influences on children's understanding of relationship, culture, and any other aspects.

From Deng's story of her struggle in the ways of negotiation with her mother-in-law and her ways of trying tot figure out a more balanced strategy in dealing with conflictions with the grandparents, showed a picture of mothers' awareness of the long existing gendered issues in the domestic sphere, and their determination of trying to change this situation for their children. Deng have experience struggle as she was raising under the influence of the Confucian idea that children should be filial piety to their parents, they should obey their parents and avoid conflictions with the older generation even when they are the wrong side. Deng suffered from her mother-in-law but stood up with these kinds of treatment due to the education she received from she was a child. But with the changing view of filial piety, and how women comprehensive of idea of filial piety have been changing through time.

Furthermore, tracing to the historical form and transformation of individualization in China and the influence from western ideology, as stated in the literature review chapter, which all resulted in mothers' concern to gender equality and what kind of situation their children would face when they grow up, especially when they have daughters, like Deng's case. Due to the worrying of her daughter's gendering perspective and how she could comprehensive herself as a woman, a daughter, a future mother, or a future mother-in-law. Mothers like Deng are trying to change their children's view on a biased gender perspective on what women should do and how women should behave. Like Deng, who have explained to her daughter the changing view on filial piety as mutual respect rather that obey of the older generation. Hopefully, the view of gender could be change step by step with mothers' endeavour in the raising of the own children and in the reflection of their own experience. To pass onto a more equalled gender idea is definitely one of the responsibilities recognized by my participants as a 'good' mother's duty.

5.5 Conclusion

As described above, from three main dimensions, we have explored the intergenerational relationship in Chinese families today when grandparents are highly involved in the childrearing process; some help take care of the grandchildren during weekdays and some live together. We can see from the stories of my participants that although they are parenting with the help of grandparents, the burden on mothers is increased instead of reduced from several aspects. As such, I would argue that mothering in China is made more, not less 'intensive' through the requirement to involve and manage intergenerational relationships.

From what has been discussed in this chapter, we have explored that the knowledge gap and involvement of new technology have already generated two different views on parenting for mothers and grandparents, which leads to many problems and disagreements when grandparents start to help raise the grandchildren. The two generations are deeply influenced by different social and cultural circumstances, although they are both changing in the transformation processes. Mothers have more flexible access to information resources from the mass media and adopt a much more intensive idea of 'good mothering' affected by the commercialised market of child-rearing. These gaps and disagreements on child-rearing have led to a more intensified expectation on mothers being fully devoted in the children's development, whereas little expectation is placed on grandparents about practising good parenting.

In addition, the power distribution and labour division of 'strict mother and loving grandparents' has indicated a mother's role as educator and grandparents' role as caretaker, while this distribution of power relation is contrary to traditional culture in China where the younger generation should show obedience and respect to the older generation who have the right to make decisions. With the two generations' differences on child-rearing, the fight for decision making always ends up with mothers making compromises or devoting more effort to child development without support from the older generation. The endeavour to fulfil the role of good daughter and good mother at the same time pushes mothers to take on more responsibilities as educators for children's development and balance of family harmony.

Moreover, the subtle and symbolic interactions between mothers and grandparents and the lack of verbal communication and understanding on child-rearing have given mothers more burden in dealing with intergenerational problems and parenting style. As mentioned by Deng when she was worried about her daughter getting confused because of the argument between herself and her mother-in-law over anxiety about her daughter adopting her grandmother's perspectives on gendered roles and interpersonal relationships, she between the idea of filial piety and the education of her daughter. Their conflict also led to more responsibilities of child-rearing expected from the mother's side despite her mother-in-law's participation in the child-rearing process.

All in all, different understandings of child-rearing and the knowledge gap between two generations leads to less expectation and requirements on grandparents but high expectations of mothers. The subtle communication between generations also relies more heavily on third parties, such as husbands, rather than direct verbal communication. This all generates a situation in which mothers are expected and believed to take on full or at least the majority responsibility of children's education and development, even when grandparents are also involved in the child-rearing process. With or without fierce conflicts between the two generations, many participants in this interview have expressed similar feelings as they believe they are doing the child-rearing all by themselves. The financial restrictions for middle class families also make the grandparents' involvement inevitable. For both generations, this form of co-parenting is generated by social changes today and grandparents share a major part of burden for middle class families.

Therefore, although there is existing literature talking about grandparents' involvement in children-rearing, this chapter discussed more of their relationship in relation to the understanding of motherhood. We are not denying the contribution of other family members, especially the husband and grandparents in the child-rearing process. But looking at the reasons mentioned above, the involvement of grandparents in the child-rearing process does appear to reinforce the idea of 'intensive mothering' with most of the responsibility to raise a 'good child' falling on mothers. A culture which needs rationalising for the reasons mentioned. In addition, this chapter showed a more in detail empirical study of intergenerational relationships in China,

and how it intensified the role of mother rather than help mothers release some burden from child-rearing.

6. The Role of Husbands in Practising Motherhood

This chapter will focus on mothers' relationship with their husbands in the childrearing process, and the discuss further of how their relationship with their husbands generate their perspectives on mothers' duty in comparison with husbands'. The chapter have five main sections to further illustrate the role of husbands in the practising of motherhood. The first section is an introduction of existing literature about husbands' role in the domestic sphere and their involvement in the child-rearing process. In this section, it will be illustrated more in detail about what this chapter would talk about that expend the existing literature or rarely mentioned in previous studies. The second section in emphasized on the discussion of widowed parenting where the division of labour in the household is still severely gendered and showing an empirical detail of how most of the child-rearing work became mothers' responsibilities rather than fathers. The third section is the analysis of women's career choice in relationship to their role as mothers, and their role as wives. Indicating how their choice of career would further intensify their role as mothers and their responsibilities as 'good mother'.

The fourth section explores further about women's perspectives on marriage and their choice of husbands. From the stories shared by my interviewees, this section further explored women's expectation on their husbands, and what they seek to acquire from a marriage in the cultural context in China. And using the expectation women have on their husbands to explain their acceptance of the gendered role in the domestic sphere and their willingness to do most of the work in relation to child-rearing. The last section is the conclusion section, which will further explain how the interaction and negotiation with husbands would also in turn intensifying the role of mother and increase burden on the mothers' side in regard to childcare and children's education.

6.1 Introduction

In previous chapters, I have discussed women's understanding of what it is to be a 'good mother' from the perspective of their devotion in early years education, and their interaction with the older generation. This chapter will focus on the involvement of husbands in the child-rearing process, and the influence of husbands' roles on how these women conceptualise the mother's role. During the interviews, I was struck by how many women complained about the absence of their husband's involvement when taking care of their children. Even without me asking them, the frequent appearance of topics about husbands when they talked about their understanding of what it is to be a 'good mother' brought my attention to the husband's role in child-rearing process and in a marriage for Chinese women today. Before the interviews, I did not initially include questions about husbands in the interview questions, but after talking with my participants, I realised the importance of the husband's role in the practising of motherhood, thus it is inevitable to talk about husbands when we discuss 'good mothering'. This is why I focus this chapter on a husband's influence on women's ideas of 'good mothering' from the perspectives of division of labour in the household, the pursuit of a career in relation to a husband's views and the purpose of marriage for today's Chinese women.

In wider literature about women and motherhood in relation to family life, the most frequently discussed questions are the division of labour and women's struggle in taking care of the family and the pursuit of career. The focus of feminist approaches on the familial relationship has explored the experience of women in the domestic sphere and the workplace (Giddens & Sutton, 2017). Although there are different opinions about the historical emergence of domestic division of labour, it is mostly believed that the capitalist social relations brought a sharper distinction between private and public sphere, which resulted in the sphere of women and men, and the men's role as breadwinner (Giddens & Sutton, 2017). In the western studies of gendered division of labour in the household, the main responsibility of domestic tasks is still falling on women, and despite the fact of women's participation in paid employment in the workplace, they still have less leisure time and more duties in terms of housework, childrearing, and caretaking of elderly (Sullivan, 1997; de Vaus, 2008). Feminist studies also reference women's contribution in the caring activities as a family member. The caring activities of

women have not only been referred to in terms of family member's physical and psychological well-being, but also the emotional work women do within the relationship. Wharton has pointed out that women have been contributing to not only the family tasks like cleaning or child-rearing but have also invested large amounts of emotional labour in maintaining familial personal relationships (Wharton, 2012).

When analysing the division of labour in housework and child-rearing, there are also debates about the idea of the 'absent father' in the sociological literature focused on western societies. The idea of the 'absent father' can be traced back to the 1930s, but it has mostly inferred the lack of a father's role in the child-rearing process due to war, or divorce (Giddens & Sutton, 2017). There are further academic discussions on the absence of father and the loss of fatherhood due to divorce from the 1990s (Blankhorn, 1995; Hobson, 2002). In addition to the issues raised by divorce, in married couples, studies still show women as the main contributor to domestic tasks and childcare even in dual-earner families. Gendered expectations have continued to put pressure on men to work full time and women to prioritise domestic duties (Morgan, 1996). With both men and women in the workplace, many women find themselves struggling with two contradictory forces.

On one hand, they want to have personal achievement and economic independence through their career, whilst on the other hand, they want to be 'good mothers' to their children (Crompton, 2006). Studies have shown that in Europe and the UK, women still do most of the housework and childcare (Shelton, 1992; Park et al. 2013). One explanation of the gendered division of labour is the gendered economic forces, as Hochschild (1989) argues, when women earn less than men and remain economically dependent on men as the main provider. Because of this, women are doubly oppressed by men; once during the 'first shift' and then the 'second shift'. However, even in families where men earn less than women, men still do not share an equal duty of housework (Hochschild, 1989). The traditional gendered expectations have continued in family practises, where women are doing most of the housework and childcare, and they are more likely to take a break from their career to take care of the children (Bjornberg, 2002). Miller (2011) also argues that in families of heterosexual couples who have children, the language of 'fatherhood' may be used by men to emphasise their involvement and bonding with the children,

whilst their practises continue to reflect the traditional gendered expectation of man as family breadwinner and women as caretaker. Women are expected to enjoy the motherhood role and to prioritise their responsibility as mother over their career. Meanwhile, fatherhood is still seen as a secondary role that is less important than their role as a worker (Giddens & Sutton, 2017), which makes it harder for women to pursue their career and to have a balance of work and family.

Furthermore, as stated in the literature review section, neoliberalism also had influence on women's role in domestic sphere and way of parenting both in western societies and in China. Although scholars have argued about whether neoliberalism exists in the Chinese society as an party-stated oriented nation, the important production was still controlled by the nation, whilst ideal free market would not exist in China. However, the exist of neoliberalism's influence in parenting and gender is still evident. With globalization and privatization of eco-market, and the commercialization of children's education market. Mothers are pushed to act as the main caretaker of their children. Mothers are expected to be responsible for themselves and for their children, which also reinforced gendered division of labour in the household.

Similarly in China, the absence of husbands is evident in the household sphere and in the child-rearing process, with the gendered division of labour intensifying requirements on mother's responsibility of child-rearing and household duties. The long existing gendered view in the domestic sphere has pushed women to sacrifice their personal needs and career choice in order to fulfil the role of mother. Developments in parenting that have been discussed in Chapter Four also pointed out the high requirements on children's early childhood education which also leads to more expectation on women to sacrifice time, energy and money on children's education, and intensified mothers' roles as educator and caretaker, are not the same expectations as those placed on fathers. In Chapter Five, through focusing on mothers' roles in relation to intergenerational relationships, we saw that from the older generation's perspective, affirmation from the older generation on the gendered division of labour also contributed to the reinforcement of 'intensive mothering'. In this chapter, we will explore whether this also leads to the reconsideration of the meaning of marriage for contemporary Chinese women. Trapped in the dilemma of their social role and family role, Chinese women are influenced both by the traditional cultural ideology of family and women's roles in relation to the ideology of individualism, as outlined in Chapter Two. Many of the women I spoke to stress the importance

of a career and independent income, while at the same time the majority of them ranked childrearing as the most important task for them and expressed a sense that the role of mother is where they feel most valued. From the interviews, many participants expressed feelings of pressure and anxiety about whether they are being a 'good mother'; a concern influenced by the social and cultural requirements on women's duties as mothers. This idea is being reinforced by their family members, especially their parents, parents-in-law, and as this chapter we will explore further, their husbands. For both working mothers and stay-at-home mothers, the perspective and practise of husbands as fathers also have an influence on women's idea of 'good mothering' when they are struggling between career and family.

Another key difference between contemporary Chinese and western marriage contexts is that there are often different reasons for Chinese women to get married and have children in comparison to western contexts where love is emphasised in the composition of family and choosing a spouse. From the pervasive phenomenon of *cui hun* (parents urging and pressuring children to find a mate and get married) in China, we see the continually existing cultural view of marriage and family stability as 'obtaining a stable life' and 'continuation of the family line'. In China, it appears to be a common situation where the older generation go to places like parks where they can make matches for their children; they show their children's age, work, and financial situations, to help find a mate for their children without their children being there. To get married is a very important life task in China that is still largely influenced by the older generation. Many of my participants described being pushed into marriage and having children by their parents, and the phenomenon of *cui hun* is pervasive in the cultural context in China. The responsibility to 'continue the bloodline' is still being enforced on women, which

foregrounds the importance of reproduction as a priority for women, thus having a child and having a family is seen as an important accomplishment in women's life (Fei, 2018). The accomplishment of marriage and having children is a moral responsibility for women to fulfil, and a majority of women give up their own perspective on marriage and having children in order to compromise with their parents' values on marriage and fertility in the process of constant perpetuation of traditional marital values (Liu, 2017). The anxiety of not being able to accomplish this life objective and the existing gendered division of labour in Chinese families has encouraged women to get married for the purpose of having children.

From the interviews, as I will explore in this chapter, Chinese mothers with young children today consider marriage as a symbol of life with stability and view their husband in terms of financial support for the growth of the children. Women choose their husband based on considerations of genes, personality, social and economic status (Tian et al., 2019). Although exhausted from work and child-rearing, they expressed uncertainty about their husband's capacity and skills in child-rearing, feeling both wanting and reluctant of their husband's help in child-rearing. Therefore, I argue that while they demand their husbands to get more involved in child-rearing, they also believe women should shoulder most of the work. Furthermore, they accept the gendered division in child-rearing in exchange for the feeling of stability and complete ness they get from the marriage. It was noticeable when talking about their marriage that the most frequent word they used was 'stability' rather than love, and children were considered as the most important person and achievement before husband, parents, and career. In what follows, I examine how Chinese women consider what counts as mothers' responsibilities in relation to the husband's role in the family, beginning with how women talked about the absence of the father.

6.2 Widowed Parenting

Many of my participants complained about the absence of their husbands' help in housework and childcare duties. Some participants told me that their husbands have very busy jobs that require business trips or working far away from home, which leaves these women to assume   almost all the responsibilities in the household, while most of them are also working mothers. Other scenarios included complaints about their husband's limited involvement in the childcare and educational process, and some participants also noted that their husbands may also have different views on parenting, and thus they choose to leave all the educational work to mothers, like in Kang's case below. Kang is a woman who works in an insurance company to have a more flexible work life so that she can devote more time to the education of her daughter. Before her job in the insurance company, she took a two-year leave from work to focus on the child. She believes that with the fierce competition in the workplace and rising

school entrance requirements in Beijing, she should equip her daughter with various skills and hobbies to have a good chance of accessing schools and a better future. However, her husband thinks otherwise and always accuses her of putting too much work on children and he thinks child-rearing should not be this complicated. Thus, Kang's husband has little involvement in children's education and chooses to avoid participation; 'happy when he is not required to do it'.

> Kang [From Beijing, 42 Years Old, Bachelor's, Insurance, One Child]: My husband cannot help at all. He can only drag you down. He is not devoted to child-rearing at all. I get angry with him due to these many times. For example, when I came home from work and was very tired, and I was putting a lot of effort into educating my child or reading, learning, or listening to music with him, my husband would step away. As long as he was not required to do it, he was happy. I think it is a typical situation in a Chinese family. I have many friends who have the same situation.

Kang was a typical example, similar to many of the participants in this research, as a working mother she needs to work in the daytime and takes care of her daughter after work. Working equal hours to her husband, she also has to do all the work to play with and educate her daughter. In Kang's words, 'I have had almost no time for myself since my daughter was born', 'my time was all devoted to my daughter's education after I got off work'. Kang believes her responsibility as a mother is to educate her child and help with her development, but her husband is not as devoted as Kang in the education of their daughter. As long as the child is healthy, her husband feels no sense of responsibility to play with or take an active role in taking care of or educating his child. When Kang tries to fulfil her role as a 'good mother', her husband chooses to 'step away'. On one hand, Kang's husband did not feel the same responsibility as Kang did, that is the sacrifice of one's own time and energy for the development and growth of the child. Nor did he feel the anxiety of not doing a good enough job on child-rearing. On the other hand, Kang has given up on expecting her husband to show any devotion towards child-rearing and considers most of the child-rearing work her responsibility without help from her husband. She believes the best her husband could do is not 'drag her down'.

Through how Kang describes her experiences, we can see that although both parents are working, the division of labour within the household still follows a traditional gendered perspective where women should be responsible for domestic work inside the household as well as child-rearing, while men are expected to fulfil their role outside the family (Chang, 2008). While Kang and her husband each have their own career, her husband is only expected to fulfil his duty as breadwinner. In contrast, Kang feels a sense of pressure to be a 'good mother' that includes intense devotion to her daughter's growth, as explored in Chapter Four. In this sense, as we will explore further below, the traditional gendered order in the family has been preserved (Li & Song, 2016) and even reinforced despite women's equal participation in the workplace (Chang, 2008) as the husband's role as breadwinner and women's role as housekeeper and carer are maintained as per gendered-role expectations (Zuo & Bian, 2004). In contrast with an emphasis on the importance of career, Kang considered her role as a mother more important than her career and listed her being a mother as most important in her life right now. Her choice of career is also evidence of her emphasis on her duty as mother in a workplace that has more flexible time and more time to work from home.

Kang's story exemplifies what is believed by many of the participants to be a common situation in Chinese families, where husbands are more focused on career development and less devoted to the child-rearing process, leaving most of the housework and childcare issues to women. Fang's story offers us a clearer version of the division of labour in a Chinese family where a lot of domestic and childcare-related work is still considered by husbands as a 'woman's job'. Fang's story paints a picture of 'widowed parenting' as a rising phrase used to capture Chinese families' child-rearing situations today. In Kang's case, a common situation in the interviews arises, in which husbands do not see parenting as complicated as the wife does and choose to leave the child-rearing to women. Another commonly mentioned situation involves husbands falling more into the traditional ideology of gendered division of labour, where men should only be the breadwinner, and women, despite their participation in the workplace, should be the caretaker of the family and children.

From Fang's story, similar to many other participants, we see the preservation of gendered division of labour in Chinese families, where women are considered as caretakers, despite their equal contribution to the finances of the family. In Fang's case, her earnings are slightly less than her husband, and her husband has always treated her as caretaker, with most housework and child-rearing duties falling on Fang. 'He will help me with a little housework sometimes but doesn't clean up at all. My husband always thinks that 'this is the way it is supposed to be' with a lot of things deep in his mind.' Fang said that she tries to negotiate with her husband, but they still maintain a very unequal distribution of family duties. She always feels exhausted devoting all her time to her work and childrearing. When she complains about her husband to her parents, she says that they do not give her enough support. On the contrary, they believe he (Fang's husband) is good enough.'

Fang [From Xining, 40 Years Old, Master, Civil Servant, One Child]: He believes child-rearing is women's work, and he is used to this idea. A couple of days ago, he was at home, and my son wanted to play with him, so he said: 'Go to your mother.' I kept silent at first, but this happened like three or four times. I got angry and asked why he couldn't play with the child for a while.

Although Fang is angry with her husband's perspective of housework and childcare as 'women's work', and little time spent playing with their son, she still puts up with this kind of situation many times before arguing with her husband. The distribution of work was on some level accepted by Fang until she became too tired, and with the influence of her husband's attitude and her parents' affirmation, she believes despite the help from the grandparents, 'the childcare is being done mostly by mothers'. Despite the fact that her husband did not get very involved with childcare, he was still perceived to be a 'good husband' in Fang's parents' views, and Fang also said that she believes 'he is a good husband and good father, apart from the fact that he barely helps with family duties.' Whereas the expectation on Fang being a good mother seems to be stricter.

Fang: I took care of almost all the work of taking care of our son; he couldn't help with anything, and even if he wanted to, he didn't do that well. It was impossible to count on him for child-rearing. He falls asleep before the child, and he has no clue even when the child falls off the bed. Even if he wanted to help, he doesn't know how to do it at all. He never changed the child's diaper, never washed any clothes, or helped the child put on clothes; he would put on the baby's clothes back to front, and he had no concept of what the child should or should not eat. My son is timid, and the teachers said it is because of the lack of his father's company. His father is merely there for him, and I think that is one of the reasons. He's only taken the child to one course since he started extra-curricular activities, and he believes it is a woman's job.

In Fang's case, her husband always went on business trips and even when he was at home, he still did little in terms of housework or taking care of children. From the example in Fang's story when her son wanted to play with his father, Fang got angry with her husband's attitude that 'women should be the one to take care of children', but she could not change her husband's opinion on what a father's involvement should be in terms of child-rearing. She has listed her husband's absence in taking care of their son since he was born, from basic things like changing diapers, changing clothes, to children's educational issues. Even with the teacher's suggestion of the father's greater involvement in his child's life, Fang's husband was still unwilling to take their son to extra classes in the early childhood education centre, as he believed this should be 'a woman's job'. Moreover, it was noticeable that when she complained about her husband's absence, her parents had a different opinion and believed he was 'good enough'. The low expectations of her husband's practical involvement in family life and child-rearing are a long-standing situation, from her parents' affirmations to use of language associated with her husband, including 'used to' and 'deep in his mind' associated with housework and child-related work. To Fang's husband, the role of being a father is clearly less of a priority than his career and own personal needs, such as his sense of entitlement to leisure time. In contrast, Fang's role is understood, by both her husband and her parents, to primarily revolve around her being a mother, and for this to be prioritised over her career.

Fang: After my son was born, he was too small at first and spent a lot of time in hospital care; at one point I hadn't showered for days and wanted to take a shower before I went to take care of my son, and my mother got really angry with me and accused me of not being a good mother. She said, 'a good mother should not take a shower and should come quicker to look after her son!' I was really sad and tired, and I just wanted to take a shower!'

Fang's story exemplifies the intense expectations on motherhood that are still pervasive in Chinese culture. While husbands are fulfilling their expected part as 'breadwinner', wives are expected to be both breadwinner and caretaker where they should sacrifice their personal needs to do so. This pervasive idea that the housework and childcare duties are considered as women's jobs are, however, not only believed by husbands, but also accepted by women on some level, since, as my participants' words suggested, they tended to believe that 'women did almost all the work', and that 'husbands could not be counted on'. The area of childcare that husbands usually become involved in, as mentioned by Xing, are the short-term emergency issues:

Xing [From Beijing, 32 Years Old, Master, Research Engineer, One Child]: When I had my daughter, I suddenly felt stressed, I felt like I should be a good model for her.

Interviewer: Does your husband help take care of the child?

Xing: Not a lot. I think our division is that I take care of all the child's basic needs, and he takes care of some issues like signing up for extracurricular classes or taking the child to the doctors. But these things rarely happen, and they are all short-term issues, so I'm still doing most of the work.'

As Xing mentioned in her story, she felt the pressure to be a good mother and good model for daughter. Yet on the contrary, her husband helped little with the child-rearing and only

146

helped when there were more serious issues such as choosing schools or going to the doctor or the hospital, which generally happened infrequently. The rest of the work associated with childcare was all considered to be Xing's responsibility. Although Xing and her husband are both working, husband are satisfied with helping only when there's huge problems, and they are expected no more than this. Although like Xing, they feel tired and stressed, but when their husband get involved, they are not doing good enough, which lead to the same result that all the work will be done by mothers.

Why didn't these women negotiate more with their husbands on the division of labour in the household? Why do they accept the fact that 'most of the work is meant to be done by women'? One reason appears to correspond with the emphasis in previous studies of western societies, that because women typically earn less than men (Hochschild 1989), this is perceived as making household affairs their duty. In addition, the long existing gendered division of labour has rooted the image of a 'good father' and 'good mother' in people's minds, with fathers often absent and taking little involvement in the child-rearing process. As Fang mentioned about 'changing diapers, [and] washing clothes', fathers also devote less attention to children's education and development and believe that early childhood education is not necessary. Furthermore, even though in some instances husbands did try to help with household affairs and child-rearing, what they actually did in these activities could not reach the standard of their wives' expectations of what would count as a good job, which then fuelled further anxiety and argument.

> Fang: If I'm not around, I can't trust him alone with my son. When I told him, he cannot feed the child something, like when some food is very salty and should not be eaten by children, he would always get angry at me and say, 'You are annoying and care too much'.

The situation that Fang, Cai and Xing all describe is termed 'widowed parenting' on popular websites and social media in China, evoking the significant absence of the father in the childrearing process (Xu, 2020). The phrase 'widowed parenting' has brought up an extensive

discussion on websites and social media, with many women posting about their experiences with their 'similar husband' online. There is another popular phrase, 'the mother gives birth, the mother raises, the father comes home and praises' which vividly conjures up the gendered division of labour in Chinese families and the reinforcement of the mother's distinctive role and responsibilities in relation to child-rearing, and it is this gendered division of childcare that increases women's anxiety over the balance of family and career, and decreases their feelings of happiness in marriage (Xu, 2020). The gendered division of labour has long existed and is today still reinforced by both the older generation and husbands, as increasing requirements, and sacrifices in terms of time and energy are laid on mothers, as described in Chapter Four. On the one hand, mothers are required to devote more time and energy to child-rearing with the sacrifice of their own needs, feeling pressure from both their parents' generation and their husbands, while husbands are used to the gendered division of labour and take it for granted. As in Fang's story, while her parents became angry with her when she tried to take a shower before taking care of her child, their view of her husband was that he is 'good enough', despite her husband's belief of child-rearing as 'women's job' when they both have a career. The long absence of fathers' practical involvement in domestic labour and child-rearing tasks, together with the pressure of high expectations on the mother's side, go towards constructing the idea of a 'good mother' as one who takes on most of the responsibilities in the household, and who sacrifices their own time and needs on child-rearing tasks. This construction of the 'good mother' seems to push women to ask less in terms of their husband's involvement in childcare and shifts them to devoting themselves more to achieve their goal as a 'good mother'.

6.3 Mothers' Career Choices

As described above, the division of labour is highly gendered with the perspective that women should do most of the work in child-rearing. Although husbands are involved in some respects, like decisions relating to significant life issues or emergencies, most childcare and domestic work is done by mothers no matter if they are working outside the home or not, and their work is largely taken for granted. The expectation on mothers is therefore high, while husbands are clearly not equally required. From Fang and Deng's experiences, their husband's devotion in terms of family and child-rearing is considered to be 'good enough', while Fang, in

contrast, is required by her parents to be there for her child and even blamed for wanting to take a bath before going to see her son. These expectations in terms of the mothers' devotion and sacrifice for their children are much more demanding than the expectations of husbands, and it is therefore perhaps not surprising that the combined stress women experienced in terms of juggling workload and family responsibilities also influence women's career choices. While husbands are perceived as the main 'breadwinner' with no limitations in terms of what might be expected in their career choices, mothers are expected, or rather we might suggest forced, to choose careers that are more flexible, with shorter working days, located closer to home. They might even quit their job, in order to fulfil their responsibility as a 'good mother'.

Karen [From Xining, 26 Years Old, Bachelor's, Front Desk, One Child]:

Interviewer: Do you like your job?

Karen: Of course not! But my old job was too busy; I did not have time for my child. I believe my value cannot only be from my career. But I cannot be a fulltime mother as that way my information sources would be cut off, and I will be a woman who stays at home all day and knows nothing about the world. That is why I work at the front desk now. It is a job where I can still have time and energy for my child.

Karen used to work as a nurse which was a job she liked and where she felt valued. However, her job as a nurse was too busy for her to take enough time for her child, and she believed that if she became a stay-at-home mother, she would lose contact with the world and become a 'yellow-faced wife' and 'a frog at the bottom of the well'. She used a lot of negative phrases when she talked about the possibility of being a full-time mother without a career, the 'yellow-faced wife' infers a wife who stays home all day and becomes old and ugly. But she also faced the difficulty of making enough time for her child, and therefore her solution to this contradiction was to settle for what she saw as an easier job and fulfil her responsibility as a mother by giving up her sense of achievement and value in her career. She was afraid of losing contact with the world, as she described it, if she stopped working outside the home. However, she still felt she had sacrificed her own sense of self by leaving her work as a nurse to be a

149

mother. Cai's experiences and choices were different from Karen's, and she had made the choice to be a full-time mother. From Cai's case, she took the accomplishment of raising a child as more fulfilling than having a good career, since she felt like she could be easily replaced by other people in the workplace, but she is unique and irreplaceable to her own child:

> Interviewer: Do you think a full-time mother is better than a working mother?
>
> Cai: I cannot say it is better. They both have advantages. When you work you can earn more money and more stability, but when you stay at home, you need to arrange your own time. When I was working, I felt accomplished, but after I resigned, I found out that my workplace still functions as usual, while I am unique and irreplaceable for my child. Although there is financial stress, I believe I made the right decision.

Here we see how Cai's sense of her own value as a mother was more important to her compared to the value she placed on her career. She believed her contribution to her family and children was 'unique' and 'irreplaceable' while her workplace could easily replace her. Considering the perspectives of Cai and Karen, we can see the role of mothers is both felt as a priority in comparison with their career, and the value of being a 'good mother' is seen as 'more valuable and unique' than the fulfilment they get from work. Hao's example also illustrates how women's careers could be sacrificed for the sake of both husband and child. When we were having dinner, Hao introduced me with her job, which she loves and has a promising future in. She expressed several times of how unwilling she is that she has to quite her own career development schedule to fit for her husband's career plan and better development for her children if they move to the city her husband work in. I would see her sadness that she has to leave the workplace she is familiar with and to start all over in a new city for the sake of her husband and child:

> Hao [From Xining, 34 Years Old, Master's, Bank Clerk, One Child]: Because my husband needs to transfer his work to Guangzhou, I have to transfer my work there as well. I have already asked my workplace for a

transfer although I do not want to. He said [my husband], 'you should just come, find a random job, and take care of the child'.

Here we see how Hao reveals another way in which women's choices prioritise the child over career, in stark contrast with her husband. Due to her husband's change of workplace, she had to change her work as well so that she can move to Guangdong and take care of her child, even though she was very happy with her current job and felt anxious about her future life in a city she had never been to. She still chose to move with her husband. Her husband's attitude to her sacrifice implied a clear sense that her job was considered not as important as his, as her husband believed she should 'find a random job and take care of the child'. Hao's giving up of her current career is not considered as a significant sacrifice by her husband, and her main responsibility, according to her husband, is considered to be 'taking care of the child'. From all three examples above, there are different situations where women are giving up their career for the development of their children, while their husbands seem to make no sacrifice on their career choice or consider any sense of responsibility for child-rearing when making their own career choices. Women usually need to consider the extent to which their jobs are time consuming, energy consuming or take too long a commute in accordance with childrearing, while husbands don't have any such concerns, according to my participants' stories.

Furthermore, women's sacrifices were taken for granted as their husbands believed they were responsible for the child-rearing by husbands also does not seem to be the main priority for women. The primary sense of struggle that these women articulated between their work and their family was more of a struggle and anxiety in terms of not being a 'good enough' mother and not being able to provide more time and energy to children, rather than the anxiety of not being able to achieve in a good career, or not being able to do their dream job. Many mothers in the interviews brought up their sense of anxiety of not giving their children enough time and energy and felt guilty that they have to work due to financial burdens. They said that they would choose an 'easier job' in order to take care of their children. For example, Hao, who although she liked her current job, had to move to the city where her husband had found a new job, even though she didn't agree with her husband's idea that 'you should come and find a random job, then take care of the child'. However, she still believed it was the best choice for her daughter

151

overall to live in a bigger city where she would have access to more and better educational resources, and she therefore agreed to move and give up her job. Therefore, based on the women I spoke to, children are still the most important priority for women, and their roles as mothers are their priority rather than the accomplishment in a career, which is in contrast to their husbands. While they may often say that they do not agree with their husband's perspective in terms of viewing their career as 'less important', they nevertheless rank their career as less important.

6.4 Marrying for Stability

Given that husbands are doing relatively little in terms of family-related work or help with child-rearing, why then would Chinese women choose to get married? The absence of husbands' support in the child-rearing process and the phenomenon of 'widowed parenting' as a common situation in Chinese families has raised questions not only about women's huge responsibilities raising children, but also about the value of marriage to women (Guo, 2019). Many participants mentioned the word 'stability' more than 'love', especially after having children, which implies most of the participants believe children are more important to them compared to husbands or parents. The composition of family to Chinese women is more of a form of stability rather than the pursuit of love and happiness.

> Summer [From Beijing, 46 Years Old, Master, Child Early Education, Two Children]: Before I got married I wanted to have a child more than a marriage. I feel like my life is complete when I have a child. And my parents also pushed me to get married sooner. I was raised to listen to my parents and do things at their preference.

> Hao [From Xining, 34 Years Old, Master's, Bank Clerk, One Child]: The first few years after my child was born, I felt like I had no freedom and no time on my own. I had this child because my husband's grandmother was

152

very sick, and they wanted his grandmother to see her great grandson. That is why we had this child, not because I wanted to have a child. I would regret it sometimes, but due to my responsibility as a mother, I had to take care of my child, but I do feel like I lost my own time and freedom.

Summer and Hao both mentioned how their parents and other family members urged them to get married and have children, and the decision to have children is largely influenced by family members. *Cui hun* is a pervasive situation in China and happened to most of my participants before they got married. Different from 'forced marriage', the older generation do not make their children marry a certain person, but they keep urging them to get married, and better to do so before reaching 30 years old. People who are not married after 30 are judged more intensely by their parents. This happens especially to women, when their parents worry about their children missing their best time to get pregnant and have children. Summer was influenced by her natal family that women should get married and have children earlier than 30. Influenced by her parents' view, she believes having a child is the 'completion' of her life and an important lifetime goal. For Summer, marriage is for having children as opposed to 'pursuing love'. Hao is different from Summer as Hao had her child due to her husband's family, the need to 'continue the bloodline' and 'let the older generation see their grandson and great grandson'. She had her child reluctantly. The meaning of marriage in China is more about reproduction to 'continue the family line' rather than the 'pursuit of love'. The women's decisions about her fertility are largely influenced by family members rather than their own desires. And marriage and children are seen as a symbol of a more 'complete' life for women and an important task to fulfil. Other than 'completion of life', marriage and children are also seen as a symbol of life where 'stability is obtained' from many participants' stories. The notion of a 'stable life' was described by the mothers in the interviews as more important than notions such as career success or 'finding love and happiness'. And the expectation on women to be a mother and have a family is seen as very important life tasks for women in China, with the main purpose of marriage in China focused on the purpose of reproduction, and children as the bridge keeping a marriage stable. The purpose of being a mother is stressed when women are seeking marriage, not only by the older generation, when they *Cui hun* (urge) their daughters to get married and have children, but also stressed by women themselves when they choose husbands who have

153

'stable careers', 'and good genes' which all relate to the purpose of reproduction, and thus, the purpose of being a mother.

Interviewer: 'Do you think you have become who you wanted to be?'

Sunny: No. I was hoping I would have some accomplishments in my career, but my parents always wanted me to have stability in my life. So, I found a job in the government system and got married early. My parents are very satisfied with my life now as I have stability in my career, my marriage, and my child. But I always regret not trying. I feel like my life is hazy and I have no dreams.

Hu [From Xining, 40 Years Old, Master, Civil Servant, One Child]: When I had my child, I was working in Japan, and I took care of the child all by myself for six months before I went back to China.

Hu: I think after women's independence, women became more tired than before, because you need to work as well as take care of the family. I never feel like I have a good relationship with my husband, and I do not think I live a happy life. But when I compare it with others I know, I feel like my life is more comfortable and stable. I believe most Chinese families pursue stability. After you have a stable life, you can grow attachment, but love will not necessarily bring stability. When I chose my husband, I was practically minded. Even if we were to divorce, I would wish him a good life, because he is the father of my child and he needs to pay child support. I ask little from him; I am satisfied with him preparing a gift for me on my birthday or apologising after we fight. My choice of husband is first based on his appearance; he should not be too ugly. Men are not reliable, so I would rather choose a good-looking one for good genes for my child. Secondly, I think he should have a soft and gentle personality. I have been fighting for my rights, so I prefer a husband with a soft personality.'

Sunny and Hu are examples of women who seek stability in life rather than accomplishment in their career, or the pursuit of 'dreams and love'. In Sunny's case, although she regretted not trying to explore what she wanted in life, she still chose to get married early, have her child, and find a career as a civil servant; a career in government organisations is considered as a more stable and a lifelong job with little chance of being fired, which is a perfect condition for a 'stable life' in the Chinese cultural context. Sunny's view of her current life is 'stable but with regret' while she believes her parents think her current life as 'complete' and 'satisfied'. Hu similarly stressed her sense of purpose in terms of marriage and career as a way to obtain 'stability' and her choice of husband for 'good genes for children' and a 'more comfortable life'. In the interview, Hu mentioned her ex-boyfriend before she got married to her husband, and she said she 'loved him a lot and hoped he is not doing well after their breakup' while she hopes her husband would have 'a good life' even if they divorce so that he could 'support their children financially'. The composition of the family is more function oriented in terms of being primarily focused on reproduction and stability, according to the stories shared by my participants. Moreover, the participants 'ask little' from their husband in relation to their division of labour in the household and describe themselves as 'easily satisfied with their husbands' occasional help and attention' due to the more important sense of stability the marriage has brought and the reassurance of a better environment for the children's growth.

In conclusion, the stability women seek from marriage is to become a mother and have a husband to support the family. The choice of partner is primarily based on financial ability, genes for future children, and the pursuit of stability for women who are more focused on being a mother, the accomplishment of reproduction, and the continuation of a family bloodline. Deeply influenced and continuously pressured by the older generation on the urgency of getting married and having children, women have become very anxious when approaching 30 and are taking the task of being a mother very seriously, even when several participants pointed out they did not like children before they got married. Still, they have children due to the pressure from their parents. Motherhood is still stressed in marriage in China, while for men, even with the pressure of continuing the family blood line, their role of being a father is not stressed in the same way as it is for women.

6.5 Conclusion

Overall, in the Chinese social-cultural context, although women are struggling with trying to balance work and family, they still want to pursue a career as well. Yet most of my participants spoke in the interviews about how they prioritised their role as mother at the current time. Their narratives indicate that their husbands' perspectives on child-rearing are still deeply rooted in the traditional gendered division of labour. This is the case despite the changing social and economic situations where women are acting as dual earners within the family. Unfortunately, their careers are still seen by husbands as less important, and the duty of housework and childcare are still seen as the women's work. While most women did not agree with their husband, they nevertheless accepted the expectations of mothers doing most of the work and they even sometimes expected that the family might go back to a previous era where women only take responsibility for household affairs and husbands are the breadwinner. These women are feeling stressed about the gendered division of labour, and they are choosing to solve this problem by reducing their expectations or achievements in exchange for more time devoted to their children, rather than negotiating with their husbands. Due to the long absence of husbands in the child-rearing process, mothers get more pressured when they feel their husbands are not 'doing a good enough job' even when they try to help, so mothers choose to sacrifice more of their own needs to accomplish good parenting.

The emphasis on women being a mother is stressed much more both before and during a marriage, compared to the expectations of men in terms of fatherhood. Before marriage, the purpose of reproduction is much more emphasised to women, and the role as a mother is more prioritised in Chinese culture. Husbands' role as breadwinner, and the provider of good genes are more stressed in a marriage, symbolising stability. Meanwhile, family and children, and the intensified expectation of 'good parenting' are falling on women, and being reinforced by the older generation and husbands, like in Fang's case, when she was struggling with doing all the child-rearing stuff by herself, her own parents think that her husband is already doing a good enough job as breadwinner, even though they are both working. Therefore, women are still

156

expected to do most of the sacrificing from the perspective of the older generation and the husbands, forcing mothers to take more responsibilities even though they are already tired enough. When a mother is not doing good enough in children's care and education procedure, she would be criticized by the surroundings, even by their own parents, but husbands are less expected to fulfil their father's role and only expected to be the breadwinner for the family. Deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture and the intensified child-rearing ideologies, women themselves also stress their value as mothers and are willing to sacrifice more for their children even when they believe devotion in the family is unequal between husbands and wives. The women's attitude and understanding of marriage, and their compromise on husband's little evolvement in the domestic sphere all contributed to the intensification of motherhood with increased burden in child-rearing.

7. Good Mothers and Gender Preference

After discussion of mothers focus on children's education, their relationship with the older generation and with the husbands, another important issue worth talking about rise up from the interview data, the gender issue. In the chapter of children's education, the intergenerational relationship and the negotiation with husbands, gender is existing in every topic and influenced how these relationships work in daily life. This chapter generated due to the stories of gender discrimination experience shared by several of my participants, although with the knowledge of China's boy preference culture in the past, the detailed stories still sound shocking which pushed me to ask more questions about how women today perceive of the view of gender and how they intend to pass on to their children. This chapter will talk about these issues from an empirical perspective.

This chapter has four main sections. In the first section, there are some literatures that have been talking about gender issues relating to motherhood, and a brief introduction of what this chapter will be different from the previous studies. In the second section, experience, and stories in relation to boy preference in the old Chinese cultural value is presented. In the third section, the new focus of girl preference will be further discussed. More stereotypes are posted upon the image of daughters and sons while mothers view themselves as more equal on gender issues and trying to pass on a equalled gender perspective to their children. The conflicted image of women who are expected to be both 'soft' with images like quiet, clean, nice temper, know their way to keep the family's harmony by showing weakness. And on the other hand, also expected by mothers to be strong and independent women who do not rely on other people or compliance

to the patriarchy system when it causes harm to themselves. The conflicted image of expectation on daughters shows a hybrid of ideas of individualization and the existing of Chinese cultural gendered view. Through which, mothers are struggling and trying to be as equal as they believe they can. In the last section of conclusion, it is further illustrated how mothers determine to pass to the equal gender perspective to their children. And although without noticing, they are actually reinforcing some of the gendered image and passing on biased gender perspectives to their children, but they have aware of the pressure on women and trying to make changes for the next generation as a responsible 'good mother'.

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, this thesis has explored motherhood through mothers' interactions with their children, the older generation, and their husbands. To seek the answer of what counts as a good mother, one more aspect emerged as significant during the interviews. The idea that 'boys are better than girls' was a long existing patrilineal and patriarchal tradition in China (Shi, 2016), as having boys has historically been very important for Chinese families.

However, many participants mentioned the idea that 'girls are better than boys' which was quite a surprise. In addition, some participants mentioned experiences of being at the receiving end of gendered discrimination from their parents since they were children, which has also influenced their later marriage choices and child-rearing decisions. Thus, this chapter will try to explore the question of inheriting gender through generations, discussing what my participants have received from their own mothers in terms of understandings of gender and what they then seek to pass on to their children in regard to the understanding of being a good mother. The chapter will discuss this through four sections; the first section will talk about the long existing preference for sons in China, the second section will then show a picture of how mothers practising motherhood believe they are treating sons and daughters equally with no gender bias, the third section will then turn to address the different expectations of how women should behave during the child-rearing process, and the final section will discuss the surprising finding of my participants' expression of daughter preference. Through these four sections, this

chapter will discuss ideas about what makes a 'good mother' with reference to the ideas and practises of gender with which Chinese mothers with young children engage.

7.2 Boys being Better than Girls

The family is the first social organisation that children come into contact with, and the parents are the children's first teachers. In daily parent-child contact, parents' gender concepts and gender stereotypes will be passed on to children through their own behaviours and parenting methods. Family education has a subtle and important impact on the development of the socialisation of children's gender roles (Chen & Lu, 2012). The preference of sons over daughters has long existed in Chinese culture, and gender bias has been found from the start of breastfeeding to the investment in children's education (Woollett and Lloyd, 1991). On the discussion of motherhood practise and gendered bias, for example, Woollett and Lloyd (1991) argue that mothers who have daughters have more expectations about their daughters' behaviour and appearance which was mainly influenced by gender stereotypes. Although more families have started to see daughters as equal to son, Croll (2000) and Li and Lavely's (2003) findings nevertheless indicate the continuing existence of son preference, influenced by the cultural values and norms concerning gender roles and traditional family structures.

However, improvements have been made to the investment in children's education, resulting in much more subtle differences in recent years (Hannum, 2005; Connelly and Zheng, 2007). Research focused on rural areas of China indicates that the attitude of mothers' aspiration in children's education is still influenced by traditional gender values, where mothers respond more strongly to son's engagement in school rather than daughters (Zhang et al. 2007). They believe that sons' persistence in education is linked with a family's economic situation, whereas daughters' persistence in school was highly linked with mothers' own educational attainment and the mothers' educational aspirations for their daughters. Mother-daughter relationships were seen as more closely linked and mothers, rather than fathers, are seen as the main influence on daughters' gender perspectives. However, no matter whether for sons or daughters, in

families where mothers act as main caretaker, they have the main influence on their children as regards gender perspective(Zhang et al. 2007).

Having sons in Chinese culture is crucial for families as sons are responsible for the continuation of ancestral line and the main financial and care provider for families (Shi, 2016). Therefore, there has been a strong preference for sons rather than daughters among Chinese families, with sons playing a pivotal role, and most families preferring to have a son to fulfil the obligation of filial piety and to continue the family bloodline (Skinner, 2002). After the implementation of the One Child Policy in 1979, many families, especially in the rural areas, who viewed sons as really important for the family, have strongly resisted the policy in order to have at least one son. Moreover, with the desire for sons and its conflict with the One Child policy, female infants were even abandoned or selectively aborted during pregnancy, resulting in a male-biased sex ratio at birth in China (Shi, 2016). On the other hand, due to strict policy control, the mainstream discourse on child-rearing has begun to transform from 'more children to more sons to less children', and 'daughters are as good as sons' (Tang, 2013). Ye (2010) conducted a survey about the gender preference of people born after the 1980s in urban areas, showing that most of the people see one child as an ideal number, and despite the preference for sons still existing, the preference has been reduced, and replaced by the pursuit of 'Er Nv Shuang Quan' (a family that has one son and one daughter). However, with the Two Children Policy, Chinese people have generally changed their intentions and are having two children. People prefer to have one son and one daughter, but if not possible, sons are preferred to daughters, as research by Jiang et al. (2015) demonstrated.

Other sociocultural and economic changes also impacted choices relating to reproduction changes in China as well. Many families started to accept the idea that having a son is not essential, and daughters are as good as sons. One reason was due to the growing expense of child-rearing and the limited family resources to secure children's best upbringing (Davis, 2000 & Fong, 2004). As mentioned in Chapter Four, Chinese families take children's education very seriously, and are willing to invest in children's education for the possibility of better opportunities and upward social mobility, while the cost of child-rearing is rising rapidly. Families, therefore, have to concentrate their resources on limited numbers of children rather

than pursuing sons (Shi, 2016). Daughters and sons are starting to receive   equal treatment in families who do not consider sons as the only bloodline (Lin & Geng, 2010 & Shi, 2016). In addition, sons who were traditionally considered as care providers (Xu, 2001) are now becoming financial burdens to some families in China, as the raising of a son involves significant amounts of money, not only in terms of education, but also the rising cost of bride wealth. Bride wealth is the expense to be given to the bride's family before the engagement, in the form of money, jewellery, or other assets, as a gift to the bride's family. The average amount for this has increased sharply from hundreds to over 20,000 yuan (Shi, 2011).

Moreover, in contemporary China, men are still seen as the main financial provider in a marriage, as described in the previous chapter. In China, marriage requires men to have strong financial foundations, and the basic requirement is to provide a house before marriage, while in big cities in China, the average cost of a house is thousands for only one square metre (Tang, 2013) And the furnishing of a new or well-renovated house, or at least the down payment on a new house is crucial preparation for the marriage by the groom's family, (Diao, 2007. Li, 2017. Shi, 2011). Influenced by the limitation of the One Child Policy and the rising financial expense of having sons, the status of daughters has therefore been revaluated and daughters and sons are more equally treated, especially in the urban areas (Shi, 2016). Another reason is the rising status and financial ability of women in the household and the workplace, giving them more control over their fertility choices in some senses, and reducing the preference of having sons over daughters (Tang, 2013). With the changing cultural values, despite the influence of the traditional 'bloodline' preference for sons, people have been changing their perspectives on gender due to the reasons discussed above. However, some scholars have also argued that changes in culture and values develop independently from, and at a different pace than - economic developments. Thus, despite the transformation of the social and economic situations in China, cultural development has transformed slower than the economic development due to its long existing histories in China (Chen & Wang, 2013).

In keeping with the historical preference for sons, some of my participants mentioned severe gender discrimination from their own parents while they were growing up. This was particularly stark in the cases of Lian and Hu, who felt their parents gave most of their love to

162

their brothers. In Hu's case, since she was a child, she has felt that her parents only cared about her brother. Even though they went to the same school, her parents only made delicious meals to send to school for her brother, while she had nothing to eat. 'My parents gave me away when I was little because I'm a girl, and I was sent back to my original family after my second family had their own son, and he would take care of the family in the future', Hu recalled in the interview. 'My parents didn't want to pay my school bills; I had to fight for my own right.' The preference for sons over daughters has left deep scars for Hu, 'All the good things belong to my brother, and I was invisible and had to take care of my brother. I was determined to treat my children equally.'

Hu's case demonstrates her determination to change the biased gender treatment that she inherited from her parents and to not pass this on. While an extreme case, Hu's story shows the implication of the historical cultural preference for sons in China, which several participants also described, although in less severe ways, as having experienced, or continued to experience in terms of their treatment by the older generation. Regardless of their previous experience of gender discrimination, all the mothers in my interview sample claimed that they see daughters as equal to sons; especially participants like Hu and Lian who seek to make up for what they lack in their childhoods. They are determined to treat their children as equal to avoid what they have experienced. Although many of them, after marriage, have still received some of the gender discrimination from their parents or parents-in-law, and been influenced by Confucian culture in China, much of the time, they choose to avoid conflicts with their parents, as described in Chapter Four. However, at the same time, the experiences they describe in the interviews also reveal that when it comes to their own children, they try to stand up against the values of their parents' generation in order to establish a more equal view of gender for their children. Hu's interview provides an example of this

> Hu [From Xining, 40 Years Old, Master's, Civil Servant, Two Children]: When I was pregnant with my second child, my husband suggested the child take my last name. But my mother said to me, 'we have our own son and grandson, we don't need your son!' I was really angry with her, and I thought, I really don't care what my son's last name is!

The children's last name is an important thing in traditional Chinese culture. The children's taking of a husband's last name means the inheritance of the husband's family bloodline through their children. Hu's husband's suggestion on taking Hu's last name for their second child demonstrates his acceptance that children not only belong to the husband's family. Departing from the traditional patriarchal perspective he is accepting Hu's position and her contribution to the family. However, when Hu's mother rejected this offer, it displayed the common belief of the older generation that only sons could inherit the family bloodline and daughters who get married are like 'spilt water', no longer belonging to the natal family, as well as the children she would have. We see that the younger generations are starting to break the idea of sons as vital for families and their traditional duties for Chinese families as inherited bloodline and family wealth. The gradual disappearance of traditional cultural values, such as children adopting the husband's last name, has been indicating a more egalitarian gender view in the younger generation who are trying to pass on different norms to their own children.

The rise of women's agency has been challenging the patriarchal system in various areas, while Yan (2006) argues that the challenges are more towards the generational axis rather than the gender axis, since the empowerment of young women in marriage is the result of shifting power relations between the senior generation and the junior generation (Yan, 2006). Indeed, from Hu's story, we see some endeavour from the younger generation to change the view on gender when raising their own children.

7.3 The Emphasis on Gender Equality

From the stories of my participants, mothers who have daughters all suggest that they are teaching them to be independent and have the ability to support themselves in the future. They also emphasise their ability to consider what is right and wrong without following the older generation's views. Deng also experienced gender discrimination from her mother-in-law after she got married. After she had her daughter, her mother-in-law moved in to take care of the child and, during this period, her mother-in-law treated her unkindly and assigned her all the

chores, despite the fact that she worked like her husband. Because her mother-in-law also took care of her daughter, she became really worried that her mother-in-law's perspective on gender might be a negative influence on her child.

> Deng [From Beijing, 41 Years Old, Master, Education Consultant, One Child]: I always kept silent because she is the elder and I believed I should obey her will and show my respect. But when I realised it would influence my daughter's view of what women and family relationships should look like, I needed to teach her this was wrong.

Therefore, when her mother-in-law forbade her from taking the whole family to spend time with her natal family on New Year's Day, Deng asked her daughter to think about what she would do if the same thing happened to her also happened to her daughter in the future? Would she feel unfairly treated, or does she believe men should have privilege? As Deng is raising her daughter, she takes her daughter's understanding of gender equality seriously and tries to teach her daughter that women should have the same rights as men do. In addition, her way of telling her daughter to rethink the situation involving her grandmother was a way to teach her child to break up the wall of traditional cultural norms and think more from a gender equal view. Therefore, when Deng tried to demonstrate to her daughter, by standing up to her mother-in-law, Deng's daughter had her preconceived ideas of traditional gender and family from her grandmother, brought into question.

> Deng: When my daughter told me that she thought I was not right to talk back to her grandmother, I asked her to think about whether she could accept the same situation if she was in my place.

Deng also said, 'I don't want my daughter to experience the same thing, so I have to fight back. I want her to realise women should be equally treated.' In order to change her daughter's idea on this, Deng has been encouraging her daughter to express herself whenever they disagree

and hopes her daughter will think independently through discussion with her rather than just obey her parents' thoughts. 'I encourage her to express herself, and she always argues with me. Parents are not always right; I hope she can think for herself.'

The emphasis Deng places on cultivating her daughter's ability to think independently as a characteristic of 'good mothering' also indicated her expectation to break the traditional cultural value that the elder generation are always right, and the younger generation should show respect by obeying their ideas. Deng is searching for a more equal gendered view, not only between men and women, but also between the younger generation and the older generations. In Deng's child-rearing experiences, we see her endeavours against the traditional patriarchal configurations. On the one hand, deeply influenced by her parents, she believes children should respect the elderly, and has tried to fulfil her responsibility as daughter-in-law by obeying her mother-in-law in the first couple of years in her marriage. On the other hand, she wants her daughter to have a different life and different status when she has her own family. Thus, she has started to teach her daughter that women and men should be equally treated. She also wants her daughter to break the traditional rules of filial piety by 'respecting' rather than 'obeying 'the elderly'. 'I don't think the elderly know the world anymore and some of her [mother-in-law] thoughts are unacceptable. For example, she thinks boys are better than girls. I worry how my daughter will think of herself when she grows up'.

Many ideas of gender equality were raised by Deng in her parenting ideas, as well as many other participants, who stressed that daughters are the same as sons now, and they would not treat them differently. Interestingly, mothers who have sons are also trying to break the traditional gendered ideas about masculinity, such as, 'men do not easily shed tears', and the expectation that men should restrain their feelings. Related research by Wu (2017) also claims that the gender stereotypes surrounding girls' personalities are more flexible than boys, stating findings showing that almost all boys believe women are timid and love to cry, while girls think that women are sometimes fragile, but can also be very brave. In contrast to cultural stereotypes that men are strong and won't easily cry, many mothers in the interviews mentioned allowing their sons to express their feelings. Boys are allowed to cry in many of the participants' families, although not all, since some are still influenced by the old, gendered expectations. Mothers who

hope to pass on a more equal gendered perspective encourage their sons to express their feelings when they feel afraid or angry, as can be seen from Wen and Lemon's stories:

> Wen [From Xining, 36 Years Old, Bachelor's, Civil Servant, One Child]: I hope to be my son's friend. Whenever he has troubles, he can talk to me, and I can help him. I hope he will express his feelings to me.

Similar to how Deng tried to encourage her daughter, Wen also encouraged her son to express his feelings and thoughts and discuss with her as an equal rather than a more authoritative mother. We see here how alongside mothers trying to break the chain of the old, gendered bias influencing expectations about how women or men should behave, they also seek to change the mother-child relationship to be a more equal relationship that enables children to express their own perspectives. Especially from the case of Deng, who was a woman that compliance to her mother-in-law's authority before she realized she was getting unequalled treatment from her mother-in-law is not only a family problem, but also a gendered bias pressed on women in domestic sphere. Therefore, she changed her attitude to her mother-inlaw and stood up for herself as she was trying to pass on a more equalled gender perspective to her daughter of what kind of position should a women have in domestic sphere and also trying to pass on her own idea of 'what counts as a good daughter' and 'what counts as a good mother'. Different from the old cultural value of filial piety, she showed her daughter an image of a more equal relationship between generations, and her actions of showing respect without obeying everything the elder generation say.

> Lemon [From Beijing, 34 Years Old, Master's, Full-time Mother, One Child]: I paid attention to teach my son how to express his feelings. For example, I would say, I know you are angry, or I know you are afraid. Don't worry, I would always love you.

Different from the traditional idea that 'men should be brave, and men should not cry', Lemon chose to encourage her son to express his feelings and hoped he would realise it was ok to feel afraid or sad. Lemon said her parents never said 'I love you' to her, and she never said 'I love you' to them either, but she would occasionally say it to her son, in order to let him know, he could be himself in front of her, and could express his feelings no matter if they were happy or sad.

These stories show that these mothers are trying to change some of the gender bias of their own child-rearing experience, trying to make their daughters more independent, while allowing their sons to express more feelings despite the traditional cultural concern with this being 'not manly enough'. In the child-rearing process, my participants believed they are trying to break some of the traditional gender images that are seen as damaging for both boys and girls, as well as the traditional relationship between generations, allowing boys to be sentimental and expressive and girls to be strong and independent, and to think about the relationship of men and women from a more equal perspective.

7.3.1 'Soft Women' Versus 'Hard Women'

Peng did research analysing a TV show focusing on how the notion of gender essentialism was promoted in Chinese TV shows (Peng, 2020), which has reflected on the existing gender power relations established in the socio-economic structure in China. As Peng (2020) pointed out, Tv programs in China are controlled by the National Radio and Television Administration on what could be played on broadcast. Therefore, the gender essentialism expressed by the TV program has its underlying political logic and the 'socialist values' in line with the insurance of the Party-state's stability (Peng 2020). The cultural industries have created various gender representations to address gender identities (Hu & Wang, 2020). The main emphasize of promotion lies on heteronormative representations and any notion that fall out of the female-male complementary interdependence were problematized (Peng, 2020). Women's image in the TV program was still portrayed stereotypically. And women and men are always portrayed as interdependent, being successful in career has become symbolic loss of their female virtues,

confining women to the domestic sphere without challenging men's dominance of the society and outside the domestic sphere (Peng, 2020). While the participants in this research are trying to break the stereotype and expected feminine virtues imposed on women's image and men's image of masculinity, at least it is what they believe they are doing in practise of motherhood.

From the stories of my participants, although there were limitations on women's expectations in terms of their own careers once they had children, as discussed in the previous chapter, not only did women have relatively more power in the workplace and in family life than their parents' generation, but they were also seeking to pass on the idea of 'girl power' to their children. This was especially the case for mothers who were born in families where boys were treated as significantly more important than girls. Not only did many participants mention gender equality when they raised their own children, many even argued that daughters are better than sons. In my participants' parenting stories, I could see their effort to pass on more equal gendered views, however, they have not totally broken away from the influence of the old, gendered perspective and, I would argue, continue to pass on biased gender views in daily life. On the one hand, mothers expect their daughters to be more independent and tough as 'hard women', presenting a strong image. On the other hand, their descriptions of their parenting practises also contain the passing on of an image of men being the brave and dominant one, while women are being protected and presented as needing to show a more feminine 'soft' side.

> Dan [From Xining, 37 Years Old, Bachelor's, Civil Servant, One Child]: My son is a little bit fearful. In order to stop him from stepping on a well lid, my mother frightened him with a ghost under the well. I changed the story of a ghost to brave turtles living underground helping the poor, women, and children.

Dan's parents participated in the child-rearing process, and whenever the grandparents wanted their grandson to behave, they would think of a ghost story to frighten the child. This caused her son to become a little fearful and afraid of things like the well lid. Since Dan was

169

busy at work, she couldn't change her parents' every parenting idea, so she had to change the stories his grandparents told him into some less scary ones. Thus, she turned the ghost story into a hero story, and instead of ghosts, brave turtles lived underground to save lives and do good deeds. Her initial expectation was to help her son to overcome his fear. Not intentionally, she assigned women more disadvantaged roles who need help and didn't notice the gendered bias contained in her stories. The qualities expected from boys are to be more tolerant and generous, and to be more considerate to women, while, as in Hu's case, although perhaps inadvertently, the women are described as being in a weaker position.

> Interviewer: What would you do if your child is bullied when he goes to kindergarten?
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> Hu [From Xining, 40 Years Old, Master, Civil Servant, Two Children]: My child always comes home with scratches on his face. I see if they are serious, and I ask if he still wants to be friends with this child. And if all the scratches are made by little girls, my child who is a boy, and taller than those little girls, has to be the bigger person.

Although Hu's attempt was to teach her son to be braver and not haggle over small fights with his classmates, her idea of girls being the weaker side and that the scratches made by a 'little girl' should not be taken seriously indicates a more traditional gender image imposed on men and women. Without noticing the gendered view, she posed on her son, Hu believe she was passing on the right gender perspectives. Especially when take into consideration of Hu's childhood experience of gender discrimination from her parents, she was really determined to try to let her son learn about gender equality. But from years of influence of old cultural value about women and men. Hu mistakenly believe that when a boy give way to a girl, it is a way of gender equality and the boy's respect on the girl. The image of women and men are still perpetuated with gendered bias. Therefore, without noticing, Hu actually intensified the gendered perspective on difference of women and men rather than her determination of passing on equal gendered view to her son. This contrasts with Hu's expectation of raising her child

with equal gender views that is different from her own experience. Jiao is also passing on to her son ideas of masculinity associated with strength and protecting women:

> Jiao [From Beijing, 33 Years Old, Bachelor's, Education Front Desk, One Child]: I always tell him he is a boy, and he should grow up to protect his mother, because he is a man, and I am a woman.

Jiao positions herself here as a 'soft woman' who needs to be protected by a man. When I asked her whether she believed in gender equality, she response with certainty that: 'Of course! Sons and daughters are the same! I'm all in gender equality! Afterall I am a woman myself!' Whereas, when she talked about the daily details of her practising of motherhood with her son, she's actually sending her son image of women as 'need to be protected' and men as the masculine figure. Therefore, there are two different gendered expectations being passed on concerning femininity from the daily stories shared by Hu, Lian and Jiao, which map onto available accounts of femininity in broader Chinese discourse. One is the image of 'strong women', who are independent in career and life, well educated, and who do not need men to provide protection or support (Tan, 2015). Another image is women with more feminine features, like how Hu and Jiao position women in the weaker position and who need to be protected by men. Lian's story about how her beliefs about how women should act in family life also places women into a 'softer' position.

> Lian [From Xining, 28 Years Old, Bachelor's, Early Education, One Child]: My mother-in-law treats me well. My husband is good at dealing with my relationship with my mother-in-law. He makes me look good in front of her.
>
> For instance, when my mother-in-law does not want to wash the dishes and I am expected to do it, then my husband will pretend to complain I waste too much water and I'm too slow, and he washes the dishes instead of me.

In this way, my mother-in-law does not feel unhappy because I was blamed, and my mother-in-law can also take a rest.

Lian describes having to show her delicate and clumsy image to make her husband look like a bigger man in the eyes of her mother-in-law. In Lian's marriage, she believes she had a good relationship with her mother-in-law and her husband. She mentions her husband loves her a lot and helps her with all kinds of chores. But looking at how her husband has been dealing with her relationship between Lian and her mother-in-law, women are still in the position of being expected to be the one doing all the housework, as outlined in the previous chapter. Her mother-in-law's idea of a gendered division of labour in the household was not changed by Lian's occasional weakness. In her family, her mother-in-law and Lian are the main people doing housework, and when her husband wants to help her, he has to make his mother feel comfortable by blaming Lian for not doing a good enough job first or sneaking behind her mother-in-law's back.

Lian's husband's behaviour seems to be a means of tempering Lian's relationship with her mother-in-law, to help promote her relationship with the older generation, but his behaviour could at the same time also be said to reinforce women's position in the family and the gendered expectations on women in terms of domestic labour. Furthermore, Lian's story of how she gets along with her parents-in-law and her husband also shows the image of a 'soft woman' at home who knows how to show people their weakness and make their husbands appear to be better than them to maintain family harmony. This kind of behaviour of 'playing the woman' and recognising men as the protector or provider is also a long existing culturally gendered image in China (Zheng, 1994& Jiang, 2001), to position women as 'being protected'. Sons are more commonly required to have more tolerance for girls and to protect girls. Influenced by this historical gendered view, the contemporary social and cultural situations and the trends of mass media, although women are trying to obtain a more equal and independent gendered image as mother and wife, they are still expected to be good at both work and family, and the expectation of 'women being more feminine' stills exists in mainstream mass media, requiring women to pay more attention to their 'feminine appearance' and show more 'feminine behaviours', with men acting as the 'protector'. My participants are all more or less influenced by these two

conflicted gendered expectations on women, and these conflicts have also been shown in relation to their child-rearing practises.

Chen and Lu (2012) describe an example of mothers' conflicted perspectives on gender being influenced by both the traditional gender role of women and the new image of women being a strong individual, impacted by neoliberalism, modernisation, and the transformation of cultural understanding of gender equality and gendered role. Drawing on findings from a survey they demonstrated that mothers want their daughters to be well-educated, and many expect their daughters to obtain a bachelor's, master's degree, or even a doctoral degree. One reason for mothers making education an important part of raising children is to prepare them for a competitive society and hope they will be equipped to have a good career in the future, echoing the findings explored in Chapter Four. The other reason shown in Chen and Lu's survey (2012) was that getting a good degree could increase the daughter's 'price' in marriage, and help her daughter find a partner with better academic and financial conditions. Therefore, while mothers believe being independent and strong is important for daughters, they also believe a good marriage is important for women and could provide a better life for their daughters, as I described in the Introduction. As explored in the previous section, similar conflicts concerning how women should behave and what their role should be were interwoven in the interview accounts of my participants. The conflicts and contradictions that women are feeling about themselves, and when they are raising the next generation also indicate that, while they try to promote ideas of gender equality, the reality of the contemporary social environment in China simultaneously leads to the passing on of more traditional perspectives on gender.

7.3.2 Girls are Better than Boys

As mentioned above, preference for a son was not stressed by many of my participants and they claimed they are raising their children with a more equal gender perspective. However, in contrast to the historical gender perspective of son preference, I found that many participants claimed they believe having daughters is better than having sons. As previously mentioned, studies in some urban areas have shown that some mothers have girl preference over boys due

to reasons like sons need to pay a lot of money for marriage and for the preparation of getting married, the natal family need to prepare house and car for sons (Wang, 1994; Li, 2011). The financial burden expected when having a son have made some parents prefer to have a daughter rather than son. Similar preferences have also been found in studies focused on Japan, as Japan is also a country with a long history of son preference (Kureishi, Wakabayashi, 2011; Fuse, 2013). Japanese parents' perspectives on gender preference have however been changing due to cultural transformation and the improvement of financial conditions. It is stated that fewer families now count on children to take care of the family when they grow up, especially financially, thus the importance of sons has reduced. With the belief of girls being more considerate and caring, more families have started to prefer girls rather than boys (Zhang, 1993). China has a similar situation where parents do not expect their children to financially care for them in their elderly life, which has reduced the importance of sons and increased preference for daughters. Research on gender preference in China also indicates that with the improvement of education and social and financial status, more families prefer to have daughters over sons (Wang, 2015).

When they talked about whether they would prefer to have a boy or a girl, many of the participants in my study said, 'girls are much better than boys!' But when they talked about their reasons, many of them were based on gendered ideas, positioning daughters as quiet, less naughty, and sons as 'hard to raise'. In addition, daughters were described as more sensitive, and sons more insensitive and tough. We notice from the participants' descriptions of daughters and sons that traditional gender stereotypes are still a pervasive belief for my participants, although not for all of them. While they all say that they hold an egalitarian gender view when raising their own children, they nevertheless still mobilise some of the gender stereotypes in describing their preference for daughters.

> Jiao [From Beijing, 33 Years Old, Bachelor's, Education Front Desk, One Child]: girls are cleaner, and quiet, and they are easier to raise than boys.

Yang [From Xining, 40 Years Old, PhD, Professor, Two Children]: My first child was a daughter. I found it very easy. But my second child was a boy. I think boys are really difficult to raise.

These qualities that participants listed in the interviews reveal how particular gendered expectations are still imposed on women and are at odds with what they expect their daughters to grow up to be, in terms of hoping for them to grow up as strong willed and inclined to fight for their independence. No matter whether they have sons or daughters, many participants still rely on this kind of gendered image when talking about differences between boys and girls. Cao and Lin (2019) have discussed children's *Yang* (upbringing) and *Jiao* (education) in Chinese families, and from the descriptions given by my participants, their preference for girls comes mainly from *Yang*, as they all mentioned 'daughters to be easier to raise'. Most of the mothers with young children in my interviews are working mothers, with the intensive requirements of 'good mothering' and difficult work-life balance as described in the previous chapters. Therefore, while they all seek to be good mothers, the burden of juggling work and family has pushed them to wish the child-rearing to be easier, and this thought has coincided with the gender stereotype of daughters and sons. Thus, when considering the first couple of years' work raising a child, many participants wish to have daughters rather than sons as they believe 'daughters are easier to raise'. When they struggle to have both a career and fulfil the duties of a 'good mother', having a daughter seems to be an easier way for them to achieve their goals. Like Guan said, 'After I had my second child, I found my older son really annoying, especially when he was being naughty, screaming and jumping around. I felt really tired. I wished I had a girl; I would like a daughter more than a son'. In the cultural and social context in China today, there are intensive requirements on women both in terms of their parenthood and their ability at work, and the expectation of 'super mothers' has made mothers with young children exhausted. Although they have some help from the older generations, they are still required to do most of the child-rearing, as described in Chapter Five. Therefore, despite their efforts to treat daughters and sons equally, they still impose gender stereotypes on children when expressing their own gender preference.

When discussing Jiao (education), a number of the mothers in my interviews also believe there are gendered differences between daughters and sons. For instance, daughters are more sensitive, and sons are more tough; daughters can learn faster, and sons are hard to communicate with:

Cai [From Beijing, 40 Years Old, Master's, Online English Teacher, One Child]: My daughter thinks a lot. She worries if she can't perform well, and other people will laugh at her. Many of her friends who are girls are all like this. But boys would not be this sensitive.

Xuan [From Beijing, 36 Years Old, Master's, Admission Consultant, One Child]: I occasionally spank my son, but I don't think it's hurtful. Boys are tough!

When talking about the difference between teaching sons and daughters, Xuan, Jiao, Lemon and Kang all mentioned the same difference between boys and girls. It was a surprise how they all believe the same gendered configuration:

Xuan: Boys are different from girls. They cannot understand what you are saying. When he's playing, he can't hear you and he can't interpret what you say. When you communicate with boys, you find that you are in two different worlds. He doesn't understand what you are saying and will stick to his thoughts.

Interviewer: Do you believe it would be different if you had a daughter?

Xuan: Yes, I think so. Girls are less naughty. Boys are tricky, you don't know what they are thinking. There may be boys who are not naughty, but then you would worry if something went wrong with him. Why is he not naughty?

Aside from the perspective of daughters being quiet and easily raised, and boys being naughty and insensitive, there were also views that girls learn faster, and across more disciplines than boys:

Yang: Boys are slower than girls when they learn to speak.

Guan [From Xining, 36 Years Old, Bachelor's, Auditor, Two Children]: When I had my second child, I wished it was a girl. But it was still a boy. I think daughters can learn a lot more than sons, like dancing and painting.

Qing [From Xining, 30 Years Old, Bachelor's, Accountant, One Child]: My child is a girl, so I wanted her to learn an instrument. My husband wanted her to learn football. I refused him! Football would influence the shape of her legs; they would look ugly when she wears dresses.

In addition, judging from Qing's story above, boys and girls are expected to learn things at a different pace, and in different areas. Daughters are more expected to learn dancing, painting, or an instrument, while boys are more expected to develop skills in sports and other areas. Especially from Guan and Qing's expectations of what daughters might do, the gendered role has been established through daily life on what girls should learn and what girls should wear. From these descriptions of differences between sons and daughters, I would argue that we can see how Chinese mothers with young children unintentionally perpetuate gender role stereotypes as part of the raising of their children. Although they frequently state their intentions to, and make attempts to break away from these stereotypes, these nonetheless continue to be part of Chinese parenting culture, whether the emphasis is on 'boys being better than girls' or 'girls being better than boys.'

We might say that mothers in the interviews all take passing on a more equal gender perspective as part of their responsibilities in child-rearing, especially the participants who have experienced gender discrimination. However, they cannot not break away from the traditional gendered view completely, and some of their behaviours in daily life have, in many ways, inherited and reinforced gendered stereotypes. Nonetheless, we should not ignore their attempts to educate the next generation, or the fact that the practise of 'good mothering' seems to now include passing on at least some ideas of gender equality.

7.4 Conclusion

Overall, influenced by the social-cultural changes in contemporary China and the nation's policy on reproduction, the generation of mothers in the interviews have all been influenced by a more egalitarian gender perspective, which impacts on their raising of their own children. The women in my sample had to both greater and lesser extents, some experience of gender discrimination when growing up, and they still face many gender-based struggles, as the previous chapters have shown. These women are influenced by two contradictory perspectives: the long existing patriarchy culture and the preference for boys, and the gender equality view where women should be independent. While as mothers with young children they are still experiencing inequalities in the family and workplace, not to mention the huge burden of balancing work and family for working mothers, they are at the same time trying to pass on a more equal gendered view as they do not believe women in contemporary China are equally treated compared to men. Therefore, when they are raising their own children, on the one hand they try to teach their daughters to be strong and independent women, while on the other hand, they are also unintentionally reinforcing a gendered perspective on children. For example, they fell into the contradictory ideas of women being 'strong and independent' and also 'soft and feminine'. While they tried to teach their daughters a more equal view, they also reinforced ideas of women being in a 'weaker' position and men being the protector and confused this kind of perspective as an equal gender perspective for women. And for participants who have sons, they also passed on the idea of women being the weaker group and men being the protectors in daily life when telling stories or dealing with small fights at school. The conflicting idea of being both a 'strong woman' and a 'soft woman' reflects China's social and cultural situation

in its transformation process, where the idea that women should be treated equally is widely accepted by the younger generation (Zhang, Kao, Hannum, 2007; Tatli, Ozturk, Woo, 2017) while gaps still exist between theories and practises.

Despite these conflicts, we also see mothers with young children are endeavouring to change what they have experienced not only when educating daughters, but also when raising sons. The reduction of importance of the son's role in Chinese families, and the break of traditional gendered images by these mothers should not be neglected. Yang's (2017) research indicates that women who have been deeply influenced by gender discrimination when they were children are more likely themselves to hold beliefs that accept the unequal position of women and men, which would then reinforce their preference for boys when they have children. However, my research in Beijing and Xining demonstrates that no matter whether mothers have experienced biased gender treatment or not, they believe sons are the same as daughters, and they believe they are raising their children without gender bias, which reinforces their beliefs of 'good mothering'. Although in their everyday practises, they have often imposed gendered perspectives and stereotypes on their children, and in some cases their preference has changed from boys to girls. However, the reasons for these changes are closely related to China's social, economic, and cultural transformations which have created a new type of gender bias, caused by historical tension and rapid social and cultural changes promoting gender equality. The understanding of gender is moving forward in China through these conflicts and inheritances, and as seen in the stories shared by the interviewees in this study.

8. Conclusion

This chapter is the conclusion chapter of the whole thesis, in order to remind the reader what have been talking about in this thesis and to establish what differences this thesis have made in this chapter. This chapter have six sections. The first section is an introduction of what have been covered in the previews chapters and what my conclusion is going to cover. The second section is the chapter summaries of key findings of each analysis chapter, which is different from the chapter introduction in previews chapters, it indicated more about what I have found from my interview data and what is discussed as key findings in each analysis chapters. In the third section, it is further discussed about the contribution this the thesis has made to provide new angles of what we didn't know before and to establish my original contributions to existing sociological literature in the study of motherhood in China. The fourth chapter shows more about the limitations of my research including the limitation of sample I could be able to collect, and the things could be conduct better if I have a chance to redo my project. In the fifth section, the discussion of possibilities of future study will be discussed, for example, the changing birth control policies in China, which would make it harder for women to stay in the workplace and with more children, there will be more burden for mothers to take care of their children. Will it change the way of parenting in China? In addition, under the circumstance of worldwide pandemic's influence on people, more people started to work at home, which create more time to spend with the family but would also change the way of interaction in the household. Moreover, the form of course for children would also change from offline to online courses, will it have any influence on the perspective of motherhood? These questions would be further discussed in this section. The last section is a final reflection of the whole thesis. After I finished most part of this thesis, I looked back to the beginning of my thesis to reflect

on what have been changed from the view of 'tiger mother' to the understanding of 'good mother' today in contemporary China. From my interviews, what did I learn and what surprised me as all my knowledge of motherhood came from books and papers I read, and it is quite different when I became the listener of all these detailed daily life stories and first-hand feelings of being a mother, and how to be a 'good mother' from all my generous interviewees. This section will appear as a final conclusion of what I gained from this research and what I expected for the future.

8.1 Introduction

In this thesis, I explored Chinese mothers' understanding of 'good mothering' and how they practise motherhood in everyday life. First, I searched and reflected on existing literature about key themes of motherhood and 'good mothering' in western societies and related studies about China. The intensification of motherhood has been discussed further in many western literatures, and its influence on Chinese women has also been indicated in Chinese studies of motherhood. However, there are still blanks to fill in relation to motherhood and intergenerational relationship, motherhood and gender related relationships and issues. When taking into consideration China's special social and cultural context, recently there are rising numbers of families who have grandparents involved in the child-rearing process; many of whom are coresident with the older generation before children go to primary school. In addition, even greater attention is being given to children's education in China with increasing numbers of early children's education centres and high requirements and competition for school entrance, more conflicts have been raised by previous studies. However, there are few studies offering insights into empirical detail about motherhood and the conjunction between the intensification of motherhood, intergenerational relationships, and gender relations in contemporary China. Therefore, I conducted semi-structured interviews in China with 34 women who have preschool aged children, from which I tried to show a picture of how middle-class women in China deal with their responsibility of being a 'good mother' and how they practise motherhood in everyday life.

In my methodology chapter, I talked in detail about how I conducted the interviews in China. I interviewed 34 middle class heterosexual Chinese mothers in urban China with young children. From the stories they shared, this thesis explored their understanding of 'good mothering' in everyday motherhood. At first, I was confronted by a lot of difficulties when trying to find participants and there were also problems I needed to reconsider during the interviews, such as how to deal with the participants if they experienced emotional fluctuations, or how to create a safe and comfortable space for participants to share their story. It is hard for Chinese people to share their private life with strangers, especially in a short time like in an interview. To make the interview flow and prepare in advance, I posed three research questions before my field work and outlined a series of topic guides relating to these three research questions in order to understand mother-daughter relationship. I have listed questions about mothers' interaction with the older generation, how they perceive the idea of motherhood, and what kind of mothers they wish they could be. But as I stated in the methodology chapter, after I started my fieldwork in Beijing, I noticed the change of focus for my participants, as during interviews, participants constantly asked me about what I believe should be count as 'good mother' and wanted to ensure if they are doing a right job as mother. Their biggest concern have changed from mother-daughter relationship with the older generation to their configuration of motherhood. Therefore, I changed my research focus into how Chinese mothers with young children comprehend the meaning of what it is to be a 'good mother' and how they practise motherhood through negotiation with their children, husbands, and the older generation. To include regional differences, I contacted 17 interviewees in Qinghai, Xining, a small city in the northwest of China, and 17 interviewees in Beijing, the capital city in China. From the stories my participants generously shared, we have a picture of how women with preschool age children experience and navigate 'what counts as a good mother?'. The three research questions were:

1.What is the understanding of what it means to be a 'good mother' for Chinese mothers of young children in their childrearing process?

2.What does motherhood mean to Chinese mothers of young children in regard to their interactions with their own parents, parents-in-law, and husbands?

3.What did Chinese mothers of young children receive from their own mothers and what are they seeking to pass on in relation to being a good mother?

From these three research questions, I intended to explore how my participants comprehend the meaning of 'good mothering' through their interactions with their children, husbands, and grandparents. The process of finding participants and conducting interviews was not easy. After experiencing rejections, long hours travelling and other obstacles, I was grateful that all my participants showed me a warm welcome and enthusiasm to share their stories of being a mother. And with their help, this thesis has provided new insight into what it means to be a 'good mother' in a Chinese cultural context through four analytic chapters.

In Chapter four, I discussed maternal engagement in children's early childhood education in relation to the idea of being a 'good mother'. I discussed children's educational problems from two angles. One is formal education, which places emphasis on children's academic performance. The other is informal education, which is mothers' expectation of children to selfregulate, be well-behaved, be 'good human-beings' with good interpersonal relationships, and a 'good person' from the Chinese cultural perspective. How mothers engage in childrearing in relation to these aspects of education is discussed in detail in this chapter.

In Chapter five, I talked about intergenerational interactions in the process of child-rearing. Several conflicts and differences were raised by participants, such as generational gaps about child-rearing knowledge and child-rearing methods. The reason for grandparents' high-level involvement in the care of grandchildren was also discussed in this chapter, together with the ways in which mothers negotiate with the older generation in relation to these conflicts or different perspectives in daily life. Furthermore, this chapter also talked about both continuity and changes in understanding of Chinese cultural values during the intergenerational interactions in the process of taking care of the new generation together.

Chapter six discussed mothers' relationships and interactions with their husbands in the practise of motherhood. Three main themes were analysed in this chapter. First was the phenomenon of 'widowed parenting' and the absence of husbands in relation to the gendered distribution of child-care responsibilities. Second, I talked about women's career choices and how these are still closely linked with husbands' career choices and the needs of young children. Third, I analysed the reason women are getting married and what standards they apply to choosing their husbands, according to the stories my participants shared with me. How mothers understand their role as a 'good mother' were discussed from these themes in relation to their interaction with their husbands.

Chapter seven discussed gender preferences and inheritance in relation to practises of motherhood. The contradiction of previous boy preference and new girl preference were discussed from the gendered preference and daily stories mothers shared, in terms of what mothers seek to pass on to their children in relation to gender and how they do this in daily practise. In this chapter, other than the introduction of what I have covered in this thesis. The second part of chapter summaries will also talk about the key findings of each chapter. The third part of the conclusion chapter is to talk more in detail of the contributions of this thesis in comparison to the existing literature. The fourth part will talk about the limitations of this thesis, to discuss more of what could be considered more if I redo the research and what are the strengths and limitations of this research. The fifth part of this chapter would talk about what could be done in future research in accordance with recent social changes. And the sixth chapter is the final reflection of the whole thesis, and the discussion of what have changed from the time of 'tiger mother' Amy Chua has talked about to the current understanding of motherhood in contemporary China.

8.2 Chapter Summaries

In this chapter summaries, I will further indicate about the key findings argued in each previews chapter. In the first analysis chapter, chapter four, I explored mothering in terms of the emphasis that participants placed on their children's education. Other than the discussion of

intensive engagement in children's education in China, due to the highly competitive environment and mass media emphasis on children's education with its marketisation as a standard for measuring motherhood, this chapter also contributed to a more in-depth discussion regarding China's social and cultural situation. The chapter divided mothers' concentration on children's education into two main sections; the formal, referring to school performance and academic success, and the informal from a cultural perspective, focusing on mothers' aims to educate children to become a good human-being. Therefore, this chapter provided new sociological angles on what makes a 'good mother' especially in the Chinese context. This chapter also added more understanding to the ideology of intensive mothering in the Chinese context and its influence on mothers' ideas about their role and how they practise motherhood and negotiate with their children in daily life. Meanwhile, a more comprehensive understanding of motherhood and a mother's love in a Chinese cultural context was represented by stories of love 'with constraint and control'; necessary in the role of a 'good mother' when educating children. In contrast to an emphasis on much existing research which characterises Chinese parenting as authoritative, mothers in this study comprehend their control on children's behaviour as what a 'loving and responsible' mother should do. Certain regulations were believed to be necessary in order to help the children grow to be a better person and to succeed as a 'good human being' in the future. Mothers believe they should constrain their love in order to avoid spoiling their children so that they may be better equipped to live on their own. This new perspective of a strict mother as also loving and responsible provides a new way of looking at motherhood in the Chinese social and cultural context.

In chapter five, I looked at motherhood in terms of participants' 'daily negotiations with the older generation in relation to child-rearing and childcare. With more mothers working as well as their husbands, and the policy allowing a second child in the family, grandparents have been more involved than ever with child-rearing, and many have even moved in with their grandchildren before they can go to primary school (Chen et al, 2011). This chapter explored intergenerational relationships in connection with the social and cultural changes that have influenced the power distribution and labour division between mothers and grandparents. We see how responsibilities have changed around decision making, and the main responsibility for these two generations has shifted when raising a child under the same roof. Furthermore, the chapter explored motherhood from the daily interactions between mothers and grandparents,

and ways of negotiation from a Chinese cultural perspective. From the stories shared by the interviewees, this chapter pointed out that with the knowledge gap between generations, such as the differences on how to raise a 'good child' and how to educate a 'good child'. It also indicated that with the symbolic ways of communication and lack of mutual understanding on child-rearing, intensification of a mother's responsibility, as well as the burden of dealing with intergenerational relationships is not shared. All aspects therefore contributed to mothers feeling that they should take more responsibility in order to fulfil their duty as a 'good mother' in the child-rearing process, rather than less, even after the grandparents became involved. Although grandparents' involvement could help with taking care of the children physically while mothers were working, the mothers' work and responsibility after working hours actually intensified as most of the work related to children's education fell on the mothers. In addition, dealing with all the differences and conflicts during the child-rearing process also became a huge burden for some of the mothers I interviewed. All in all, this chapter provided new insights into the intensification of motherhood by exploring the pressures and burdens of intergenerational involvement in childrearing.

In chapter six, I discussed how women comprehend motherhood in relation to their negotiations and interactions with their husbands. Although most of the participants in the interviews are co-working parents, most of them still expressed a sense of significant absence on the part of their husbands in child-rearing. This chapter provided empirical detail about motherhood for middle-class mothers in urban China in relation to the interactions with their husband's. From the stories presented a picture of husbands' lack of participation in the child-rearing, the still existing gendered distribution of labour, the emphasize on mothers' responsibilities on child-rearing, and including the comparison between highly devoted mothers and less devoted fathers who were expected less on spending time with the children or devoted to the education of the children. Given the intensified role of motherhood rather than fatherhood, this chapter also analysed why women accepted this unequal distribution of domestic burden. It emphasised the importance of understanding motherhood from women's expectations on marriage and their choice of reproduction from a cultural perspective. Compared to the expectation on fathers to practise fatherhood, it is more emphasized on women's role as mothers, while the role as a mother is more prioritized in Chinese culture when seeking for marriage. The expectation on husbands as main breadwinner, good gene provider and safe environment

supplier is still emphasized on their job as breadwinner, and as good gene provider for the purpose of having children and provide children a good environment to grow. Influenced deeply by both the Chinese cultural value and the intensified child-rearing ideologies, mothers themselves consider their role as most important in a children's life and are willing to devote themselves to their role as a 'good mother' despite the uneven contribution husbands and wives make to thein family and in the child-rearing process. Although existing literature has discussed the absence of husbands in raising the children (Shi, 2018), this chapter provided more perspectives from a Chinese cultural context and discussed more in detail from women's daily negotiations with their husbands in child-rearing. Furthermore, this chapter also illustrated why mothers are willing to accept and embrace this unequal relationship with their husbands when it comes to childrearing.

Chapter seven focused on the exploration of what it means to inherit gender through generations. From the stories of mothers' daily interaction with their children, this chapter sought to understand what participants have received from their parents and what they wanted to pass on to their children in regard to the understandings of gender, and how this is connected to ideas about being a 'good mother'. This chapter discussed further of the new angle of gender bias, different from the old cultural value of 'boys being better than girls', more participants mentioned their feeling of 'girls being better than boys'. Meanwhile, all of the participants believed themselves that they treated boys and girls equally without gender bias, although they still imposed gendered perspectives and stereotypes on their children in daily practise without appearing to acknowledge this. This chapter discussed motherhood from the angle of this new gender bias and how it has that have been generated by the conflict between tension of existing Chinese cultural values and the emergence promoting of gender equality. The chapter also contributed to the sociological discussion on mothers' understanding of gender in the changing social and cultural context in China through inheritance and conflicts in their daily practises when fulfilling their responsibility as a 'good mother'.

8.3 Contributions

The existing literatures illustrates the change of ways of parenting over the last half century. And parenting became crucial in all the areas of everyday life that could be crucial influence on a child's health, happiness, and future success (Bristow, Faircloth and Macvarish, 2014). The notion of a 'good mother' and the dominance of intensive mothering have been largely discussed by sociologists in recent years (Hays, 1996; Christensen, 2000). Research concerning motherhood in China has also emphasised the intensification of motherhood recently, indicating the high expectation and requirements on women from both the workplace and family (Li, 2016). Some of the particular cultural differences in motherhood practises which I found in my study have also been mentioned in previous literatures, such as Chinese education emphasized on moral virtues (Sun, 2017) and the spirit of 'love the nation' (Guo et al. 1997) areas are also part of mother's responsibility. However, what my thesis different from the existing literatures is that, first, as most literatures still argued about the patriarchy and gendered Confucian values in the Chinese family (Cho, 1988; Sekiguchi, 2010; Herr, 2016), my study of motherhood from the angle of intergenerational relationships showed more empirical details of the negotiation between generations, providing more than a traditional cultural patriarchy way of filial piety, and gendered division of labour. My thesis showed the changing pattern of interaction between generations. Patriarchy and filial piety are not as emphasized by Chinese families as before (Zuo, 2009; Lee, 2011). When the older generation participant in the procedure of child-rearing, more comprehensives issues are included in the intergenerational relationships rather than the simple patriarchy way of filial piety. And this studied discussed further of how women negotiate with the older generation now in contemporary China with new strategies and new understanding of filial piety through negotiation and conflictions.

The focus on women's accounts of the everyday practise of motherhood through intergenerational and gender interactions allows for a richer insight into how women actually negotiate with the differences and conflictions in relation to their expectations of from themselves and from the surroundings on being a 'good mother'. Although there are existing literatures on women's interaction with their husbands in the child-rearing process (Kenkyu, 2000; Hua &Stainton, 2000), the emphasize is more on husbands' absence in the domestic sphere rather than the empirical detail of motherhood and relationship with husbands in everyday life in contemporary China. The thesis provides new angle of how women consider their marriage and how it related to having a child, And the analysis of their daily negotiation

with their husbands and the older generation also indicated that the accomplishments of 'good mothering' are simultaneously about the negotiations of gender and intergenerational relationships.

Furthermore, I have discussed the complexity of the intensification of motherhood when taking into consideration of the intergenerational and gender relationships in families in urban China and how this context itself becomes part of the process of intensification. Different from the preview's literatures on intergenerational relationship, especially study on grandparents' participation in the child-rearing process. This thesis provides new understanding of the involvement of the older generation and the husbands in the childrearing process, which in contrast with helping women release burden, it intensified the role of mothers and increased burdened instead of release burden for mothers in China.

Moreover, my thesis has also made original contributions on Chinese women's awareness of gender equality and their ways of passing on their own gender views in the process of practicing motherhood. The previous literatures about Chinese women's agency of challenging the patriarchal system have been indicated in various ways (Yan 2006) But there is still existing gender preference, like 'son preference' (Chen & Lu, 2012) and, in more recent years, 'daughter preference'. My thesis looked into more empirical details of these changes and different gender preferences, explored more in detail of the 'daughter preference' in daily life and what kind of gender perspective are believed and passed on by middle class heterosexual mothers with young children in the cultural context of China. In addition, this thesis also analysed more about how women negotiate the gender pressure they have experienced in family life and what they seek to pass on to their children. It offered original contributions on the study of Chinese urban middle-class women's ways of engaging with gender pressure in the practise of motherhood and how they are keen to change the situation. Specifically, I have shown how mothers, try to treat children equally and pass on more equalled gender perspectives while sometimes still perpetuating gendered ideas in relation to the raising of their children.

8.4 Limitations

This thesis has analysed Chinese mothers with young children's understanding of what makes a 'good mother' from different angles, including their negotiation with children, husbands, grandparents, and their views on gender as inheritance. However, there are limitations on what this research can claim. The group of participants included are middle class, heterosexual Chinese mothers with children under seven7 years old. This means that there are still gaps in our understanding concerning the ways in which women of different classes, different regions, and different sexual orientations understand and practise motherhood in the Chinese cultural context. The research was conducted using a small qualitative sample based on these two urban areas in China and cannot be generalized. However, there are also strengths from including two different urban cities in China, which added differences of situations women may confront in different cities in China under different developmental status. While the research is only based on two cities, I purposely chose two quite different cities, and also quite far away geographically to include more differences. However, due to the limitation of sample collection in this study, there are still many possibilities to explore in the contemporary China.

In addition, as the research was first intended to be about mother-daughter relationships, but through the conduct of interviews, my research questions gradually developed, and the focus changed after the conduction of a few interviews. Talking with these mothers in China, I found out that their greatest most concern they have expressed were whether what they were doing were right, whether they were practising as a 'good mother' traits, and what is exactly counted as a 'good mother'. The intergenerational relationship became less important after they have their own children, as they have devoted almost all their time and energy in the process of child-rearing. Thus, I changed the focus of the interview and emphasized on the exploration of 'good mother' and the practise of motherhood afterwards. Therefore, there are still more digging to be done left to dig deeper if the interview questions were initially aimed to the present focus. As I'm not a mother myself, my original research questions were constructed listed only from what I have learned from the existing literatures. If I could redo the research with the interview questions I have developed later in the process of the interviews, I believe it might make more

difference. Therefore, more work could be done according to the understanding of the 'good mother' from the perspective of Chinese mothers.

Moreover, reflecting back to the process of my interviews, I found out that when mothers had taken their children with them during interviews, there were actually many interesting interactions between mothers and children. Not to mention that when I recruited participants in the early child educational centre, where mothers took their children to go to all kinds of classes, like children's cooking experience class, or badminton class, there were many interesting observations. However, as I didn't have consent from these mothers - to share my observations involving children, this limited the scope of my analysis. If I could do the interviews again, I would seek ethics permission for the observation of children as part of parent-child interactions, taking a more ethnographic approach. Interviews were the right approach to understand narratives and perspectives on motherhood, but I could also learn more about the daily practises of motherhood through an ethnographic perspective. Aside of that, another part I could also probably improve my research in the future is that I could also interviewing fathers and grandparents, to get a sense of their insights and how they compare with the women's perspectives from their stories.

8.5 Future research

During the writing of this thesis, the policy on having children in China was changing, which has implications on the ways in which mothering is conceptualised and could form a basis for future research. China has implemented the one-child policy since 1979, which stipulates that a couple could only have one child, in order to produce a resulting in a continuous decline in the new population. Since 1999, the population has population it has rapidly aged, and so to delay entered an aging society. To delay this trend of population aging, the Chinese government officially launched the two-children policy in 2015, relaxing birth restrictions, encouraging couples who were single- child families in their family to have a second child. However, after the implementation of the two-children policy, there was no significant increase in the population, and except for a small rising in birth rate, and the pregnancy rate of young

women continued to decline over in three consecutive years. In response to this situation, scientists Regarding this situation, scientists called for greater full opening and encouragement of childbearing, and. On 31st May 2021, China has officially announced the implementation of the three-child policy that a couple can have three children and implemented a series of supporting measures to further optimize the birth policy. The policy meeting proposed to improve the maternity leave and maternity insurance system, strengthen support policies such as taxation and housing, and protect the legitimate rights and interests of women in employment to encourage women to have more children. These changes will, in turn, would have a further influence on women's roles as mothers and how they practise motherhood; something which is worth to do more research on in the future research. There are already studies after the State opened the policy of the second child, like Zhang (2020) who discussed how mothers would balance between work and family after the Second Children Policy. The image of 'hot mother' Zhang (2020) argued as a modern mother who could balance not only work and family, but also have a healthy appearance and optimistic attitude in life showed a more intensified image not only on mothers, but on women as a whole. With the implementation of policy that allow family to have more than two children is worth further studied in the cultural context of China.

Another key development since the data was collected for this thesis, with major implications for practises of mothering, was the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the spread of Covid-19 all over the world, China has continued to employ strict prevention and control measures. The government has fully implemented the general strategy of 'preventing imports from abroad and preventing rebound from within' and the, together with a policy of 'dynamic clearing', to earnestly safeguard the lives and health of the people, and coordinate epidemic prevention, and control, and economic and social development to the greatest extent possible. The prevention policy of 'clear the epidemic' and the strict isolation policy have led to more time spent working from home. If one person got infected, the whole region would experience strict lockdown control and people are required to stay at home mandatorily. According to China's policy against pandemic, if a place was identified as high risks, people are strictly restricted to leave their house and the government would provide door-to-door food delivery. In these situations, people are forced to stay at home for a long time, days, weeks or even over a month. There are different policies on high risk, medium risk, and low risk areas. The highrisk area implements 'stay-at-home, door-to-door service'. No new infections for 7 consecutive days can been

reduced to medium-risk areas, and medium-risk areas with no new infections for 3 consecutive days can been reduced to low-risk areas. Without the restriction order, mothers still spend half of their days at work, but with mothers sometimes spending the restriction order, sometimes for days or weeks, the whole family stayed together 24 hours a day. The extent of time spending together, especially when forced to spend this time together, could raise more conflicts surrounding child-rearing (e.g., between husbands and wives, mothers, and parents-in-law) that might have been resolved before via the types of practises highlighted in my analysis, could now be but which may have intensified now. Thus, these new conditions new problems could change people's choice of how they negotiate with their family members and how they raise their children. There are existing literatures working on gender and motherhood during the pandemic which have indicated how it has intensified the already intensive pressures on women (Cummins and Brannon, 2022), such as the increased burden of home education of the children. More detailed research on this in the Chinese cultural context would be beneficial would beneficial as well. Therefore, research could further explore motherhood in China under the situation of this continuously existing worldwide epidemic, and the ways in which family relationships and questions relating to gender equality implicated in them have been affected by the pandemic period.

Furthermore, with the widespread pandemic, will there be new changes on children's courses, especially when many of the courses have been changing from offline to online courses. The challenges of online courses are not only for school and students, but also for mothers. Will there be requirements of mothers to be the custody when children are taking online courses at home? Will it take more time and energy from mothers if there are changing style of different courses and extracurricular? There is already research about pandemic's influence on children's online learning in China (Cui, Zhang, Wang, Zhang, and etc., 2021) And the study of online teaching in elementary school and middle school during pandemic period (Zhou, Li, 2020). But more research could be done about the change of early childhood education, and to explore more about whether these changes could have impact on the understanding of good mothering in contemporary China.

From the angle of research methods and recruiting methods in relation to study of motherhood. There could also be other innovations in the using of research methods. For example, I was really regret I didn't have the consent to observe more mothers and how they interact with their children, especially in children's early childhood educational centre. The ways of how mothers interact and negotiate with their children in daily practises that I have observed is no less interesting when compare with the data I gathered through interviews. From interviews, the information I get is 'what mothers believe they are doing', but from observation, I could gather more information of 'how mothers are actually practicing motherhood'.

Therefore, if I have another chance to do similar studies, I will adopt methods of observation as well as interviews to gather more information from both sides. In addition, an innovation of using of research methods would also be a good idea, like the adopting of Participatory Research method that treat participants as more that research objects (Southby, 2017; Lenette, Stavropoulou, Nunn, Kong, Cook, Coddington, Banks, 2019).

In addition, I would recommend more research in the Chinese cultural context using the recruiting methods of 'gatekeeper' (Patterson, Maris, and Borshmann, 2011). When I first started recruiting participants, I tried to recruit interviewees through social media and WeChat, but I got really little responses to these recruitment letters. And due to the cultural context of China where the sharing of inner thoughts and family life details appears to be hard as I am a stranger to them. Furthermore, also I have successfully recruited some of the participants using 'snow-balling' methods, but there are still limitations of what the 'snow-balling' could get to me, as most of the mothers are working mothers who are very busy during the daytime and need to spend their after-work time with their children. This results in less people to say yes when they consider interview as losing of their time. This kind of situation went worse when I was conducting interviews in Xining, as in small cities, people are much more unwilling to share their private experience with a stranger like me, this is when I found out that the most effective recruiting methods was 'gatekeeper' method instead of 'snow-balling' method. Especially when I was conducting interviews in children's early childhood educational centre in the weekends, I asked the manager of the educational centre to act as a gatekeeper's role, introducing me to all the mothers waiting outside for the children to finish class. Before I was introduced by the manager, I was a total stranger and outsider for these mothers, therefore, even when they have nothing to do when they were waiting outside, they were still not that willing to participant in

my research. However, after the introduction from the manager, I became someone with reputation and recognition by the manager who they trusted. With the manager's approval and recommendation, my position became trustworthy and what I was doing became more professional from the mothers' perspective. Thus, more mothers became willing to participant as my interviewees since I became trustworthy and professional as a researcher with moral rules and capacity to do the research. Therefore, when the position of the researcher was being questioned or not trustworthy enough, I would recommend using of 'gatekeeper' as an effective way to recruit participants.

8.6 Final Reflection

From the start of this thesis, I talked about the book written by Amy Chua (2011) talking about 'good mothering' as a Chinese mother raising two children in America. She shared her experience of raising two daughters using traditional Chinese ways, which is usually understood from the western view as a more 'authoritarian' way of raising one's children. She required strictly on children's academic performance and give her children less leisure time. And she asked her daughters to practise hours of instruments (piano) every day. Chua's idea of being a strict mother as her responsibility, and her way of being a 'good mother' to her children raised attention to a debate of 'what counts as good mother', as she herself was born and raised in US but still insisted educate her daughters in a more Chinese cultured way. The debate on the differences of parenting in western and eastern culture, and Amy Chua's understanding of a Chinese parenting style is what prompted me to do research about 'How Chinese mothers are raising their children in contemporary China?' And through all the interviews and analysis, I intended to find out the answer of 'what is a good mother' from the perspectives of my participants.

What Amy Chua showed the viewers of the mother's role is also the prevalent view of Chinese parenting style by western literatures. A strict image on children's education, especially the academic performance. 'Grades are important!' And to make the children into a more excellent future, the mother figure would ask children to devote a lot of time in practising

instruments or in extracurricular courses such as mathematics. However, from the stories shared by my participants in Beijing and Xining, we could notice that much of the idea of good mothering have been changing through time. On the parenting style, more mothers started to wish to be friends with their children rather than just an authoritarian figure. Children's feelings and thoughts are encouraged to be expressed, and there are more communications and negotiations between mothers and children. Although, academic performance and the emphasize of extracurricular such as music, English, math, are still emphasized by Chinese mothers, but they are trying to accomplish their goal through games, negotiations and guidance, rather than require children to accomplish tasks as an authority. The devotion of money and energy in children's education in China is definitely increasing in China, but more work like negotiations with children, and even teach children themselves after work are falling on mothers as part of their responsibilities if they are trying to be a 'good mother'.

Mothers in China today, acting as both children's mother, friend, and teacher at the same time, are actually spending much more time and energy in children's education. In the past, as the story shared by Amy Chua, mother has the authority of command children to study. While today, mothers started to act as multiple roles in the child-rearing process, and the importance of children's mental health and happiness are prompted more and more in recent years, pressuring mothers to focus on children's academic education on one hand, and their mental health on the other. More things became negotiable, and children are allowed to argue when they feel tired or when they do not like what they are doing. In this circumstance, mothers have to develop more strategies in the child-rearing process, like developing fun games through which children could learn, like negotiate with the children about the hour of study, and sometimes, they occasionally brought out their figure of authority when they couldn't find other ways to push their children to study or behave, like 'suddenly shout at my children' or 'spank'. But different from the old authority view of parenting understood by western literatures, mothers consider all these roles and strategies as what is necessary to be a 'good' and responsible mother.

Another change of the focus of mothering in China is the increasing focus on children's informal education. Many participants emphasized their focus of raising their children as a

'good human-being'. The kind of human-being who knows how be behave properly and how to interact with other people. The quality of being a 'good human-being' is seen as a really important part in the process of child-rearing. Some of the mothers I interviewed even send their children to educational centres that cultivate children's personality and help them learn the good side of the traditional Chinese culture, especially about how to behave nicely, and how to be a person with good interpersonal skill. Mothers believed it is a necessary quality for their children to survive in the future, no matter it is in the workplace or with friends. Some of the participants even argued that being a 'good human-being' is much more important that raising a child with good academic performance. Indeed, the view of what counts as a 'good mother' have been changing through time, whereas the burden of being a 'good mother' is increasing as well. As a 'good mother' in China, it is not enough now to just focus on children's grades in school, or how many instruments the child could play. The mental health of a child and one's ability of being a 'good human being' have also became one of the many tasks mothers today are responsible for. Even as working mothers, it is hard for mothers I interviewed to ignore even one of the qualities needed for children today. Aside from work, all of their time are devoted to children's formal and informal education.

In addition to what have changed since the time of Amy Chua. More new circumstances appeared in the child-rearing style in Contemporary China. There are a few changes that really surprised me during the process of my field work. Because I myself do not have a husband or child, all the knowledge of being a mother in China I knew was from existing literatures. When I talked with these women for hours about their daily life as mothers, I felt like I learned more about what being a mother means vividly from their daily life stories. Although, in many literatures about Chinese families, it has been mentioned that there are more involvement of the grandparents in the child-rearing process, but only after talked with my participants, could I know all the details of what is looks like when grandparents are involved in the child-rearing process, or even when they coresident for years for the good of the children. The daily communications and negotiations between generations on children's education and other detailed things in the childcare procedure is much more complicated that a sentence of 'grandparents are getting more involved!'.

As the burden of raising a children increased in China and the financial burden of what it would cost to raise a child. Most mothers I interviewed are working mothers, little is stay-at home mothers, but they still do some side-work to bring extra financial income to the family due to the huge expense of raising a child and sending the children to all kinds of expensive extracurricular courses. With grandparents' involvement, I was expecting less pressure on mothers due to grandparents' help. However, I ended up finding more burden are intensified on mothers due to the exhausting to dealing with intergenerational relationships and negotiating the differences in views of parenting. To the smallest thing like how to feed the children, mothers believe it should be healthy with balanced food and clean tableware, but some of the elder generation still believe ways like feed children with mouth, or breastfeed children when they are crying, sometimes not by mothers themselves. In the ways of trying to make compromise with the older generation, mothers have made lots of efforts. Especially due to the Chinese Confucian culture of filial piety, mothers are struggled to stand up for their own feelings as well as showing enough respect for the older generation. I this process, mothers even changed their view of filial piety as more of 'respect' rather than 'obey' so that they believe they are being both a 'good mother' and a 'good daughter or daughter-in-law'. From the way of negotiating, no matter from a more subtle way or directly confront, mothers are struggling to find a balance between being a good mother when raising the children together with the grandparents and being a good daughter at the same time. Therefore, the involvement of grandparents actually heavier the burden of mothers rather than ease their responsibilities.

Furthermore, the differences they have with the older generation on children's education, and the knowledge gap between generations have forced mothers to do most of the work relating to children's education without help from the grandparents. Grandparents could keep the children fed and warm when mothers went to work, but after work, mothers still have to spend all their time teaching their children to play educational games, read books or help with their study. It seems like grandparents have helped a lot already, but the duty of being a mother is still 24 hours a day. Mothers transfer from working at the workplace directly to working at home as a mother and an educator for their children. Therefore, although I'm really surprised by this finding, and it is not denying the contribution of grandparents in the childcaring procedure, the role of being a mother is actually intensified with increased burden even with the participation of grandparents.

198

Another change that has impressed me is the mothers' understanding of 'love'. Different from the older generation's perspective is what they decide is 'good for the children', mothers today have a more comprehensive understanding of 'mother's love'. This change could be directly sensed from Kang's story share in the previews chapters. Kang raised an example of her experience of teaching her daughter to wear pants by herself. She said that: 'when you look at her struggle to wear her own pants, it may take her hours to wear them, and it seems to be really hard for her. In front of you, is this really cute child, you love her so much and you so want to help her. With your help, it could be done in seconds! But you have to control your urge, you have to constraint yourself to do the right thing. She needs to learn by herself so that when you are not there, she could still do it! Spoil a child is easy, but love a child is hard!'

Kang's story provided new angle of viewing 'good mothering' in China. 'Love with constraint', 'Love with discipline' has become mothers' belief of what counts as good mother. Although, it may be really hard to conduct in daily life, like my own experience as custody of my little nephew in cooking class, sometimes in order to make your children keep up with other children, it is really hard not to help! But mothers are trying to control their urge to 'just do it for their children' and try to let their children 'do it on their own' or 'make and keep their own decision'. Just like Kang who didn't help her child wear the pants, but to patiently teach her and watch her fail for hours until she could learn it. Or like Cai, who asked her child's opinion on whether she is willing to learn how to play piano, but when her daughter feels she doesn't want to practise as they agreed, she would push her using 'discipline' to make her keep her own decision. These strategies to '*Guan*' (Control, discipline) and '*Jiao*' (teach) are considered as what a mother should do to practise good motherhood. The comprehensive negotiation between mothers and children could be seen in detailed everyday experience, and the love of a 'good mother' become more complicated and needed in more living aspects in contemporary Chinese families. How mothers keep reflecting on their behaviours and strategies during the practising of motherhood and how they conduct their belief of 'good mothering' is a really interesting journey for me when listening to the stories from my interviewees.

Moreover, mothers' focus on gender equality and their intention to pass on a equalled gender view is also a point I found interesting! As I have found out some of the participants have experienced gender discrimination from their natal family, some are severe like Hu, who have grown up with parents only focus on her brother. She felt like she was growing up by herself, when her brother had all the love from her parents just because he is a boy. Or like less severe case like Lian, who have no place to stay when she visits her parents, because her parents give all their property to her brother, their son. With more or less experience of gender discrimination, mothers are actually really care about whether they have the equalled gender perspective. Surprisingly, in order to show that daughters are as the same as sons, many participants even raised perspective of an opposite biased view that have daughters are much better than having sons. Without noticing, they have pressed many stereotypes on daughters and sons, claiming daughters as smarter, learn faster, cleaner, quiet, or easier to raise when they talk about gender. But from their perspective, they are treating boys and girls equally without bias. With these contradicted opinions on gender, they still hope and insist they are passing on the right and equal gender views to the next generation. The aim of passing on equal gender perspective is a huge progress for women in China, which should not be neglected. Although in the practise in everyday life, it seems inevitable for mothers to make small mistakes and intensify the gendered role on themselves and onto their children without noticing, but they are trying to change what they have experienced and make more changes for their children is worth discussing about.

From this thesis, it could be seen that the changes of motherhood in China is influenced both by the parenting view of the older generation and the newly rising parenting ideas that appeared and transformed through the development of government policies, economic growth and change of cultural values. It is also the mix and development of western parenting view and the Chinese cultural view of good mothering. Mothers today are trying to keep up with the intensifying requirements on mothers' responsibilities within all these changes. After hearing their stories of how they educate their children, how they raise their children with the grandparents' participation, how they negotiate with their husbands in the child-rearing process, and what they believe they are passing onto the next generation. This thesis presented a empirical study of Chinese middle class mothers with young children, and how they practise 'good mothering' in everyday life. The mix of the pursue of individualization in western culture,

and the traditional Chinese culture's focusing on 'being a good human being', a 'people person with the surroundings', mothers' burden is increasing, and intensifying trying to raise a 'good child' and fulfil their duty as a 'good mother' from both aspects. When motherhood is studied within the comprehended details in daily life, how mothers' role is intensified in the Chinese cultural context is provided by this thesis.

All in all, this research has given me the precious opportunity of get to know the detailed daily life of what it means to be a mother, and to have the honour to be the listener of all the touching stories my interviewees shared with me about their exploration and struggle on the way of being a 'good mother' in contemporary China. I was surprised of how much work mothers are doing in order to fulfil their aim of being a 'good mother' and their ability to reflect on the experience when they were children and whether they are doing the work as a mother in the right ways. Although, the role of mother in contemporary China is intensified through pressures from different aspects, not only from family value, family member, or the gendered view of women's role as mothers, the mothers I interviewed in this research have showed their awareness of standing up for these pressures against women and to try to create a better and more equal life for their own children. They are not simply emphasizing on academic grades or physical health like the old generation, their understanding of good mothering is much more comprehensive and much more into details of life, aiming to raise children as excellent human being, or in their words, 'at least capable of surviving on their own!'. And for this aim that looks easy to accomplish but need huge amount of time and energy, mothers are putting in all the effort they have as responsible 'good mothers. And I hope this thesis could also brought up more attention to mothers in the Chinese social and cultural context. With the changing birth policies in China, women are facing increasing pressure as mothers, the policy change and the pandemic could only force women in China to deal with more difficulties in the workplace and more burden of child-rearing at the household. More policies that are beneficial to women with children should be launched in accordance with women's situation today in China, and more sociological attention should be paid to the research of this group of people, as well as more research should be conducting to explore more about motherhood in contemporary from other perspectives, and choosing different samples considering geographic positions, economic development, and different class in China. Due to the limitation of this research and the limited interviews I could conduct by myself, this topic still has huge blanks to fulfil. And I hope more

work could be done on sociological study of motherhood in China in the future to fill in more blanks of empirical study of mothering in contemporary China.

Appendix 1: Informed Consent Form

Supervisors: Dr. Xiaodong Lin (xiaodong.lin@york.ac.uk)

                Dr. Laurie Hanquinet (laurie.hanquinet@york.ac.uk)

PhD student: Yinan Zhang (yz2752@york.ac.uk)

This form is for you to state whether or not you agree to take part in the study. Please read and answer every question. You can withdraw their consent or quit at any point of the interview, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw your consent to the use of the interview data by contacting me within 6 months after the interview. You can also withdraw at any stage prior to the publication of the data. Besides, your identity will be anonymized throughout the research project, and your personal information will be confidential. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

Have you read and understood the information leaflet about the study? Yes   No

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions about the study?   Yes   No

Do you understand that the information you provide will be held in
confidence by the researcher?   Yes   No

Do you understand that you can withdraw within 6 months after the interview? Yes　No

Do you understand that you are also free to refuse to answer any question?

Yes　No

Do you understand that the information you provide may be used in future research?

Yes　No

Do you agree to take part in the study? Yes　No

If yes, do you agree to your interview being audio recorded? Yes　No
(You may take part in the study without agreeing to this).

Your name (in BLOCK letters): _____

Your signature: _____

Interviewer's name: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Form Chinese Version 知情同意书

从女儿到母亲：中国已婚女性的母女关系研究

导师： Dr. Xiaodong Lin (xiaodong.lin@york.ac.uk) Dr. Laurie Hanquinet (laurie.hanquinet@york.ac.uk) 学生： Yinan Zhang 张一楠

您好，此表格供您说明您是否同意参加本研究。 请阅读并回答每个问题。 您可以在访谈的任何时候撤回他们的同意或退出，您可以拒绝回答任何一个问题，或在访谈后 6 个月内联系我，撤销对我可以使用访谈数据的同意。 您还可以在数据发布之前的任何阶段退出。此外，您的身份将在整个研究项目中匿名，您的个人信息将保密。 如果您有任何不明白的地方，或者您想了解更多信息，请咨询研究人员。

您是否已阅读并理解有关该研究的信息传单？　　　是　否

您有机会询问有关该研究的问题吗？　　　是　否

您是否了解您提供的信息将由研究人员保密？　　　是　否

您是否了解您可以在访谈结束后六个月内撤回您的同意？　　是　否

您是否了解您可以拒绝回答任何问题？　　　　　　　是　否

您是否了解您提供的信息可能会用于未来的研究？　　　是　否

您是否同意参与本次研究？　　　　　　　　　　　　是　否

若同意，您是否同意对本次访谈进行录音？　　　　　是　否
　　(若您不同意，您仍可参与本次研究).
　　受访者签名：
　　访谈者姓名：
　　日期：

Appendix 3: Information Sheet

Hello, my name is Yinan Zhang, I'm a PhD student at University of York in UK. My PhD supervisors are Dr. Xiaodong Lin and Dr. Laurie Hanquinet. I am doing research about married Chinese women's relationship with their mother, and I am interviewing participants from Beijing and Xining. The purpose of this research is to explore the mother-daughter relationship in the Chinese cultural context and how their relationship and feelings change through marriage and maybe given birth. The length of the interview will be about 1 to 2 hours. In order to do research easily, I will ask for interviewees' permission and record what we have talked in this interview. I guarantee that each interview will be anonymous, and I will not reveal participant's identity and personal information under any circumstance. Information, provided by interviewees, will be only applied for academic purpose. If interviewees regret to be interviewed within 6 months after the interview, I, Yinan Zhang will delete all the raw data without any copy and will not include you in the study without any question.

I am looking for Chinese women who have married who have children or expecting a child. Each interviewee can decide whether they prefer talk through WeChat or face-to-face interview. If you prefer face-to-face interview, any place in Beijing or Xining will be fine for

me. The date of this interview will be around September 2019. I will email you to agree the date and the venue. The interview may include the following questions:

1. Interviewee's age, family background, education, and career

2. Interviewee's relationship and daily interaction with her mother

3. Interviewee's relationship and daily interaction with her husband and children

4. Any issue related to Chinese married women's relationship with their mothers

If you decide to be the interviewee, please email to yz2752@york.ac.uk or leave a message to my phone (+44 7529151226). Thanks for your participation.

Appendix 4 Information Sheet Chinese Version

附件二：研究参与说明

您好，我叫张一楠，我是英国约克大学的博士生。 我的博士生导师是林晓东博士和 Laurie Hanquinet 博士。 我目前在研究中国已婚妇女与母亲的关系，我正在采访北京和西 宁的参与者。 这项研究的目的是探索中国文化背景下的母女关系，以及他们的关系和感 受如何通过婚姻和生育而改变。 面试时间约为一到两小时。 为了便于研究，我会请求受 访者的许可并记录我们在这次访谈中谈到的内容。 我保证每位受访者都是匿名的。 受访 者提供的信息仅用于学术目的。 如果受访者在采访后 6 个月内后悔接受采访，我，张一 楠，将删除所有与此次访谈相关的数据，不做任何复制。

我寻找的受访者是已婚的中国女性，有孩子或正在孕期。 每位受访者都可以决定 她们是喜欢通过微信视频通话还是面对面访谈。 如果您更喜欢面对面的采访，北京或 西宁的任何地方都可以。 这次采访的日期将在 2019 年 9 月左右。我将通过电子邮件通 知您，确认具体日期和地点。 面试可能包含以下问题：

1.受访者的年龄，家庭背景，教育背景和职业

2.受访者与母亲的关系及日常互动

3.受访者与丈夫和孩子的关系及日常互动

4.任何与中国已婚女性与母亲关系相关的问题

如果您决定成为受访者，请发送电子邮件至 yz2752@york.ac.uk 或留言给我的电话 （ +44 7529151226）。感谢您的参与。

Appendix 5: Outline of semi-structured interview

Basic Information:

1.　Hi, I'm Yinan Zhang. I'm a PhD student in University of York. Thank you very much for participating in my research. Could you tell me about yourself?

2.　Could you tell me about you and your parents' education background?

3.　Do you have a job right now? what is it?

4.　When were you married?

5.　How many children do you have? How old are they?

6.　How often do you contact or visit your parents?

7.　In general, how do you define your relationship with your mother?

Marriage:

8.　What do you think marriage is?

9.　What do you think would be the understanding of marriage?

10.　Do you think your mother have any influence on your marriage?

11. Before you get married, what kind of man do you imagine yourself with?

12. What kind of man is your husband? Did he fit your imagination?

13. What kind of man did your mother want you to marry with?

14. Did your mother like your husband when you first introduce him to her?

15. What's your mother's opinion on your marriage?

16. How is life after marriage? Ang changes?

17. How is your relationship with your husband?

18. Do you feel closer or loose connection with your mother after you get married?

19. Do you and your husband have conflicts over family issues or other things? (like whose house to visit during important holidays)

20. How do you handle such situations? Do you ask your mother's opinion?

21. What is your mother's opinion about such conflicts? Or what so you assume her opinions would be?

Children:

22. How do you feel when/after you have a baby?

23. Do you feel like you understand your mother more?

24. Would you raise your children like how she raised you?
25. Do you consult your mother for parenting issues?

26. For you, what kind of mother is a good mother?

27. For your mother, how do you assume 'good mother' means to her?

28. For you, what kind of daughter is a good daughter?

29. For your mother, how do you assume 'good daughter' means to her?

30. What kind of daughter do you think your mother want you to be?

31. Do you think your mother is a good mother for you?

32. Do you think you are a good mother for your children?

33. Do you think you are a good daughter to your mother?

34. What kind of mother do you want your mother to be?

35. What kind of mother do you imagine yourself to be for your own children?

Self:

36. What kind of women do you define yourself as? Do you satisfy with yourself right now?

37. Do you think your mother influenced you on life choices? (School, Career, Marriage…)

38. What is their expectation on you when you were a kid? What kind of people/women did they want you to be?

39. What kind you people/women did you want to be?

40. Did your parents' expectation change while you grow up? Are there any differences before and after you married and have children?

41. Did your expectation on yourself change while you grow up? Are there any differences before and after you married and have children?

42. Did your parents always agree with your expectation on yourself? How do you handle it?

43. What is your expectation on your kids? What kind of person do you want them to be? If you have daughter, what kind of women or daughter do you expect her to be?

Appendix 6: Outline of semi-structured interview Chinese Version

访谈大纲：基本信息

1.您好，我是张一楠。我是约克大学的博士生。非常感谢您参与我的研究。您能简单介绍一下自己吗？

2.您能告诉我您和您父母的教育背景吗？

3.您现在有工作吗？是什么工作？

4.您什么时候结婚的？

5.您有几个孩子？他们几岁？

6.您多久联系或拜访您的父母？

7.一般来说，您如何定义您与您母亲的关系？

婚姻：

8.您觉得婚姻怎么样？

9.您认为您对婚姻的理解是什么？

10.您认为您母亲对您的婚姻有影响吗？

11.在您结婚之前，您想象自己会嫁给一个什么样的男人？

12.您丈夫是什么样的男人？他符合您的想象吗？

13.您妈妈想要您嫁给什么样的男人？

14.当您第一次把他介绍给您母亲时，您的母亲是否喜欢您的丈夫？

15.您母亲对您的婚姻有什么看法？

16.结婚后的生活如何？有什么变化？

17.您和丈夫的关系如何？

18.结婚后您与母亲的关系是否更紧密？

19.您和您的丈夫是否在家庭问题或其他方面存在冲突？（比如在重要节日时拜访谁的父母)

20.您如何处理这种情况？您会问您母亲的意见吗？

21.您母亲对这种冲突的看法是什么？或者您认为她的意见是什么？

孩子：

22.您怀孩子时/生了孩子后感觉如何？

23.您觉得您更了解您的母亲吗？

24.您会像您母亲抚养您的方式一样抚养您的孩子吗？

25.您会向您母亲咨询育儿问题吗？

26.对您来说，什么样的母亲是好母亲？

27.对于您的母亲，您认为'好母亲'对她意味着什么？

28.对您来说，什么样的女儿是个好女儿？

29.对于您的母亲，您认为'好女儿'对她意味着什么？

30.您觉得您母亲想让您成为一个什么样的女儿？

31.您认为您的母亲是个好母亲吗？

32.您认为您是您孩子的好母亲吗？

33.您认为您是您母亲的好女儿吗？

34.您想要您的母亲是什么样的母亲？

35.您认为自己要为自己的孩子做什么样的母亲？

自我：

36.您认为自己是什么样的女性？您对自己的现状满意吗？

37.您认为您的母亲在生活选择上影响了您吗？ （学校，职业，婚姻……）

38.当您还是个孩子的时候，他们对您的期望是什么？他们希望您成为什么样的人/女人？ 您想成为什么样的人/女人？

40.您长大后父母的期望是否有所改变？您结婚前和生孩子之前和之后有什么不同吗？

41.在您长大的过程中，您对自己的期望是否有所改变？您结婚前和生孩子之前和之后有 什么不同吗？

42.您父母总是同意您对自己的期望吗？如果有冲突您怎么处理？

43.您对孩子的期望是什么？您想让他们成为什么样的人？如果您有女儿，您期望她是什 么样的女人或女儿？

Appendix 7: Participant Information Sheet

Background

The University of York would like to invite you to take part in the following research project,

Before agreeing to take part, please read this information sheet carefully and let us know if anything is unclear or you would like further information.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study is designed to explore the mother-daughter relationship in the Chinese cultural context and how their relationship and feelings change through marriage and maybe given birth.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you could help me understand more about mother-daughter interactions from your perspective.

Do I have to take part?

No, participation is optional. If you do decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet for your records and will be asked to complete a participant information form. If you change your mind at any point during the study, you will be able to withdraw your participation without having to provide a reason.

On what basis will you process my data?

Under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the University has to identify a legal basis for processing personal data and, where appropriate, an additional condition for processing special category data.

In line with our charter which states that we advance learning and knowledge by teaching and research, the University processes personal data for research purposes under Article 6 (1) (e) of the GDPR:

Processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest

Special category data is processed under Article 9 (2) (j):

Processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, or scientific and historical research purposes or statistical purposes

Research will only be undertaken where ethical approval has been obtained, where there is a clear public interest and where appropriate safeguards have been put in place to protect data.

In line with ethical expectations and in order to comply with common law duty of confidentiality, we will seek your consent to participate where appropriate. This consent will not, however, be our legal basis for processing your data under the GDPR.

How will you use my data?

Data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this notice.

Will you share my data with 3rd parties?

No. Data will be accessible to the project team at York only.

Anonymised data may be reused by the research team or other third parties for secondary research purposes.

How will you keep my data secure?

The University will put in place appropriate technical and organisational measures to protect your personal data and/or special category data. For the purposes of this project, we will:

Information will be treated confidentiality and shared on a need-to-know basis only. The University is committed to the principle of data protection by design and default and will collect the minimum amount of data necessary for the project. In addition, we will anonymise or pseudonymise data wherever possible.

Will you transfer my data internationally?

No. Data will be held within the European Economic Area in full compliance with data protection legislation.

Will I be identified in any research outputs?

No. Your identity will be anonymized throughout the research project, and your personal information will be confidential.

How long will you keep my data?

Data will be retained in line with legal requirements or where there is a business need.

Retention timeframes will be determined in line with the University's Records Retention Schedule.

What rights do I have in relation to my data?

Under the GDPR, you have a general right of access to your data, a right to rectification, erasure, restriction, objection, or portability. You also have a right to withdrawal. Please note, not all rights apply where data is processed purely for research purposes. For further information see,
https://www.york.ac.uk/recordsmanagement/generaldataprotectionregulation/individualsrights/.

Questions or concerns

If you have any questions about this participant information sheet or concerns about how your data is being processed, please contact xx in the first instance. If you are still dissatisfied, please contact the University's Acting Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@york.ac.uk.

Right to complain

If you are unhappy with the way in which the University has handled your personal data, you have a right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office. For information on reporting a concern to the Information Commissioner's Office, see www.ico.org.uk/concerns.

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