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**DIVERSE
INDIVIDUALISATIONS
AND
INTERDEPENDENCES:
HOW ADULT ONLY-
CHILDREN'S MARRIAGE
AND FAMILY FORMATION
AFFECTS PARENT-CHILD
RELATIONSHIPS IN URBAN
CHINA**

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Abstract

My research focuses on the first generation of only-children and their parents, to see how the only-children's marriage affects the relationships with their parents thus contributing to debates around intimacy and individualisation processes in China. Since the implementation of the one-child birth control policy in the late 1970s, the one-child family has become a common family type in urban China. With the shrinking of family size caused by reduction in the number of births, my research explores how this change, together with socio-economic change, affects the intergenerational relationships in Chinese families. The Chinese family has traditionally involved a long-term contract between parents and children, in which parents raise children with the assumption that children would reciprocate by taking care of them in their old age. Scholars have asserted that under the influence of marketisation and consumerism, individualisation is rising which leads to the decline of moral behaviour and disintegration of family bonds, as well as obligations to elderly parents. Most existing research on intergenerational relationships in only-child families has adopted quantitative methods and often focuses on elderly care problems, overlooking the complexity of only-children's meaning-making process in relation to their parents and the family. My research uses qualitative methods and involved interviews with 120 people from 30 only-child families, members of the couple and one of their respective parents. In the Chinese context, individualisation has had an impact on

intergenerational relations in only-child families and existing theories generally see individualisation in terms of the selfishness of younger generations, with little exploration of the impact of individualisation from the point of view of older generations. My study fills this gap and the data reveals that both the only-child generation and the parent generation show a trend of individualisation, varying according to social background. However, relations between generations continue to be based on interdependence, and the importance of intergenerational interdependence is not confined to China. Although debates about individualisation in China situate it within the specific context, my work points out the need not to assume that it means people are actually more self-reliant. My work shows how the privatisation of support for families affects the relationships between older parents and their adult children.

Declaration

I confirm that the work presented in this thesis is all my own work, and it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Qing Lin', written in a cursive style.

Signed: QING LIN

Date: 30/03/2018

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1.CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

'Will you marry me?'

'Yes, I will'.

After several simple words, I knew something had changed in my romantic relationship. Yes, I was going to be a bride and step into a marital life after a romantic wedding. That was what I thought in a second after I said 'Yes'. A wedding opens the door to marriage. There is a saying that marriage is the tomb of love, and another one says that marriage is the flower blossom of a relationship. Some fairy tales end with a grand wedding for the prince and princess and the last sentence is usually something like 'and they lived happily ever after'. However, is this really the case? What I am interested in is the couple's life after the wedding; whether they get along well with their in-laws and if, through the process of marriage, they become alienated from their own parents.

In the months leading up to my marriage, I often thought about my father's cousin, whom I call my aunt. I remember when she had a boyfriend, and her mother was against their relationship because she thought the young man did not have a good job and his family was poor. My aunt was not allowed to go out on weekends in case she was seeing her boyfriend again. My aunt sometimes took me as her cover, telling her mother that she was out with me, when she was also out with her boyfriend. For a long time, they dated secretly and my aunt refused to go on any blind date her family arranged for

her. In the end, they finally got married and both sets of parents had to concede to their marriage. When it came to their wedding day, my aunt cried bitterly when the groom came to take her to the new home. I asked her why she was crying. She said it was the custom for a bride to cry at the wedding ceremony to show her unwillingness to leave her parents. But she also told me that she was too happy to cry thus she had to pretend to cry.

In my eyes, the beginning of my aunt's marriage was a turning point of the relationship between my aunt and her mother. My aunt was perceived as a good filial daughter amongst her family and friends—she had a good temper and had always been obedient to her parents until she went against their wishes and married an 'unsuitable' man. After they got married, they lived in a tiny flat and later they had a daughter. Their small one-bedroom flat soon became home to four people from three generations when my aunt's mother came to look after her grandchild. Every time my aunt complained about the constrained living conditions, her mother would put on a face that read 'it's your choice. I told you not to marry him.' My aunt frequently told me that she did not like her mother's mockery, and responding to this, she sometimes ignored or argued with her mother. The mother also felt unhappy and wronged because she thought she was offering help, so she sometimes complained about it when chatting with some relatives. Over time, there were more tensions in this family until my aunt's mother eventually moved out after

a huge argument.

Although this all happened when I was about ten years old, it still quite clear in my memory. Standing at the crossroads of marriage and family, my aunt's experience led me to think about how I would deal with such family conflict if I were my aunt. Would I side with my new husband or my mother? How could I encourage family members to get along with each other? I do not know because just like the old proverb says, 'there are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes', there are also a thousand home affairs in a thousand families.

Before I got married, my family role was quite straightforward. I was a daughter. However, after I got married I would continue my role of daughter, but would also become a wife and daughter-in-law. I worried about how I would handle these new family roles? Would I still be the same daughter to my parents as before? Chinese people usually call their mother-in-law 'mother' and father-in-law 'father' as their partners do. Would I have a good relationship with my new 'mother' and 'father'? Will the newly joined family members change prior relations within my family? This series of questions inspired me to think about intergenerational relationships in Chinese families and taking my own position into consideration, my research topic focused on how adult only children's marriage and family formation affects parent-child relationships urban Chinese families.

There are multiple reasons for focusing on Chinese families in particular. Firstly, I am a Chinese woman and grew up in an urban Chinese society, so I want to take a critical look at the context which I am familiar with. The prevalence of one-child families in China against the backdrop of the birth control policy in China, discussed later in the chapter, is also relevant, since this provides a particular sociocultural milieu for understanding intergenerational relations and social change. Moreover, my experience of studying abroad gave me the opportunity to understand a different society that led me to question taken-for-granted family norms in China. For example, I thought grandparents should be primarily responsible for the care of grandchildren before I came to United Kingdom, because all of the children in my family were predominantly looked after by grandparents. This is also the case in tens of thousands of Chinese families, where young parents tend to work full-time, leaving their children in the care of their grandparents (Goh, 2011). However, I noticed so many children were looked after by their parents in the UK and that led to my questioning of the Chinese way of doing family. Next, I will introduce the changes of Chinese family in order to get a better understanding of how the socio-economic changes influence the Chinese family.

1.1 Traditional Chinese Family—before 1949

The dominant norm in Chinese families has traditionally been based on a long-term contract between parents and children over the past centuries, in which parents raise children with the assumption that children would take care of them in their old age as a reciprocate (Tang & Parish, 2000). This kind of arrangement has been connected with strong patriarchal cultural norms, for example, the Confucian ideology which emphasises the patrilineal line in residence after marriage (Tang & Parish, 2000). In these traditional family norms, the ideal family is a large, extended household with different generations living together. The man in the oldest generation was the head of the family household so he holds the authority within the family. Younger generations had to respect and obey their elders. Multiple hierarchies within the family existed (Stockman, 2000). A hierarchy based on age categorised men within the same generation by their birth order. For example, a younger brother would refer to his elder brother as 'elder brother' rather than by his given name and would be expected to accept the elder brother's authority and leadership. Elder siblings were expected to take care of younger siblings. A hierarchy based on gender also existed within the traditional Chinese family. Women were considered to be subordinate to men in all family relationships. As a daughter, a woman should obey her father; as a wife she

should obey her husband and as a widow she should obey her son who became the head of the family after his father's death (Stockman, 2000).

The main purpose of marriage was to continue the patrilineal family. Marriage was deemed a *family* rather than an *individual* matter, so marriage was usually arranged by parents in traditional Chinese families (Stockman, 2000). The new bride had the responsibility to serve her parents-in-law, and her parents-in-laws would determine her duties in this family. The new bride had a very low status in the family and the only way for her to improve her status was to fulfill her main function of producing a male offspring. Sons were much preferred to daughters, and the birth of a succession of daughters was met with disappointment. This often led to a lowering of the status of the daughter-in-law within the family and wider community (Stockman, 2000).

Children were raised and educated within the family household, where they learned the Confucian norms in the maintenance of harmonious family relations, and the practical meaning of filial piety. They learnt the differences between the social roles of males and females. Most sons were prepared to take over the roles of related adults in economy, and daughters were waiting to leave their natal home and marry into her husband's family (Stockman, 2000). Patrilineal descent also involved patrilineal inheritance. The custom was for all sons to inherit the family's property in roughly equal

shares. Daughters did not inherit, but could receive dowries as an appropriate share of the family patrimony (Ebrey, 1991). Overall, the features of the traditional Chinese family system could be seen as patrilineal and patriarchal.

1.2 Changing Chinese Families—before and after 1978

A Socialist system has been implemented since the New China was founded by the Communist Party in 1949, and the work unit system is the main governance mode in urban China. Individuals were expected to devote themselves to collective work units out of their families, and strive for the public good of the whole country. Urban citizens worked and lived primarily in their work units, and as a consequence the family's functions of production and consumption became weakened (Lu, 1989). The work unit system offered urban individuals secure jobs and many social guarantees such as government distributed accommodation, and free education and medical care. More importantly, work units took over a lot of functions which originally belonged to families, since these units operated as a multi-functional social organisation and community (Chen, et al., 2013). As such, those growing up during this period did not have many concerns or worries about housing and careers. Such factors weakened the power which parents had over their children.

The government created a series of policies and laws to influence people's marriage life, and established the marriage system of modern China (Meijer, 1971). The Marriage Law of 1950 was designed to change the old patriarchal marriage system with a new democratic marriage system which was based on the free choice of partners, monogamy, equal rights for both sexes and protection of the lawful interests of women and children (Meijer, 1971). The power of the government was used to shift the family relations away from the hierarchies of generation, age and sex to a more egalitarian model (Stockman, 2000).

The Chinese government implemented the reform and opening-up policies in 1978 modified the state-planned economic system and accelerated the economic interactions with the outside world. Since the reform and opening-up in 1978, the predominance of the work unit system in many cities has gradually been influenced by the private ownership system. In 1978, there were only about 300,000 self-employed people in China. However, this number surged to 14.5 million only a decade later. In 1988, the number of employees of a private enterprise was no longer limited up to eight. After that, with the number of private entrepreneurs increasing sharply, more and more people began to work for private enterprises. Until 2005, a total of more than 30 million people ran private businesses, and the number of their employees reached over 96 million (Tsai, 2007: 51-61). One

of the immediate consequences of the emerging private economy was the termination of the government's monopolistic control of resource distribution and living opportunities (Yan, 2003). The new labour market brought by the rising private economy offered people a great number of choices and opportunities (Yan, 2003). The economic reform in 1978 substantially untied governmental authority from families and individuals, reducing the functions and influence of the all-round government. The role of the state turned to macro-controller instead of monopolising everything as before. Social resource distribution was managed by the market instead of the government, which actually brought families and individuals into the flood of the market (Li, et al, 2009). Individuals' previous lives which standardised by the state were altered. Individuals had to strive mightily for living materials in the market competition, and family life exhibited a tendency of individualisation (Yan, 2003). Under this circumstance, the family turned increasingly privatised and individualised, and became a private sphere in its true sense.

After the reform and opening-up in 1978, it becomes less and less possible for the state to influence families through the patriarchal system. Many scholars believe that there are two dimensions of inequality in the patriarchal system: gender and intergenerational hierarchy (Short et al, 2001; Yu et al, 1990). During the Chinese social transformation, it is modernisation that influenced these two factors to put an end to the patriarchal system.

From an economic perspective, the changes in the family economic base fundamentally cause the decline of the patriarchal system (Liu, 2017). The economic base of the patriarchy was that the individuals' productive incomes were distributed to parents based on the family unit, and arranged for consumption by parents as well (Wang, 2017). During that time of shortage of materials, people had low incomes and their consumption had to be limited. In cities, although many people enjoyed salaries from their employment, they had to hand them over to their families in order to afford their family's joint expenses in some cases. The reform in the economic system in 1978 greatly weakened the economic base of the patriarchal system, because individuals' salaries were directly paid to individuals, who began to enjoy economic autonomy. Children's incomes were no longer totally under their parents' control, and the family played a decreasing role of joint production and consumption (Liu, 2017).

Some regulations and laws also promoted the decline of patriarchy. For example, laws on right of succession and laws on elderly-care obligations stipulate gender equality, while the enactment of the one-child policy promotes the female's status in the family (Wang, 2017). The one-child policy set in 1978 effectively controlled the population, and greater gender equality in succession rights and elderly-care obligations began to appear. The reduction in the quantity of children changed the elderly-care obligation, which was

traditionally undertaken by the sons. Under the one-child policy, especially in cities, daughters were also supposed to be responsible for elderly care in families which have no sons. Additionally, the enactment of the policy made family resources unprecedentedly concentrated on one child in a family (two children in a few cases). Daughters began to enjoy equal educational conditions and welfare with sons, which helped to narrow the gender gap in the future succession rights and elderly-care obligations (Wang, 2017).

Moreover, the diversity of residential patterns also extends the traditional mode of patrilocal residence. In the late age of the work unit system, with the welfare-oriented public housing distribution system being gradually disrupted, many factors, like commercial housing price inflation and population mobility, jointly brought out a variety of residential patterns; the intergenerational residential pattern was closely linked with the family life cycle. A tendency developed of 'joint residence—-independent residence—joint-residence again' (Zeng & Wang, 2004). When taking economic and other factors into consideration, individuals may make different choices in residence patterns, like living independently, living with the parents of the husband or wife, or living with children, etc., among which the traditional patrilocal residence had less and less influence. When individuals wanted to make choices on their residence patterns, different ideas, demands and economic considerations in different generations became determinant factors which further undermined patriarchal

authority (Wang, 2012; Feng, 2009). The power for maintaining the intergenerational relationships was more required by mutual benefit and collaboration among family members, rather than traditional filial piety with which the younger generation were unconditionally obedient to do as their elders wish.

A 'big family' is the Chinese designation of a joint family, in which children keep on living with their parents after they get married. Linked with a 'big family', a 'small family' is a so-called nuclear family, which is made up of one couple and their unmarried children. However, the boundary between a 'big family' and a 'small family' is sometimes vague in fact. Whether big or small can, on one hand, be decided by family's living space, and on the other hand, be defined by the recognition of family members. The definition of big or small offers uncertainty and flexibility concerning the family size. When family members try to set the boundary of small families, they also make their judgement on who belongs to the inner family. Family recognition is demonstrated by how individuals define their family members. The elder generation usually regard themselves, their spouses, their children, their children's spouses and their grandchildren as a small family, while the younger generation always consider themselves, their spouses and children as a small family (Yang, 2018). Different people also have other different explanations on the definition of small-family members. The various possibilities of small-family member definition illustrates that, under the

influence of individualism, individuals often give out the self-centred definition on the boundaries of families according to their self-requirement and relationships with others.

Before the reform and opening-up in 1978, family interests were always given priority over individual demands. Baker (1979) believes that in the west a family mainly offers an individual a good environment to grow up and step into society. In traditional China, an individual was regarded as the extension of a family, rather than as getting support from a family. After the policy implementation, due to the fierce competition in market-oriented economy, the adult family members are mostly required to get employed, and especially the increasing female employment brings out conflicts on intra-household labour division, which traditionally expected that men worked out and women stayed home (Feng, 2007; Liu, 2017). With the changes in the traditional labour division pattern, individuals show an increasing tendency of spending more time on other activities besides family affairs. Family life is no longer limited within some specific place, and it can be found in many different locations (Sheng, 2013). Job mobility also directly influences family life. Joint family life requires more and more coordination among family members in order to combine different and separated tracks of life together. Under this background, it also makes it more possible to witness family conflicts. The decline of parents' authority accompanies the increase in children's independence. Everyone wants to pursue their own life, and a family is

maintained based on the balance between reciprocity and conflict. Family members cooperate with each other for the reciprocity, while they conflict with each other due to the different patterns and concepts of life.

Under the influence of individualisation, intergenerational relationships are no longer simply around patriarchal networks. In some cases, intergenerational relationships are effected by mutual reciprocity and mutual assistance among family members (Wang, 2017). The reform in 1978 and social development released individuals from the traditional families and collective work units, which made people live their own lives. When individual interests conflicted with family interests, personal interests and demands were no longer completely ignored (Yan, 2003). Under the historical background and the development of the individualisation, women are not constrained by their traditional gender roles which they only played as mother and wife. It is unnecessary for them to obey the fixed gender norms which are set by the society (Xu, 2010). As independent individuals, women are expected to have their jobs and dreams, and it is not required for them to give up their personal lives and jobs for their families. However, it may lead to contradictions in the household labour division, especially when a new generation is born. Many couples thus still depend on their parents to offer support for finance and housework, and it is a quite common phenomenon in Chinese families which is called parent-consuming (kenlao) by the mass media. Young couples may

need their parents to assist them with the housework and childcaring, while only-children's parents may demand emotional and economic support as well. The interactions and connections thus increase due to the collaborations between parents and children on family affairs. After the enactment of the one-child policy, the shortage of immediate siblings and the shrinking of the kinship network made the maintenance of intergenerational relationships mostly concentrate on a minority of family members. In the following section, I will discuss the one-child policy to discover how it was formulated and promulgated, and how it influenced China during that period.

1.3 One-Child Birth Control Policy

In the late 1970s, an unprecedented birth control program was introduced by the Chinese government which aimed to reduce the country's population growth and allow for rapid modernization and economic development (Greenhalgh, 2008). In order to achieve the goal of limiting the population to 1.2 billion by the end of the twentieth century, the State Council issued an ambitious 'one-child birth control policy' in late 1979 (Poston et al., 2006). This was to limit family size to one child for all newly-wed couples except in the autonomous regions where the ethnic population was under 10 million (Greenhalgh, 2008). According to the population census in China in 1990, the amount of urban only-children was at least

56 million while in the year 2000 the number reached more than 61.47 million, which was about 10% more than the previous decade (Guo, 2001). As a consequence of this policy, children with no siblings were emerging as the new generation in China.

On 1st January 2016, Article 18 of the latest version of The Population and Family Planning Law of the People's Republic of China stated that where the requirements specified by laws and regulations are met, a second child may be allowed. Henceforth, it marked the definitive end to the one-child policy which had been carried out for almost forty years. Therefore, this first generation of only children and their parents can be regarded as a specific group who had experienced the nation-wide family structure reform under a very specific social background.

1.4 Parent-Child Relationships in One-Child Families

Scholars argue that two components of family life appear to be transformed as a result of the introduction of the one-child birth control policy: filial piety and the position of women and girls (Feng, et al, 2014; Deutsch, 2006). A study focusing on the first generation of only-child families found that parenting was more child-centred than in families with multiple children (He, 2007). Parents spent more time on child care if they only

had one child than multiple children and the parents were more likely to agree that parenting was the most meaningful and fulfilling part of their lives (Chow & Chen, 1994; Chow & Zhao, 1996). Other studies have found that only children are given more attention by parents than non-only-children from the very beginning of their lives (Sun and Tong, 2009). For example, only children received more toys and pocket money and were more likely to have a bank account (Deutsch, 2006). This kind of parental attention and investment has contributed to anxiety about the generation of 'little emperors' (Sun & Tong, 2009; Chow & Zhao, 1996), especially when the first generation of only children reach marriageable age. Some scholars argue that large numbers of only-child parents spend almost all their savings on expensive weddings and marital homes (Ma, 2011; Li, 2008; Shen, 2010). This contributes to the representation of only children as 'unfilial' and to their parents as 'victims'.

The birth control policy had lasted for almost 40 years till now that the first generation of only-children who were born after the birth control policy was introduced were already in their 30s or even 40s. In Chinese, there is a saying 'san shi er li' (三十而立) that can be broadly understood to mean that people should be independent from their parents and have their own career and family after the age of thirty. The first generation of only-children are about to reach this stage of their lives, so that means most of them are expected to have a career, get married and may have children. Indeed, many

Chinese people get married at quite a young age compared with people in western countries, despite the introduction of the 'late marriage' policy, which encourages people to postpone marriage and childbirth by offering those who get married at a relatively late age to have an extended wedding leave and maternity leave (Jiang, 2010). The threshold for a 'late marriage' is 25 years old for a man and 23 years old for a woman. This suggests that many of the first generation of only children, who are now in their 30s or 40s, have already gotten married and formed a new family.

I am interested in researching the effect of only-children's marriage and family formation on parent-child relationships because the marriage of children could be seen as the symbolic point for adult children to leave the parental family and start to form the new nuclear family with their partner. Some sociological analyses show that marriage could function to strengthen couples' social ties by providing opportunities and resources for relationships, especially with kin (Fischer, Sollie, Sorell, & Green, 1989). On the other hand, Parsons and Bales (1960) argue that the western modern nuclear family stands on its own and spouses' ties with members of their own family are weakened. This body of literature illustrates that marriage can impact couple's relationships with other family members, and parent-child relationships are no exception.

In Chinese family norms, a child's marriage is a major priority

for parents, and something that they must devote significant attention towards (Feng, 2005). However, arranged marriage is no longer common in contemporary urban China and parents are typically not involved in the choosing their children's spouse (Zang, 2008). Despite this, parents still often take on the responsibility to pay or prepare for their children's weddings. However, economic growth and rising consumerism has led to lavish weddings that often demolish parents' savings (Sun, 2007). In the case of one-child families, the parents typically spend more on their child's wedding since their child is the centre of the family (Liu & Cai, 1997). However, the wedding is just the beginning. Changes in modern Chinese society, in particular the housing distribution system, significantly increase the burden of parents.

A market oriented housing system reform was launched in China in 1998. Before this housing reform, the work units offered housing as a benefit scheme to their employees, commonly referred to as the welfare housing distribution system. At that time, most urban employee families had their own housing which was distributed by the work unit so that, if they had a job, their work unit would give them a place to live. Due to this arrangement, employees did not need to spend much or worry about their housing (Mu, 1999). However, since the housing welfare policy changed, people have to arrange their housing themselves. Following these reforms in the 1990s, the prices of houses and rental charges have increased rapidly, especially in large cities, whilst the

salaries of ordinary citizens did not increase at the same rate. In contrast to the pre-1990s period, finding somewhere to live is a challenge for many young people who have not been working for long and do not have much in savings (Wu, et al, 2012). Furthermore, the changes of welfare housing distribution system in work units mean that most work units do not offer accommodation for their employees. Overall, these changes have made it increasingly difficult for young people to own or rent their own property (Cheng, 2010). In response to such challenges, young people, barring those on high incomes, are increasingly turning to their parents for financial support to purchase a home or for assistance with rent (Cheng, 2010).

While the reform to the housing system makes housing a significant challenge for ordinary urban families, the rise of consumerism in China is an important factor to consider when exploring the modern Chinese family. According to Yan (2009), the most obvious effect of consumerism in Chinese society is its subversion of the existing socialist hierarchy established during the pre-reform period. Under the highly concentrated system of planning and distribution in China during the period from 1949 to 1976, the government strictly controlled productive resources and the circulation of productive resources made little difference in all walks of material lives. Under this regime, political symbols, like class status and party membership, reflected one's social status. However, since the beginning of the 1990s, with the reform of

socioeconomic organisations, consumption and individual wealth, replacing political symbols, gradually became a new way to identify individuals' social status and class division. Consumerism enabled some people to redefine their social status by the consumption and lifestyle. Conspicuous consumption amongst the newly rich was increasingly lauded in popular media from the 1980s onwards. This glorification of conspicuous consumption can be understood as a factor contributing to the prevalence of luxurious weddings and the purchase of high priced marital housing. The aspiration to expensive weddings and marital housing must also be understood within the context of China's one-child birth control policy which made the consumerism more obvious over the past few years. As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, living arrangements and caring for grandchildren also can involve intense negotiation and tension, thus affecting the relationships between parents and only-children.

1.5 Structure of Thesis

In this thesis, I explore how adult only-children's marriages affect their relationships with their parents from five perspectives: 1) negotiations around marriage payment between parents and children before the children's marriage; 2) purchase of a marital home; 3) living arrangements; 4) grandparenting and; 5) dependency of adult children on their parents in their daily life. In order to explore these family

relations from these five perspectives, I draw on data from qualitative interviews with multiple family members. To explain the extent to which intergenerational relationships are impacted by the marriage and family formation of the only-child, I draw on individualisation theory, which is said may lead to the decline of moral behaviour, the disintegration of family bonds, and the decline of filial obligations to elderly parents (Yan, 2003). In studies about intergenerational relationships in Chinese families, Yan (2003) argues that the decline of parents' authority over their children and the development of autonomy and power of the younger generation can be understood as the most significant change to intergenerational relationships, especially in rural areas. Yan argues that some young people begin to pursue individual happiness at the expense of the well-being of their parents. However, there is little exploration of the impact of individualisation from the point of view of older generations. My study fills this gap by exploring both the adult only-child generation as well as their parents' generation to see if older generation also show signs of individualisation in terms of their relationships with their children. Moreover, since Yan's research focused particularly on rural areas, I situate my study in urban areas in order to identify if urban families show similar trends towards individualisation.

The thesis consists of nine chapters. In the next chapter, I provide an overview of existing studies on Chinese only-child families and identify gaps in research on parent-child

relationships within only-child families. Analyses show that we are still lacking explorations and studies on the first generation of only-children when they reach marriageable age. An increasing number of reports on these people can be seen in the mass media in China, while it obviously requires deeper and more general studies to systematically and objectively understand the parent-child relations when only-children reach marriageable age.

In Chapter 3, I address the methodology adopted for this study, taking the reader through the design, data collection and analysis, and addressing the methodological challenges of the project. In brief, I interviewed both the only-child couple and their parents and my informants consisted of two generations, one of which are the first generation of only-children and the other of which are their parents. As a result, a total of 120 participants from 30 families were interviewed. My informants came from three different levels of large-scale housing compounds in the city of Tianjin to ensure the diversity of my data. After the interviews, I used the NVivo qualitative analysis software to help me code the data into classes for data analysis. Although I have tried to deeply explore my data, I have to acknowledge the limited possibilities of generalisation on the basis of the data analysed. For example, my research focused on the relationships between only two generations and I did not take the third generation into consideration. Therefore, I would pay attention to these limitations and make further research in the

future.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 present the empirical data. In Chapter 4, I discuss how the two only-child families negotiate the quantities of betrothal gift, dowry and the cost of wedding ceremony. My data reveals significant differences from traditional family norms, where marriage payments worked as a payment for 'buying' a bride for the groom's family. Nowadays both families 'lose' their only-children after the marriage and both families will undertake a new mission to support the adult only-children's family. Many of the children interviewed can be understood as 'individualised' and some parents also changed their old image of selflessness, suggesting changes to norm of filial duty.

In Chapter 5, the issue of buying a marital home is analysed. Due to the reform of the housing distribution system in China, young couples usually need economic support from their parents if they want to have a property that belongs to them at the start of their married life. Therefore, whether to purchase a marital home, who pays for it and what kind of property is expected will to some extent effect the relationship among family members. Among all the interviewed families, 24 out of the 30 couples have their own marital homes. Parents' financial help was an important factor in the whole process of property purchase and this could be seen as a reflection of 'descending familism' (Yan, 2016). This chapter also reveals a change in traditional family norms, where the

groom's family typically offer a marital home. In this sample, ten only-daughters' parents purchased or contributed to the purchase of marital home. In terms of home purchase, both the parents' generation and the only-child generation shows a tendency towards individualisation, while the misunderstandings and tensions may appear between the two generations due to some realistic issues. In this chapter, I demonstrate that the negotiations around the purchase of a house significantly impacts on parent-child relationships. However, I also illustrate that purchasing properties does not automatically lead to good parent-child relationships, but rather, I make the argument that good intergenerational relations are based on multiple factors that go beyond financial assistance.

Chapter 6 is closely connected with the marital housing chapter because it focuses on the living arrangements in only-child families. In this chapter, I analyse the decision-making processes related to the living arrangements for the only-child couples in order to investigate how the final living arrangement was made and how the parent-child relationship was affected by these negotiations. This chapter demonstrates that generational co-residence is not the dominant nor preferred living arrangement style amongst my sample, which suggests further changes in intergenerational norms. In this regard, my data challenges Feng's (2009) argument that posits that only-children are more likely to live with their parents because they are often dependent on their

parents' housework support. Moreover, only-daughters in the sample were highly dependent on their parents instead of the traditional family norm of becoming alienated from their own parents after they get married.

In Chapter 7, I explore grandparenting and the negotiations underpinning their care of the grandchildren. In contemporary China, grandparents are still seen as the main carers of grandchildren (Goh, 2011). How this kind of task is negotiated and distributed between only-children and their parents is important to their relations. Among my sample, most only-child couples rely on their parents to take care of their own children. However, in contrast to some literature on grandparenting in China (Li & Feng, 2016), many only-children's parents did not deem it an obligation or responsibility to raise their grandchildren, whilst many only-child couples think their parents have an obligation to take care of grandchildren. This chapter demonstrates that, although both generations of parents and children are moving towards increased individualisation, most parents are still constrained by grandparenting. Based on this point, the characteristics of individualisation within Chinese only-child families can be illustrated by the fact that both generations carefully think about not only themselves but also their relationships with other individuals in their families.

In chapter 8, I will discuss the reliance of only-children on their parents, which I call 'parent-consuming'. This term refers

to the over dependence on parents, where adult children have high expectations of their parents in their daily lives following their marriage. This was a common occurrence across the sample and hence this dependency forms an important part of their intergenerational relationships. Among the interviewed families, most of the only-child generation were reliant on their parents' help, although to different degrees. In those families who relied quite heavily on their parents, 'parent-consuming' becomes a mode of parent-child communication, which is committed through parent-child exchanges. Many parents are dissatisfied with their children 'consuming' them and they are not completely willing to devote themselves fully to their children. These parents nonetheless make compromises based on their attachments to their relationships with their children and grandchildren. The parents' generation consider their relationships with their children from their own aspects and make some compromises, while many adult only-children are pursuing independence and egoism. In this sense, individualisation is present in both generations, but it is expressed in different ways.

An overview of parent-child relationships are elaborated on in Chapter 9, which in the concluding chapter of the thesis. This chapter reflects on the contributions of the research and concludes that Chinese adult only-child families appear diversified during the process of individualisation. In the Chinese context, individualisation has had an impact on

intergenerational relations in only-child families and my data reveals that both the only-child generation and the parent generation show a trend of individualisation, varying according to social background. However, in illustrating the process of individualisation, the thesis also illustrates that relations between generations continue to be based on interdependence.

2.CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW SITUATING ONLY-CHILD FAMILIES AND PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, existing literature on Chinese families and parent-child relationships will be discussed. I will begin by providing some contextual background to one-child birth control policy in China, and review literature analysing the impacts of the one-child birth control policy on Chinese families. Following this, I will discuss relevant research in the field of intergenerational relationships and identify research gaps that this thesis addresses. This review of existing literature suggests that explorations and studies on the first generation of only-children when they reach marriageable age are underdeveloped. An increasing number of reports covering only-children and their marriages are evident in the Chinese mass media, but a sociological in-depth study of parent-child relations at this point in the life course is lacking. Finally, I will engage with the application of individualisation theory to contemporary Chinese families. By reviewing all of this literature, I illustrate some of the empirical gaps that this thesis attempts to address.

2.2 The One-Child Birth Control Policy

It has been almost forty years since China launched its birth control policy. In order to limit the population to 1.2 billion by the end of the twentieth century, the State Council issued an ambitious 'one-child policy' in late 1979 (Poston et al, 2006). This was to limit family size to one child for all newly-wed couples, except in some autonomous regions where the ethnic population was under 10 million (Greenhalgh, 2008). To implement the one-child birth control policy, the Chinese government devised various 'carrot and stick' methods to reward couples who took a pledge to just have one child and to penalize those who exceeded the one-child limitation (Poston, et al, 2006). The implementation of the one-child policy led to huge demographic changes and a significant restructuring of the Chinese family (Naftali, 2016). For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, the birth rates in China were quite high, reflecting the pronatalist population policy of the Maoist Era (Scharping, 2003). The birth rates have dropped since the launch of the one-child birth-control policy. The timing of these policy transitions meant that many parents who were of childbearing age between 1950 and the late 1970s had several children, and most children born in that era have several siblings, while many of those born after 1979 are only children (especially in urban areas) or have only one sibling (Fong, 2004).

The ratio of people in the older generation to those in the younger generation is growing rapidly (Scharping, 2003). The

population of China in the 0-14 age category is expected to remain stable until the year 2020, at the point which it will begin to decline. The working age population (15 to 64) will vary slightly until 2026 and then it will decline rapidly. The elderly population aged 65 and older is now growing rapidly and will keep growing for the next few years. Consequently, the need for care of the elderly is increasing and will be high in the future. It is predicted that the ratio of working-age to elderly population will drop from almost 10:1 to nearly as low as 2:1 between 2010 and 2050 (Scharping, 2003).

The birth-control policy has had many intended and unintended effects on family life (Fong, 2004). In cities, many families have had to get used to the reality of having a daughter but no son, which had led to changing gender roles within the family and the more equal treatment of daughters and sons (Jacka, Kipnis and Sargeson, 2013). The desire to have at least one son in order to continue the patriline is weaker but has not vanished completely (Jacka, Kipnis and Sargeson, 2013). In rural areas a second child is allowed if the first child is a girl and that leads to almost all girls having one sibling, while boys are often only children. Girls may be older sisters or younger sisters, but boys seldom have a younger sibling and so cannot experience the role of an older brother (Jacka, Kipnis and Sargeson, 2013). In some places, a minority of parents are so eager to have a son that they do foetal sex testing, which is illegal in China, and then have a sex-selective abortion if the foetus is female. Families who

violate the birth control policy are often fined enormous sums which can be up to six times the average annual income of the local area. Some parents may lose their job as punishment. To avoid these penalties, some parents hide their children from the government, with the result that China has an unknown number of children who are not registered in the hukou system (household registration). These children often suffer great disadvantage unless their families are wealthy—the large fines cause poverty and those children who are not officially registered in the hukou system cannot access public schooling and other public welfare (Jacka, Kipnis and Sargeson, 2013).

2.3 Research on Chinese Only-Children

In the 1980s, research on only-children mostly focused on issues relating to their personalities and education (Chen, 1985; Liu et al, 1988; Xiao & Zhang, 1982; Gao, 1981), while in the 1990s the research emphasis shifted to focus on their socialisation (Feng, 1990). Some early western research, that presented only-children in a negative light, offered the general public the initial understanding of only-children (Adams, 1972; Teffel, 1977; Falbo & Polit, 1986). As a result, the first generation of only-children in China were mainly understood as problematic and challenging (Adams, 1972; Teffel, 1977; Falbo & Polit, 1986). In the 1980s some scholars believed that children with siblings had better personalities and were more well-behaved than those without siblings (Jiao,

Ji and Jing, 1986), with only-children often portrayed as fragile and capricious 'little emperors' with poor work ethics and insufficient self-care skills.

However, other academic research challenged this stereotype of only-children. Some later Chinese and western research argued that there was little significant difference in personalities between only-children and children with siblings (Feng, 1993; Falbo and Polit, 1986). During the late 1980s, most studies believed that, only-children and non-only-children exhibited differences in their personalities, characteristics and behaviour, but these differences were not as marked as people had thought (Bao, Fan & Du, 1989). Only-children behaved better than non-only-children in terms of ego-centricity and learning motivation, but they were less independent than non-only-children in their everyday lives. However, with increasing age these differences typically weaken and sometimes even disappear.

Comparatively speaking, research on the socialisation and social adaptation of only-children was carried out much later than that on personalities and characteristics, but it soon became an important topic which many Chinese sociologists started to focus on. Research on only-children's socialisation mainly gathered steam in the 1990s, exploring the basic socialisation of young only-children. Academics started to study only-children's social adaptation after 2000 (Feng, 2000), discovering the social adaptabilities of young only-

children.

Since 2000, most of the first generation of only-children, are at a point in the life course whereby they themselves are marrying and having children (Feng, 2005). Reflecting this, academics started to pay attention to the family and social lives of only-children born after the introduction of the one-child policy (Feng, 2005). Research on only-children in these different periods can thus be categorised into two main groups, one which considers only-children as research objects, focusing on their personalities, socialisation, and social adaptation. The other research stream focuses on the influences that only-children have on their families and society (Feng, 2006). Existing studies on only-children typically fall into the former category, whilst there is a dearth of research in the latter one. Most studies in the former group were similar and concentrated on one crucial question of whether an only-child could become a normal and qualified social member (Zhang, 2001). The research conclusions basically confirmed that only-children's socialisation developed normally, and they did not exhibit any strange behaviour due to their lack of siblings. This conclusion was proposed based upon researching only-children who were in the period of primary socialisation, but it seemed to be less solid when it came to adult only-children who were in the period of continuing socialisation. Some sociologists led by Feng (2000,2002,2006) studied only-children's family lives and social adaptations. Although their research was

innovative, their findings were descriptive and failing to go deep into specific analysis (Mu, 2004). In order to address these gaps, my research, specifically pays attention to the process of marriage and family formation amongst this first generation of only-children.

2.4 Existing Research on Only-Child Family in China

Existing research on Chinese only-children families mostly focuses on problems relating to elderly care. As an integral part of China's reform, the first generation of only-children's path to adulthood has been accompanied by great social transformations taking place since the late 1970s. One of the emerging issues related to the only-child generation concerns the elderly support of their parents within the context of these social changes (Liu, 2008).

Patterns of elderly care are changing (Zhang & Goza, 2006). In a traditional patrilineal family, elderly parents would live with one of their sons and be taken care of by their daughter-in-law. Ideals of filial piety suggested that middle-aged people should focus on satisfying every whim of their aging parents and never argue with them. As the family sizes have diminished and urbanisation has increased, more patterns of elderly care have emerged (Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). Some older people choose to live with their daughters or live

alone. Old-age homes are also becoming more prevalent. Some elderly people prefer to live in such homes as they find it easier to get along with their peers than with younger people. However, there are also many old people who feel physically and emotionally neglected if they are not cared for by their own children. Some children are also afraid of being judged as an unfilial child if they do not fulfil their responsibilities towards their parents (Jacka, Kipnis, & Sargeson, 2013).

The most common concern to academics has to do with the so-called '1-2-4-plus' family. This family form, also called the 'sandwich family', refers to patterns whereby a middle aged couple may have to support one child and four parents whilst still working themselves, and in some cases, up to eight grandparents as well, without the help of any siblings (Festini and de Martino, 2004; Powell and Cook, 2000). Based on a survey of 481 adult only-children and 204 adult non-only-children, Sun and Xing (2014) adopted the theory of role conflict and the role demand-resource model to analyse the conflicts between only-children's working and daily life roles, and the contributory factors underpinning these conflicts. Their research showed that only-children experienced more conflict between working and daily life than non-only-children. Xu's (2016) analysis of the first generation of rural married only-children's parents' attitudes on elderly care further supports these findings. Based on data collected from 720 middle-aged farmers in Jiangsu and Sichuan provinces in

2011, Xu concluded that only-children's parents worried more about their elderly care than non-only-children's parents. He also found that variables, like marriage status, parent-child relationships, married children's support, living conditions, and life satisfaction, might significantly influence research subjects' attitudes about elderly care.

This problem is made more complicated by the widespread doubt about the only children's ability to fulfil their filial duty towards their parents. Moreover, China's current social realities also tend to make filial obligations more necessary whilst simultaneously more difficult to shoulder than before (Liu, 2008). Whilst there is widespread concern about elderly care in these families, there has been very little systematic research on how the adult only-children, for whom the parents' elderly care constitutes an impending task, construct meaning around it. Current research on only-children and their families has mostly been limited to lower age groups, hardly beyond that of teenagers, with a few exceptions (Deutsch, 2006; Liu, 2006; Liu, 2008). Furthermore, most existing research on this topic uses quantitative research methods which often overlooks the diversity of only-children's meaning-making process in regard to their parents and the family. More systematic research going beyond the existing patterns could help us get a better understanding of how this specific group of young adults in China, who are typically experiencing a transitional period in life, are making choices concerning important issues (such as marriage and filial

obligations) under the particular social context in which their lives are rooted.

2.5 Research on the Marital Life of Only-Children

The first generation of only-children in China have now reached their thirties or even forties so many of them have already gotten married, formed their own families, and had their own children. In China, a child's marriage is regarded as one of the heaviest burdens for parents as it may consume a huge part of the parents' savings and, in some special cases, parents may even take on great debt. In this sense, a marriage is a process in which the parents' possessions are gradually transferred to the children (Wang, 2010). Almost all the properties which parents prepare for their children, such as betrothal gifts and marital home, flow to the children's new family. This phenomenon has drawn a great deal of attention from the public, the mass media and many researchers (Wang, 2010; Zheng, 2012; Xiong, 2009; Li, 2008). Some reports on only-children's marital status have appeared in the mass media, however, there have been very few systematic studies by academics in China on parent-child relations during only-children's marriages (Feng, 2002; 2005).

Among the existing Chinese literature, only a few empirical studies investigate marriages amongst the first generation of

only-children. The Shanghai Population and Development Research Centre conducted a survey which sampled nearly 1,000 adult only-children in Shanghai and researched their social adjustments, which involved adult only-children's partnerships and marriages (Su, 1998). However, they did not include the contents of partnerships and marriages in their reports on their final research results. In 2000 and 2002, Feng (2000, 2002) carried out two studies respectively among 600 working young adults in four cities in Hubei Province. These two studies mainly focused on the respondents' careers and marriage status. However, the research results only focused on the only-children's career adaptations and their fertility desires, ignoring many other dimensions relating to their marriage and family lives. Including a more explicit focus on only-children's marriages, Xia (2001) studied only-children's marital and fertility status in six towns in Wujiang City, Jiangsu Province, between 1997 and 1999. However, as the sample was restricted to towns within one small city, its results had less general significance in larger cities in which more only-children live.

In 2004, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences researched almost 2,000 adult only-children with children and it concluded that the family structure of such families was mainly formed by three generations, and only-children's families were strongly economically dependent on their parents. The research showed that as many as 47.2 percent of only-children's parents financially supported their

children's wedding entirely or for the most part, which was 12.1 percentage points higher than parents with multiple children (Bao & Chen, 2005). Nevertheless, the statistics cannot be interpreted as robust, since it is not possible to draw conclusions about financial dependency based on only one index of wedding financial support. In addition, financial dependency can be, to a certain degree, subjectively defined. It could not be used to infer that only-children have strong dependency on their parents. In fact, the statistics in the research just show that some adult children economically depend on their parents. Moreover, Bao and Chen's research (2005) did not investigate if there is any gendered dimensions in only-children's dependence on their parents. Bearing this in mind, my research fills these gaps by including gender as a dimension in my analysis of support from both only-child couple's parents.

In order to explore the relationships between adult only-children and their parents, I analyse in this research some representative stages in the timeline of only-child couple's marriage and family formation process. Thus the issue of marriage payment will be discussed initially. Marital payments are an essential step for the families to plan the marriage, providing a good position for us to explore resource exchanges, family obligations, and the issue of 'face' (dignity or status) between adult only-children and their parents. It is to this issue that the chapter now turns.

2.6 Only-Children's Marriage Payment

Marriage payment refers to the contributions that both husband and wife and their families make to their marriage in terms of money and valuable items (Spiro, 1975). In research on marriage payment, it is mainly analysed through the two related concepts of betrothal gifts and dowries. Betrothal gifts refer to properties transferred from the groom's family to the bride's family, while dowries are given to the groom's family. Based on these two perspectives, researchers make surveys and analyses on the practice of marriage payment in China. As a result, marriage payment theory and marriage endowment theory are proposed (Freedman, 1979; Cohen, 1976).

Marriage payment theory argues that the groom's family compensates the bride's family economically because they offer a bride with reproductive and labour value. The wealth offered by groom's family is actually in exchange for the demise of the rights which the bride's family has on her (Freedman, 1979). Other academics believe that the marriage payments from the groom's family can be regarded as symbolic gifts which are used to compensate the parents of the bride's family. It symbolises the recognition of the bride's value and social status (Potter and Potter, 1990). In this process, the female is totally objectified, and used for exchange. Marriage payment theory focuses on group

relations rather than generational relations.

Compared with marriage payment theory, marriage endowment theory highlights the position which a newly-established family has in the group, and emphasizes the functions that generational relationships have in marriage exchanges. The core of the theory is that the marriage payment is supposed to be considered as a financial aid to newly-weds instead of the compensation to the bride's family (Cohen, 1976). The betrothal gift will be returned to the newly-weds' family in the form of dowry. This viewpoint emphasises that newlyweds are the ultimate recipients and beneficiaries of the marriage payments.

The value of these two theories has been demonstrated many times in research on marriage payments in China in the 1980s'. In the study of Xiajia, a village in Heilongjiang Province, Yan (2003) finds that both of the two theories can be integrated into different stages of Xiajia's development over 30 years. In the early years of development, the received betrothal gifts were mainly controlled by the bride's parents, and they determined the share of it that went back to the newly-weds in the form of a dowry. At that time betrothal gifts were regarded as a kind of marriage compensation for the bride's family. However, Yan found that this has changed over time and, since the 1990s, betrothal gifts are now transferred directly from the groom's family to the bride herself. With new brides taking full control of these gifts, the betrothal gifts now

actually work as a form of financial assistance for newly-wed couples (Yan, 2003).

In the study of a rural village in China, Ji (2007) found that the amount of dowry exchange is also rising, gradually becoming equivalent to that of betrothal gifts. Such increases in marriage payments are not only reflective of the strengthening of individuality and spouse relationships, but also considered as illustrative of changing traditional cultural and social norms (Ji, 2007). Marriage payments have increasingly become an important tool for a bride's family to establish a more equal footing relative to their in-laws, the groom's family, as well as creating good relationships with their daughter's new family (Ji, 2007). Based on these changes, Ji (2007) believes that both betrothal gifts and dowries have flowed into newly-established families since the 1950s. This indicates that, after the 1950s, marriage payment is decreasingly considered a form of compensation that the groom's family makes to the bride's family, instead is a subsidy that both families give to the newly-weds. Further supporting the idea that marriage gifts are transforming from marriage payments to marriage subsidies, some scholars argue that marriage payments are now regarded as property transfers within the family (Xiong, 2009; Ma and Gao, 2005). Although researchers have not reached consensus on the functions of marriage payments, they nonetheless all point to the trend that marriage payments are increasingly shifting away from a form of compensation to a type of financial help.

This suggests that neither the marriage payment nor marriage endowment theory can alone explain the transformation of marriage payments in China.

Some authors argue that these shifts have been accompanied by a trend whereby expectations for marriage payments (mainly betrothal gifts) have increased far beyond parents' ability to pay (Sun, 2005). With the regular increases in the amount of betrothal gifts required, evidence suggests that some parents spend 5 or more years saving money before their children's wedding, but they have to spend 4 more years settling debts after that (Cao, 2000). Min and Eades (1995) argue that the high expenses in marriage were related to income rises, increases in women's labour value, the imbalance in the sex ratio, and the limitations of population migration. In terms of exchange theory, some researchers propose that structural disequilibrium of the marriage market leads to women, as the supplier of marriage resources, obtaining more rights during the exchanges (Zhang, 2015). It manifests that women are now able to demand high prices for their marriages.

Moreover, some scholars suggest that increases in financial support for newly-weds in rural areas reflect changing norms within the family hierarchy, with the younger generation increasingly having more power in family matters. Rising marriage expenses are thus a consequence of the changes in family internal power structures (Yin, 2009). Yan (2003)

argues that marriage payment have increased because both the bride and groom ask for the highest possible prices from the groom's parents. He adds that this is not merely about acquiring more money, but that it is the young adults' pursuit of personal property rights that leads to the increases in the prices of betrothal gifts.

As this generation of only-children reach marriageable age, marriage payments will benefit their newly formed family units (Yan, 2003) whilst simultaneously laying tremendous financial pressure on their parents. This challenges traditional views of filial piety and parent-child relationships. For example, some researchers point out that young adults in China have become more materialistic, whilst their parents experience intense difficulties in order to satisfy their children's requests for material assistance during the marriage process (Tsai, 1998).

2.7 Changing Filial Piety: Economic and Emotional Influence

Filial piety has been a core value in the maintenance of Chinese intergenerational relationships, and guiding principle underpinning family life (Ikels, 2004; Whyte, 1997). Yet, as mentioned above, some authors are concerned about the changing nature of filial piety in Chinese families, especially when there are examples of rural elderly people committing suicide due to the lack of filial support from their children (Guo,

2011). Yan (2003) argues that children's status in families is increasingly rising, while their parents' authority gradually diminishes. The younger generation blindly pursue personal happiness and ignore their responsibilities for supporting and caring for their parents (Yan, 2003). Guo (2001) also discovered that in Shanghai some young people squeeze their parents' for deposits to pay for their dowries and new houses. Some parents pay large deposits for their children's new homes, depleting their savings which could leave them financially vulnerable in later life. Research on the filial piety crisis paints the parents' generation as 'victims' of individualism. These researchers believe that individualism has gradually appeared in Chinese society, and parent-child relationships are increasingly instrumentalised. Young adults are becoming more self-interested and ignoring their filial duties. As a result, their parents become victims in the transformation of family individualisation (Zhong & He, 2014).

However, recently, some scholars have found that representations of parents as 'victims' is overly simplistic (Thogersen and Ni, 2010; Boermel, 2006; Zhang, 2005). This research suggests that Chinese parents are not merely victims, but often have strong emotional bonds with their children (Evans, 2010), and still seek their own independence and freedom (Zhang, 2004; Logan and Bian, 1999). For example, Thogersen and Ni (2010) discovered that parents pursue liberation, freedom and convenience as well as their children. Elderly parents desire close emotional connections

with their children, but whilst they are still relatively healthy, they prefer to have fairly independent personal lives that are not restricted by multiple generations. The authors suggest that children also perform their filial duties when they delight their parents, respect their parents' opinions, interests and habits, and do not interfere with their parents' lives. This research challenges the representation of parents as a disadvantaged group. It is also inappropriate to consider all Chinese parents, regardless of differences, as disadvantaged victims, since this ignores the diversity of middle-aged parents. Due to a lack of understanding the diversity of parents', few studies investigate whether only-children's parents' desires for family relationships and filial piety remain the same or have changed.

In order to get a better understanding of parent-child relationships against the backdrop of modernisation in China, it is necessary to figure out the relationship between money and emotions among family relationships, especially parent-child relationships. There are three understandings of the relations between money and emotions relevant to this discussion. The first one is the corporate model, in which parents cooperate with their children in order to maximise their economic profits. In this model, emotional communication is scarce and not related to maintaining favourable parent-child relationships (Potter, 1990).

In contrast, other scholars argue that, during the last 10 years

of modernisation in China, parent-child relationships have experienced an intimate turn similar to patterns in Western industrial society, or have even experienced a romantic revolution (Evans, 2010; Yan, 2003; Jankowiak, 1995). Yan (2003) believes that the corporate approach cannot completely explain Chinese parent-child relationships. Compared with the older generation, the young generation focuses more on the significance that emotional bonds have on maintaining family relationships, and they know how to put their emotions into words. Not only do the youth pay attention to emotional interactions, but studies also suggest that their parents wish to enhance their communication with their children. Between the years 2000 to 2004, Evans (2010) surveyed a group of middle-aged mothers who were born in the 1950s in Beijing. She discovered that these mothers desired communication, trust and understanding from their children, instead of authority and control. Evans argued that the desire for communicative intimacy derived from their personal life experiences which made them want to establish closer relationships with their children.

However, this emphasis on the emotional transformation of Chinese parent-child relationships has led to two different viewpoints. Some authors argue that emotion, not money, has become the expectation of filial piety (Feng, 2007). However, as discussed in the empirical chapters in this thesis, economic exchange still remains an important way to reflect filial piety in lots of Chinese families, especially those in a

lower economic situation. Some scholars think that, with the establishment of an urban pension and health care system, elderly parents can rely on pensions as their main income (Zhang & Goza, 2006). Therefore, the original rigid economic demand turns into flexible financial support. However, parents would like to have more emotional interaction with their children, while simultaneously they reduce their own dependency on their children. In my view, although the pension system in urban China could provide some pension for elderly people, it cannot be understood as a guarantee of elderly life and economic exchange is still important in Chinese families. Furthermore, some scholars (Shi, 2003; Hao, 2005) found that some parents thought it immoral for children to discuss money issues with their parents, whilst others consider house purchase and wedding preparations as unsuitable topics for discussion between parents and children. These attitudes may make parents feel hurtful and disappointed.

The last kind of understanding is represented by western scholars' work on the relationship between money and emotion (Jamieson, 1999; Folbre & Nelson, 2000; Zelizer, 2005). These authors are opposed to Giddens' (1992) view that money and emotions are always independent of each other. Giddens insists that in western modern society, due to the rapid development of technology and the significant improvement of women's economic status, the core of intimate relationships is equally sharing the opinions of both

sides, instead of governing and being governed. Therefore, individuals in relationships are expected to express their love and care through words, spend time together, and share their thoughts and feelings to maintain the relationships. This new intimate relationship is called the 'pure relationship' (Giddens, 1992). Within such relationships, the material gap, which was caused by unequal classes and genders, gradually narrows, and increasing equality appears on both sides of the relationship.

However, some scholars believe that money and emotions can actually complement each other within intimate relationships (Folbre & Nelson, 2000). Marital status and money exchange are usually manifestations of mutual care and responsibility. Through material exchange, members help themselves or others to solve some practical problems and achieve personal goals. Zelizer (2005) points out that, according to different methods of offering money, the amount of money, and its appropriateness, people pursue their expectations and fulfil their responsibilities in specific relations. She further defines these economic activities as relational work.

However, the main problem of this opinion is that most research on families' intimate relationships are limited to studies within nuclear families, ignoring other types of important intimate relationships, like the relationship between parents and their adult children (Jamieson, 2011). Therefore,

theoretical understandings of intimate relationships can be expanded through the study of parent-adult child relationships within Chinese only-children families, the focus of this thesis.

In the above discussions, on the one hand, if we hold the opinion that the parents' generation suffers from economic troubles and emotional disruption in the changing parent-child relationships, we have to insist that the corporate model has already collapsed and no intimacy turn ever existed. On the other hand, if we start from the point of view of 'active parents' argued by Thogersen and Ni (2010), another hypothesis can be proposed that parents are indeed confronted with many problems of family relationship adjustment and elderly care. However, active parents will take positive measures in order to rebuild the parent-child relationships and filial piety, which include both material support and emotional backup. In fact, Kipnis (1997) points out that Chinese people generally express their feelings and sustain their social networks in indirect ways, such as through hard work and mutual help, instead of direct verbal expressions (Kipnis, 1997). Although he talks specifically about social relations, his argument is relevant for thinking how Chinese parents consider the relationship between money and emotion. Parents are the subjects of this hypothesis, and it requires an understanding of the relationship between money and emotion from the parents' perspective. It is undeniable that this kind of research is still

rare in the existing literature. My research is thus addresses this gap by exploring the connection between financial exchange and parent-child relationships in only-children's marital lives. It is also important to consider not just money and emotions as important factors influencing these relationships, but also the other exchanges of resources such as housing which the following section discusses.

2.8 Housing and Living Arrangements

The development of a market-oriented housing system began in 1998 in China, which is further discussed in chapter 5. Following these changes, an increasing number of studies on housing tenure choices begun to emerge (Wang & Otsuki, 2015). Before housing reform, the state work units offered housing as a welfare benefit to their employees; this was called the welfare housing distribution system (Li, 2003). The demand for housing emerged following the elimination of the system, with urban residents encouraged to buy or rent in the housing market (Zhou, 2011). For the first generation of only-children, their marital status plays an important role in decisions about housing ownership, which is in accordance with the family norm that housing is a very important sign of beginning a new life after marriage (Wang & Otsuki, 2015).

With the gradual change of social background and culture, families were increasingly free of the Confucian doctrine;

these shifts have also transformed older people's relationship with the younger generations (Li, 2010). Consequently, older people's expectations and the practice of co-residency have declined significantly (Izuhara, 2004; Li, 2010). These trends are observed in other Asian countries, with elderly people in Korea also preferring separate senior housing units or developments, semi-assisted living homes, and multi-generational group homes, in that order (Kim et al. 2003). The expansion of elderly-only households reflects older people's growing preference for independent living to some extent (Li, 2010). Li's survey data from 2009 which included a total of 692 Chinese family finds that living arrangements of Chinese aged people were diverse. However, 67.8% of the respondents were not living with their adult children which means the majority of them were living independently.

Explanations for this kind of independent living arrangement have emphasised the economic independence of older people as well as the insufficiency of housing in urban areas to accommodate extended families. However, the main reason for the growing separation of older parents from adult children is because of their changing views of life and family over time (Li, 2010). Living independently has many advantages for elderly parents such as avoiding unnecessary conflicts with the younger generations, improving their individual life and pursuits, and getting more freedom (Izuhara, 2000). Research also shows that in the past century, Chinese older parents with higher income and greater net

worth have a higher probability of independent living (Li, 2010). The modernization perspective proposes that better education, free mate choice and older age at marriage, and urban residence all work to decrease parental control over the younger generation and reduce the possibility that young people will co-reside with their parents after marriage (Goode, 1963; Pimentel, 2004).

Due to the particularity of only-child families, many academics concentrate on the only-children's marriage process and their family living arrangements. Studies show that among married first generation only-children, nearly half of them live independently in their small family units, while the other half live with their parents (Bao et al., 2005). Marriage is a main influential factor for only-children to live independently (Feng, 2007), while child care is the main reason why only-children live with their parents after marriage (Hao, 2007).

This all suggests that is now less common for parents and adult children to share a residence. However, Yang and Li (2009) argue that it is still common for newly-weds to live with the husband's parents after marriage, and they believe this is influenced by the custom of patrilocal residence. Nevertheless, their analysis and conclusion is not based on a sample of only-child families. Chinese society has been dominated by a traditional patrilineal family system for a long time, of which the male-dominated marriage form and

residential arrangement are the two core elements (Li and Jin, 2005). The birth control policy has greatly affected the custom of patriarchal inheritance, and the massive growth in numbers of only-children also helps to remove the obstacles in terms of laws and customs that prevent daughters inheriting properties. Under these circumstances, the patrilocal residence is inevitably weakened (Li and Jin, 2005).

Studies that focus specifically on couples who live with the wife's parents are rare, and generally examine the particular marriage custom of matrilocal marriage, in which a husband marries into the wife's family, assigning at least some progeny to her lineage (Li, Feldman & Li, 2000). Liu (2004) focused on household co-residence patterns, not matrilocal marriage customs and conducted research on young couples living with the wife's parents. By doing so, she explores non-normative co-residence in urban China. The conclusion is that co-residence with the wife's parents may be non-normative culturally, but it has existed in nontrivial levels. There is not any existing data to reflect the trend of co-residence with the wife's parents. My research therefore analyses the living arrangements of only-child couples to investigate if there are more only-child couples co-residing with the wife's parents. This may imply that norms relating to traditional patrilocal residence have weakened in only-child families in modern China.

Thus far, this chapter has situated the current research in

various stages of the marriage process, specifically marital payment, housing purchases and living arrangements. The next section deals with another important issue relevant to parent-child relationships, childcare.

2.9 Grandparenting in Only-Child Families

As discussed earlier in this chapter, it is widely believed that the one-child birth control policy has led to the creation of a generation of 'little emperors' spoiled by their parents, as well as their grandparents who have been recruited to care for the child while the middle generation goes off to work (Cameron et al., 2013). It is very common for grandparents to take care of grandchildren for many families in both urban and rural China. This is a clear divergence from China's traditional cultural pattern of intergenerational exchange (Chen, et al, 2011). The concept of filial piety which highlighted the responsibility of children for parents in the past, is now balanced with reciprocal or altruistic help from elderly parents (Chen et al., 2011). Limited day care for preschool children, the high cost of care, the early retirement ages particularly for women and mistrust towards private baby sitters make grandparent care a cheap and trustworthy alternative (Scarcella et al., 2003). These types of reasons are used as culturally acceptable justifications for the middle generation to expect childcare help from the senior generation.

Grandparents' caring for grandchildren can be understood as an aspect of family norms. These patterns of care can also be described as part of a family adaptive strategy, displaying functional solidarity (Chen et al., 2011). According to Fei (1992), Chinese adults continue membership in their parental family even after they have formed their own nuclear family. This continued membership functions at the structural, organisational and interpersonal level (Chen and Sun, 2006). The family household is viewed as a 'corporate group' for both generations which means they make joint efforts for the family. It becomes a common enterprise in that each member has a vested interest in maintaining its existence (Chen 2006). At the interpersonal level, the seniors' unreserved devotion to the children encourages their adult children's sense of continued family membership. Some Chinese parents uphold the ideology that they have to persistently render help and support to their children until they can give no more (Goh, 2009; Li, 2003). Taking care of grandchildren is an important practice of instrumental support for the family and is embodied in the concept of functional solidarity, which refers to the degree of helping and exchanges of resources between family members (Roberts and Bengtson, 1991). From the perspective of family adaptive strategy, grandparents taking care of grandchildren could reflect household members adaptively responding to changing external constraints and opportunities for the benefit of the family (Moen and Wethington, 1992; Yan 2003). Some studies in America find that occasional babysitting by

grandparents often gives adult children temporary relief and may help to ease the burden on employed young mothers (Presser, 1989). Grandparents' involvement in grandchildren care may also increase when adult children face difficulties, such as unemployment, bankruptcy, divorce, incarceration or drug abuse (Gibson, 2005; Hirshorn 1998; Hogan, Hao and Parish 1990).

Silverstein, Cong and Li (2007) describe grandparenting as a widespread but loosely documented phenomenon. Some researchers focus on the outcome of the caregiving experience, such as the mental well-being of grandparents or grandchildren (Falbo 1991; Goh 2009; Silverstein, Cong and Li 2007). However, other studies focusing on material work and childcare were unable to provide evidence and analysis of grandparents' involvement in childcare engagement (Chen, Short and Entwisle 2000; Short et al. 2002; Chen, et al, 2011).

In the growing body of research on the experience of grandparenting, heterogeneity among grandparents and ambiguity of the norms related to grandparenthood is one of the most persistent themes (Szinovacz, 1998). For example, in terms of household structures, living arrangements vary from not living together, to co-residence where parents, grandchildren and grandparents live together, to skipped-generation households where grandparents and grandchildren live together while parents are absent (Pebley and Rudkin, 1999). When it comes to grandparenting, the

roles of grandparents vary from uninvolved to occasional helper or long-term surrogate parent (Hirshorn, 1998). There is not any accurate data of families whose young and pre-school aged grandchildren co-reside with grandparents, particularly when parents are absent from the household in China. However, it has become more common for young adults to migrate for better economic opportunities, while leaving their children to be cared for by grandparents (Silverstein, Cong and Li, 2006). Although research exists on the phenomenon of 'left behind' children in China (Chang, et al, 2011; Biao, 2006), most of these studies focus on rural families, with the 'left behind' children in cities overlooked.

Further, we do not know much about the extent of care provided by co-residential grandparents. Do parents or grandparents play an auxiliary role in caring for the third generation in co-residential families? Furthermore, while grandparents caring for grandchildren is common in China, there is little research on what level of care they typically engage in (Chen, Short and Entwisle 2000; Hermalin, Roan and Perez 1998; Parish and Whyte 1978; Unger 1993). What is more, we know little about the allocation of individual, family and community characteristics in accounting for the extent of grandparents' childcare involvement. This raises questions about, for example, the role of patriarchal traditions in China in making paternal grandparents more responsible for childcare. It also suggests that we need to investigate if childcare responsibilities depend on the mothers' working

status. My research addresses some of these gaps surrounding grandparenting in China, as well as exploring the negotiations underpinning the allocation of childcare to grandparents.

Besides the specific processes in adult only-child couple's married lives such as negotiating marriage payment, housing and living arrangements, the adult only-children's reliance on their parents in daily life is also a significant point which should not be neglected. I use the word 'parent-consuming' to describe this common phenomenon in Chinese only-children families.

2.10 Parent-Consuming

Some academics believe that ideal intergenerational relationships in Chinese families balance mutual benefits among generations, and perform as a process that the parental generation raises the juvenile filial generation, and the adult child's generation supports the parental generation (Li and Li, 2008). The relationships are expected to be based on mutual communication and balanced raising and supporting, as well as a kind of intergenerational exchange premised on equal duty and obligation (Li and Li, 2008). However, China witnessed a significant decrease in the number of children born under its birth control policies in late 1970s. The reduction of numbers of children in the family led

to a series of subtle changes in intergenerational relationships, and impacted on the balance between the generations in terms of mutual support and obligation (Zhang and Goza, 2006). The most obvious example of this is adult children who are perceived of as over reliant on their parents, with those who lean heavily on their parents termed 'kenlao' — literally, people who nibble on their elders, or parent-consuming people.

In the late 1990s UK, parent-consuming people were referred to as NEET — that is Not currently engaged in Education, Employment or Training (Bynner and Parsons, 2002). Since then the concept has gradually spread to other countries in the world, like USA, Canada, Germany, France and East Asia, who are also experiencing their own generations of NEETs and 'kenlao'. The phenomenon is thus common around the world, with the phrase 'boomerang children' referring to the North American and Australian youth who return to live with and economically rely on their parents after their graduation from higher education (Okimoto and Stegall, 1989).

In this thesis, a person is referred to as parent-consuming or not depending on whether he or she overly and constantly relies on his or her parents. But the degree of dependence is strongly subjectively evaluated. In western countries, due to poor employment opportunities for young people, those who live with their parents in adulthood are considered to lack the capability for living independently (Bynner and Parsons,

2002). However, there are some different explanations for this over-reliance in the Chinese context. Generally, as mentioned above, it is a social norm for Chinese parents and children to help, support and benefit each other (Li and Li, 2008). The ideal intergenerational interdependence is regarded as the symbol of a happy family.

Existing literature has advanced no clear standards to define parent-consuming. I am going to define only-child couples who overly and constantly rely in any way on their parents as parent-consuming. According to some relevant definitions, the parent-consuming people can be categorised into two broad groups: those who totally rely and those who partly rely on their parents. This can also be referred to as explicit and implicit parent-consuming. Mei (2008) proposes that explicit parent-consuming refers to the unemployed youth who have labour capacity but do not work after graduation and rely mainly or partly on their parents. Jiang (2012) defines implicit parent-consuming as the employed youth who have their own incomes but, due to social pressures and their living situations, still accept and seek intergenerational assistance from their parents in terms of economy, labour, and social network support.

The aforementioned definitions are helpful for reflecting on some interesting phenomena in parent-child relationships in Chinese families. Parent-consuming covers diversified contents and can be classified into three types: money, labour,

and social network (Jiang, 2012). For example, some young adults ask their parents for material support to meet their own requirements. Others ask their parents to help them with housework and baby care, whilst some ask their parents for access to their social network in order to assist them with their career development goals.

In only-child families it becomes quite obvious that parents and children rely a great deal on each other (Zhang and Goza, 2006). Ma (2008) believes that the phenomenon of dependency on the older generation does not only exist in China, but it is especially highlighted in China because of Chinese families' specific parent-child relationships—parent-child integration. The Chinese family norm believes that children are raised for elderly care (Zhang and Goza, 2006). That form of parent-child integration strongly strengthens the relationship, and in the meantime it makes the two generations close to each other in emotions (Ma, 2008). As a result, it blurs the rights and responsibilities of the two generations. Some parents make selfless contributions to their children, and some children take it for granted to accept their parents' offers. Other parents even become psychologically dependent on their children. Even more parents will feel frustrated and disappointed as soon as their children no longer rely on them (Liu, 2008).

Most parent-consuming people are children who have been used to parents taking care of all aspects of their lives since

childhood. Li (2006), Lv (2009), and Yuan (2013) believe that dependency on the aged comes from the Chinese deep-rooted traditional concept of carrying on the family line. Some only-children fail to get emotionally and economically independent even when they become adults, and their parents indulge their children. Raising a child is a long-term process and it can even continue after a child gets married. Parents regard it as their duty to support their children, and adult children take it for granted. Chinese parent-consuming adults do not feel shame at their failure to live independently, since it seems quite natural for them to rely on their parents.

With the constant increase in China's living costs and the growth of consumerism, many young adults' salaries are insufficient for meeting the costs of accommodation, education, and health care. Ye (2011) argues that, although many parent-consuming young adults have some unrealistic aims but limited abilities, their behaviour is a representation of people's life in a high-price society. Ye (2011) maintains that dependence on the parents is not only an internal phenomenon of individuals and families, but is actually a social and livelihood issue. Lv (2009) similarly argues that parent-consuming young adults are confronting a transitional society in which marketisation is continuously deepening, and the overall economic level is rising. The reform of the wage, medical insurance and housing distribution systems have led to a sharp increase in the cost of living independently for young people. When living away from

parents, parent-consuming young adults suffer from serious pressures in relation to meeting their living costs, and thus frequently turn to their parents for help.

Most analyses on the phenomenon of parent-consuming people are normative arguments which basically focus on its influences on social and family structures, and its negative results. The imbalance of the intergenerational relationship attracts a particularly large number of academic concerns. Ma (2008) criticises this group of young adults for turning intergenerational mutual assistance into the current one-way support offered to children by parents. However, this body of literature seldom describes the specific influences it has on parent-child relationships beyond these normative arguments. Indeed, some research shows that both parents and children have their own standpoints and thoughts on this issue, and the raising-supporting relationships tends towards balance in China, regardless of these significant social change (Lv, 2009; Ye, 2011). Methodologically, little existing literature describes the complexity of intergenerational relationships in parent-consuming families through empirical materials. However, an analysis of its complexity is likely to reveal new trends and problems within parent-child relationships in contemporary the specific families that this research focuses on. My thesis hence explores the effect of parent-consuming on parent-child relationships from both the younger and older generations' perspectives.

Some researchers (Li, 2006; Jiang, 2012) believe that only-children are much more likely to be overly dependent on their parents since the issue of parent-consuming is particularly evident amongst the first generation of only-children who are generally stepping into their careers and at the start of their married lives. Some only-children have been spoiled by their parents since childhood. After they enter adulthood, some scholars argue that these children generally lack social adaptabilities and living abilities, and they are subjectively willing to depend on their parents (Shot, Zhai, Xu, Yang, 2001). Under these circumstances, it seems that if parents show no objections to their children's reliance on them, the children will live off their parents.

This chapter has thus far focused on only-children's marriage and family formation and intergenerational relationships. These debates are further expanded through a discussion of individualisation and Chinese families.

2.11 Individualisation of Chinese Families

It inevitable to refer to individual demand and family interest when analysing the parent-child relationships in only-child families. The traditional Chinese family norm takes the whole household as a unit, which collects each family member's income and resources together and then redistributes the collective income and resources to individuals. In such

circumstances, family interest takes priority over individual family members. Individuals' demands, preferences and interests are not usually taken into consideration. This family norm situates the individual as a protector and defender of the family and implies an assumption that family is a highly integrated community with shared benefits. Within this, individuals are suppressing or sacrificing their own desires for the family. This prioritising of the maintenance and reproduction of the family unit over individual members' desires and preferences is the meaning of familism (Kulp, 1925). Baker (1979) also argued that the meaning of individual was to continue the family when researching the relationship between individual and family in Chinese society whereas 'the corporate family model' was usually adopted to explain and describe the production mode in traditional Chinese families.

However, realistic family life is not the same as that described in 'the corporate family model' especially in the context of conflict in the family. Family members with individual needs may take diversified strategies to get more family resources and properties. Greenhalgh (1994) pointed out that the mutual help and corporation within a family was the outcome of severe gender inequality and intergenerational imbalance. These arguments challenge the idea of the family working as a harmonious community in order to integrate family income and resources. With the development of marketization and consumerisation, individualisation, not familism, works better

to analyse the Chinese family, especially urban Chinese families.

'The logic of individually designed lives has come increasingly to the fore in the contemporary world. The family is becoming more of an elective relationship, an association of individuals who each brings to it their own interests, experiences and plans, and who are each subjected to different controls, risks and constraints.' (Beck-Gernsheim, 1998; 53). Individual is rising and becomes significant in the Chinese families, which makes the choices and decisions within family are made more by negotiations and compromises between family members. When analysing the effect of only-children's marriage and family formation on their parent-child relationships, it is necessary to pay attention to each individual in the family and the interactions and negotiations between them.

In studies about intergenerational relationship in Chinese families, Yan (2003) believes the decline of parents' authority and the development of autonomy and power amongst the younger generation has led to significant changes in intergenerational relationships, especially in rural areas of China. The strengthening of individual awareness and the idea of pursuing more privacy have played an important role in challenging the traditional family structure for the younger generation. This clearly represents a challenge to the traditional family norm that requires the suppression of

intimacy in order to maintain the family as a union. Influenced by marketisation and consumerism, individualisation is on the rise in contemporary China. Yan (2003) argues that this leads to the decline of moral behaviour and the disintegration of the family bond, which includes the dissolution of obligations to elderly parents. Young people begin to pursue individual happiness at the expense of the well-being of their parents. Yan (2003) argues individualisation in terms of the selfishness of younger generations, with little exploration of the impact of individualisation from the point of view of older generations. My study fills this gap by identifying both the only-child generation and the parent generation to see if there is a generational difference of individualisation. Furthermore, whilst Yan's research is mainly focused on a small village in China, my research is going to explore the urban only-child families to identify if the urban family shows similar trends towards individualisation as seen in Yan's research.

It is an innovative attempt for Yan to start with family privacy which is usually ignored by Chinese scholars, entering the personal emotional lives, in order to explore Chinese rural family life. However, there are some flaws in his research. In terms of Yan's fieldwork, he chose Xiajia village to do his fieldwork, trying to describe the changes in China through the development of a small village. But to what extent can a small village represent the whole of China? According to Yan's *Private Life under Socialism*, Xiajia village, an immigrant village, has a very short history of about only a century. As a

result, this village may have significant differences with many other villages which have long histories. In China, hundreds of thousands of villages enjoy great differences in terms of natural, cultural, and economic conditions. Can this village chosen by Yan sufficiently represent the whole Chinese rural society? Yan's books do not give appropriate explanations and demonstrations to show how representative and general his selected cases are. It remains to be proved whether the conclusions drew from individual cases can represent the a wide range of the Chinese society.

As a result of the shortage of sufficient evidence, some of Yan's arguments seem to be unconvincing. Yan describes the villagers' marriage patterns, standards of choosing spouse, sex and emotions, intergenerational relationships, conjugal relations, and concepts of child-bearing, etc. When analysing some common and important issues, Yan makes qualitative conclusions through the use of some modern words, like *'rights'*, *'autonomy'*, *'privacy consciousness'*, *'individual'*, *'independent'*, *'self-awareness'*, etc. Yan discovers a lot of social phenomena during his research, but he directly makes theoretical analysis on them instead of using the empirical knowledge of rural society to interpret them. In terms of residential patterns, for example, Yan believes that the changes in bedroom spaces reflect autonomy and privacy consciousness. However, before 1949, in many rural families in southern China, couples would not sleep with their adult children in the same bed or in the same room, and they

enjoyed relatively private spaces (Dong, 2018) . How can we deduce that it can represent their appeals for autonomy and privacy consciousness? For another example, Yan describes that villagers remain silent on the issue of the elderly care. He believes that the reason has something to do with the appearance of villagers' concepts of privacy, and privatisation of family lives, reflecting the rising consciousness of individuality, and rights. However, in fact, elderly care is still a kind of family norm rather than a personal right. The silence of rural public opinions on this issue can only show that the traditional function of community norms is gradually weakened. Maybe the villagers do not want to offend others, but it does not indicate that they think it reasonable to not support elderly parents. Some cases chosen by Yan seem to be explainable by his theory, however, when these cases are restored to villagers' living practice, we can discover aspects which are opposite to Yan's explanations.

Whilst Yan's approach presents an interesting way for thinking about relationships between parents and children in only-child families, Qi (2016) presents an alternative way of understanding individualisation in Chinese families. She believes Yan's representation of the relationships between adult children and their parents is not accurate. Based on her analysis of questionnaires from 28 undergraduates (26 female and 2 male) in Guangzhou, she concludes that adult children like to work together with their parents as a corporate family. Family bonds are strong and even reinforced rather

than disintegrating in her research. The adult children *and* their parents are willing to reinterpret the notion of filial piety and both of the generations work strategically to serve and maximize *both* individual and family interest. She argues that the dominant family pattern is not individualistic, since family members collaborate to secure mutual interests. However, Qi's findings are based on a very limited and unrepresentative sample. In contrast to this, my sample comes from 30 only-child families in three different socioeconomic backgrounds, and could therefore be a more representative for identifying the contemporary features of individualisation amongst urban Chinese families.

2.12 Conclusion

In this chapter, I analysed the existing literature on Chinese families and parent-child relationships that are relevant to this study. Firstly, I introduced the background context for analysing only-child families, and described how the one-child birth control policy affected Chinese family. Following this I discussed the relevant research in the field of one-child families and identified important research gaps. In order to research contemporary parent-child relationships in only-child families in urban China, I have presented literature relating to different aspects of the marriage process. More specifically, this chapter discussed the issues of marriage payment, housing purchase, living arrangements,

grandparenting, and parent-consuming. Finally, I discussed the current debates about the individualisation of Chinese families. Yan's individualisation theory of Chinese society is based on research conducted in rural China. However, family structure and economic situations are different in urban and rural areas. Focusing my lens on urban-based families thus provides a potentially rich, and as yet underdeveloped, area for the analysis of individualisation in Chinese families in urban cities.

3 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes how a qualitative approach was utilized to explore the relationships between only-children and their parents in the process of only-children's marriages. Drawing on qualitative research methods allowed me to obtain family members' understandings about family interactions and relationships and access the insiders' views from the family (Ganong and Coleman, 2014). Moreover, qualitative methods often yield extraordinarily rich data and exceed quantitative approaches for achieving some research goals (Ganong and Coleman, 2014). Based on this, I chose a qualitative approach to conduct my research.

Employing the semi-structured qualitative interview as the data collection method, the final sample is comprised of 120 participants from 30 only-children families. That means I interviewed one parent of an only-son, one parent of an only-daughter, one only-son and one only-daughter separately in a family. After the interviews, I used the NVivo qualitative analysis software to help me code the collected data into different classes for data analysis.

3.2 Research Location

Due to the difference of one-child birth control policy between urban cities and rural areas in China, I filtered research destinations by initially excluding rural areas. In China, the family planning policy allowed rural couples who did farming together in the countryside, excluding municipalities, Sichuan and Jiangsu Province, to give birth to a second child, if the first one was a girl (Xiao & Feng, 2010). Hence, I put my attention on the cities, and chose the city of Tianjin as my research location.

Tianjin is broadly representative of major cities in China. It is the largest port city in northern China, and has relatively developed industry and tourism sectors. In 2010, the permanent population of Tianjin was 12,938,200 and the population density was 812 people per square mile (Beijing's population density was 1289 per square mile). Tianjin is one of the four directly central government controlled municipalities in China, which gave relatively positive response to the family planning policy (Hou, 2004). Since the Chinese government proposed a policy which suggested that it would be good to have one child and no more than two children for each couple in the No.69 Document, some governments subsequently enacted local only-child policies (Hou, 2004). Since then, the Tianjin Government has issued some detailed policy documents in 1988, which introduced restrictions on the second child in a family and punishments

to those who had more than one child (Yang, 2001). In other words, the family planning policy was strictly carried out in Tianjin, even more strictly than national standards. The birth rates in Tianjin and in China as a whole since 1978 are shown in Figure 1.

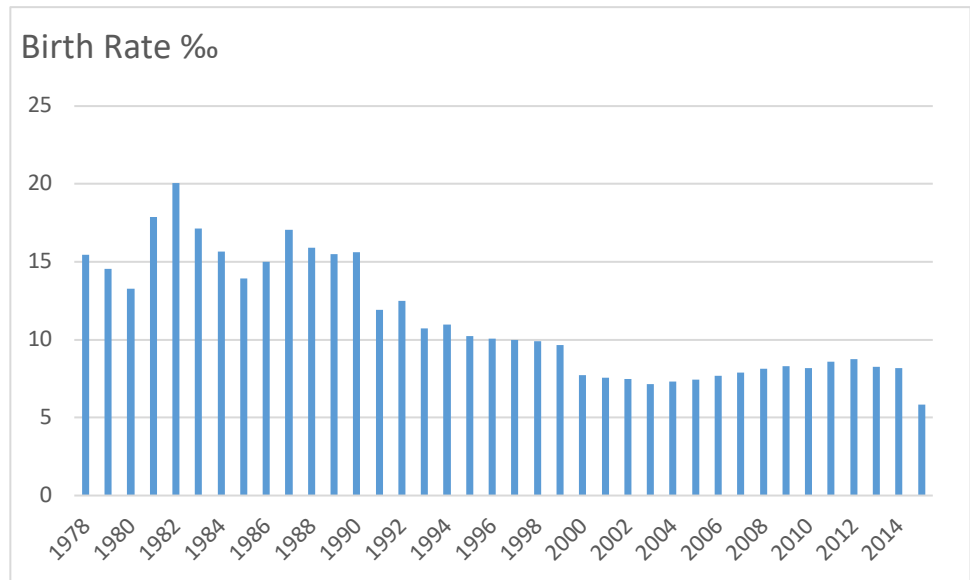


Figure 1. Birth Rates of Tianjin from 1978 to 2015 (China Statistical Yearbook, 1978 to 2015)

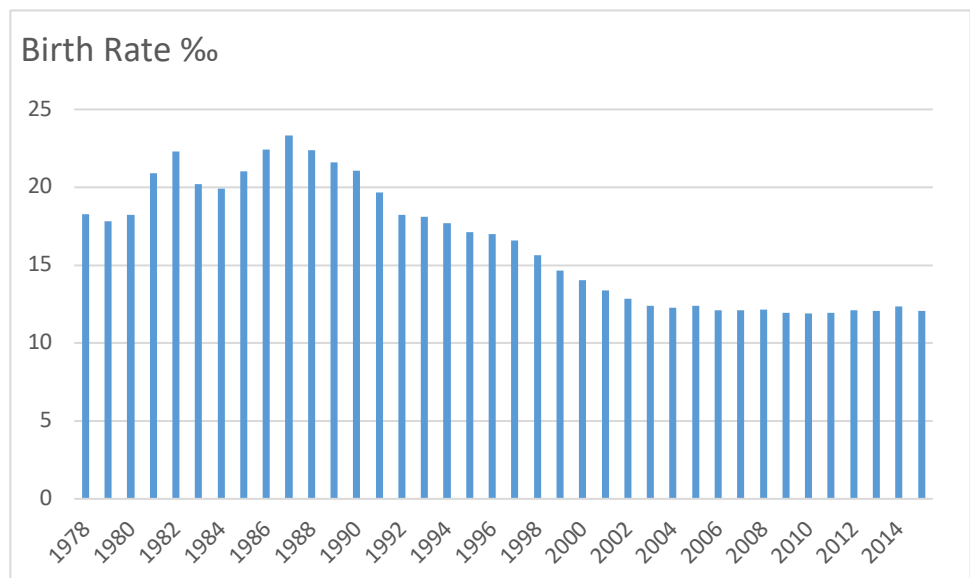


Figure 2. Birth Rates of China from 1978 to 2015 (China Statistical Yearbook, 1978 to 2015)

Figure 1 and Figure 2 show that, the birth rate of Tianjin has witnessed similar changes to that of the country overall from 1978 to 2015. The birth rate in Tianjin was lower than that of the rest of China during some periods. This suggests that Tianjin effectively and strictly implemented the national family planning policies. Based on such evidence, I assumed that I would find a sufficient sample of first generation only-children and their parents in Tianjin.

Another reason why I chose Tianjin as the research location for this research was my personal connection to this area. My family lives there and I have a strong social networks in this city, thus making conducting qualitative research there relatively convenient. In China, compared with some formal and official ways of accessing research locations and subjects, it is much more smooth and effective to look for informants through private social networks, which have been widely used by many Chinese fieldworkers (Dong, 2001). It was therefore important for me to initially contact the informants through appropriate introducers. My introducers could help me find informants who met my requirements among their relatives, friends, and colleagues. After I filtered the eligible informants, my introducers would introduce me to the research subjects, acting as gatekeepers. Thanks to their help, I was able to successfully contact diverse informants from different social backgrounds during my fieldwork.

In addition to the aforementioned reasons, I also had some

advantage based on the dialect of Chinese spoken in Tianjin. Many informants spoke the local dialect of Tianjin, and I know enough about Tianjin local culture to overcome the language barriers during the interviews which made me conveniently step into informants' lives.

Therefore, I considered Tianjin as an appropriate location to do research on the topic of only-children families. The map below shows the division of different districts of Tianjin. There are 16 county-level divisions, which are all districts. I began to find my informants from three housing compounds in Heping, Nankai and Hexi districts.

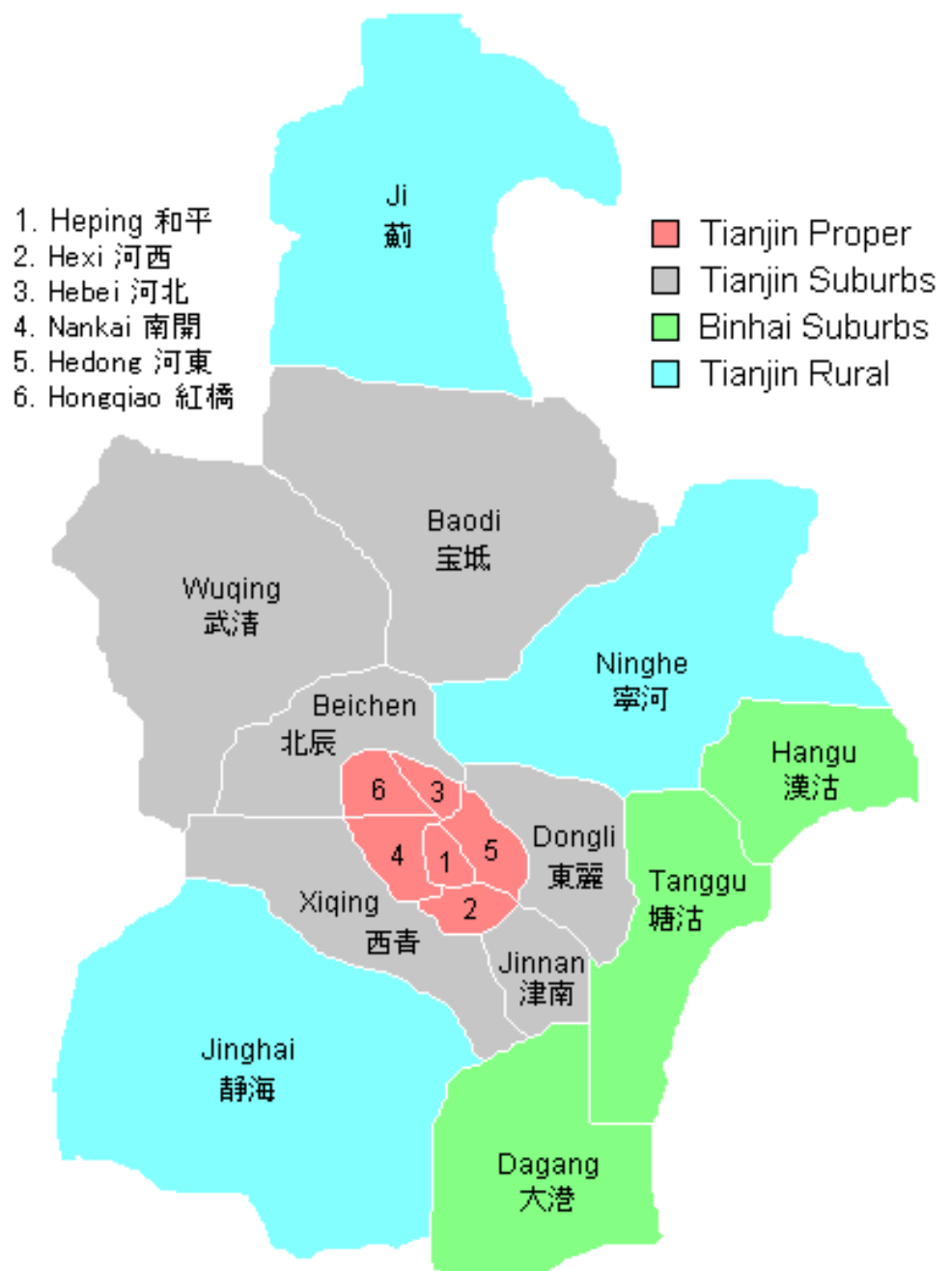


Figure 3. Map of Tianjin

3.3 Research Participants

Qualitative researchers have long established that different individuals in a family have different opinions on the same

experience (Bojczyk et al., 2011; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2002). It's good to explore at least two sides in the measurement of any relationship, especially the family relations, because subjective and partial outcomes will arise if only one side of the relationship is researched (Bojczyk, 2011). In this case, separate interviews with family members help capture negotiations and conflicts in daily life, more likely obtaining the tension of their relationships and discovering the families with potential conflicts (Bojczyk et al., 2011; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2002).

Overall, my informants consisted of two generations, one of which were the first generation only-children under the family planning policy and another of which were their parents. I selected only-child couples who were born after 1978 as my informants, but had no requirement on their parents' ages. Thirty adult only-children's families composed the research sample, and four members of each family (only-child couple, one parent of only-son and one parent of only-daughter) were interviewed. As a result, I interviewed a total of 120 respondents (see information of participants in Appendix 1).

Four respondents were involved in the interviews with one family: the husband, a parent of the husband, the wife, and a parent of the wife. To get a deep understanding of the family, I interviewed both the husband's and wife's family to find the mutual connections within the big family. When I took both a husband's family and a wife's family into consideration, I got

two sets of parent-child relationships in one family. This sampling strategy allowed me to dig deep into different family relationships and obtain something hidden behind them, like conflicts and tensions.

Only married only-children couples and their parents were selected for my research. As the issues of marriage and grandchildren were covered in the research questions, like the negotiations of marriage payment and the grandparenting, I selected married adult only-children who had their own children in order to effectively answer the research questions.

The geographical distance between only-children's home and their parents' home was not restricted. Even if they lived in the same city, maybe they would not often meet each other. Some only-children might live in a different city away from their parents. I initially designed my research for only-children and their parents who lived in the same city. However, later I also included those living in different cities in my research, as this strategy gave me a diversity in the sample, and more importantly, it could further explore the influence which geographical distance exerts on parent-child relationships. Some respondents were from families in which parents and children live in different cities. Some only children lived in Tianjin with their parents living in other cities, while some parents lived in Tianjin with their children living in different places. However, I did not choose families in which three of the four participants live outside Tianjin because it was hard

for me to interview all the four participants face to face during my fieldwork period. In summary, any family with at least two members (child or parent) living in Tianjin was eligible. Although I could make telephone or video interviews with participants who would not come to Tianjin during my fieldwork period, it was not a good way for me to talk about topics such as family intimacy and obtain comprehensive information (Opdenakker, 2006). Although telephone or video interview might let me to interview people that were not easy to access, but the disadvantage was that I had less possibilities to create a good interview ambience (Opdenakker, 2006).

This point was affirmed in the pilot interviews with 4 people from a family, as I lived in the UK at that time, and the selected family was in China, I had to contact them through video chats, like Skype or Face-Time. During the communications, I found that the participants were passive and unwilling to make some supplementary descriptions, and they only gave simple answers. It was unfavourable to obtain enough information on parent-children daily interactions in their families, and as a result, it became increasingly difficult for me to have a good view of their parent-children relationships. Therefore, in my fieldwork, I did not include in my sample the families in which only one respondent lived in Tianjin, in order to guarantee that I could interview my respondents face to face.

For families in which only-child couple and their parents lived in different cities, I started with the respondents who lived in Tianjin and then made appointments with these families for another interview, which would take place when their family members came to Tianjin for family visits.

3.4 How to Choose Individual Cases

In order to access the sample, I initially planned to look to kindergartens to find appropriate informants. The age of children in kindergartens range from 3 to 6 years old while the first generation of only-children are about at the age of 30s. That means there was a high chance for me to find the appropriate parents to be my informants. In doing so, I hoped that I could find the only-children couples and their parents by finding the third generation in their family.

At the beginning of fieldwork, I contacted some kindergartens as planned, thinking that teachers in kindergartens could initiate communication with children's parents. The first selected kindergarten was in Heping District, Tianjin. It is a bilingual kindergarten which has teachers who speak both Chinese and English and a yard with well-equipped facilities and a spacious open area, and teachers are taking good care of children. However, it was extremely difficult to obtain the approval of the kindergarten's principal. I tried to convince the principal, but she refused the cooperation due to concerns

about information disclosure on children's families. As no one in my social network had any relationship with this kindergarten, I stopped asking them for assistance. I also tried to contact some parents who came to pick up their children after school, but they refused to participate in my research. As a result, I was compelled to abandon sampling from this kindergarten.

After that, I went to a general kindergarten in a community in Nankai District, Tianjin. Surrounded by residential buildings the school occupied a small area with a tiny courtyard and a two-storey building, and was equipped with old facilities. I explained the purpose to the head of the kindergarten, but she refused to directly help me contact children's parents because of the trouble from parents or from authorities due to data protection she would have experienced if she had accepted my request. However, she told me to directly communicate with the parents myself. Unfortunately, my attempts at reaching out to the parents proved to be another failure—only one out of five parents consented to an interview. Some parents just told me they did not have time or they did not want to participate in my research.

These two failed cases made it clear that it was extremely hard to gain access to a sample through a kindergarten unless I had a good social network there already. After reflecting on these challenges, I made some changes to my research plan, and started to look for respondents in housing

compounds (*jumin xiaoqu*). Tianjin has hundreds of thousands of diversified housing compounds which can be understood as the basic unit of Chinese cities— some big and some small, some new and some old, some rich and some poor. At this point, my social network played a significant role in helping me find appropriate interviewees. I thus listed the addresses of all my relatives and friends who lived in Tianjin, and I chose three relatively large-scale housing compounds as my sample sources. Due to being introduced through a mutual acquaintance, respondents seemed less suspicious of me and were actively willing to cooperate with the research.

Housing compound A, a relatively old, compact living community in Nankai District, enjoys convenient access to public transportation networks and is next to some food markets which open daily. This highly-populated housing compound has a total of 10 buildings, each of which hold about 140 households, and each household occupies an area of about 40 to 70 square metres. As housing compound A has been part of a welfare-oriented public housing distribution system since the 1990s, most people who lived here were middle-aged or elderly retired people. When chatting with the residents I found that most inhabitants of this community had comparatively lower socio-economic status. Many of them engaged in manual work, and some of them worked as street pedlars. There were a number of parents of only-children in this community. When I visited this community, I observed that some grandparents looked after

their grandchildren in the street below from their flats. In general, housing compound A had old public facilities, and its residents had relatively lower socioeconomic status.

I chose to find my informants in this housing compound because my introducer worked in the neighbourhood committee¹) and she knew many people who lived there. As well as this, she was well known amongst the residents, could vouch for me and therefore facilitate my access to the community.

Housing compound B, a housing facility for middle school staff and family in Hexi district, was constructed by the middle school for its employees in the year of 2000. This leafy complex has four buildings, each of which housed 48 households. Most of the residents here are teachers or staff of the middle school from a diversified age groups, some of whom had already retired and some of whom had just worked there recently.

My aunt, who retired from the middle school last year, lived in this community and maintained harmonious relationships with her neighbours, most of whom were also her ex-colleagues. With my aunt's introduction, I easily found suitable families. The residents in this housing compound can be referred to as middle-class people because the majority of

¹ Means juweihui, also translated as residents' committee, works as mass autonomous organization of the neighbourhood

them are teachers, and therefore white collar workers (Zhang, 2008). The class background of residents from compound B was thus different from the participants of housing compound A.

Housing compound C, an upscale, gated community in Heping District, the richest district in Tianjin city, was equipped with a 24-hour CCTV system and security guards. This compound also enjoyed a beautiful garden, a number of fitness facilities and a large-scale underground parking lot. Due to its proximity to very good public transportation routes, several shopping centres and excellent schools, the flats in this compound attracted considerably high housing prices and a group of rich householders with high incomes.

One of my aunts, who lives in this housing compound has befriended many of her neighbours due to her engagement in regular social activities taking place in the compound. These parties and activities are typically organised by the compound's property management company approaching potential participants in this housing compound, I asked my aunt to take me to some of these parties. I went to a Chinese medicine health care lecture, a tea ceremony performance, some badminton matches and a yoga class with some of the residents. With the help of my introducers, I found some respondents who were willing to participate in my research. After interviews, some respondents would continue to introduce me to some other families which met my sampling

criteria.

Snowball sampling was the most appropriate method of sampling for my research, because a large scale of qualitative research would have required a longer time frame for data collection and financial resources than that available. Accessing statistics on only-children families from official government sources would have presented a significant challenge also. Furthermore, as I planned to interview four members of each one-child family in the sample, they may have been highly reluctant to participate in the research if I approached them without the help of a gatekeeper. I thus made the decision to initially ask those in my social network to introduce me to some informants whom I would contact to establish a relationship as discussed below, hoping that they would then introduce me other only-children families.

Snowball sampling can easily lead to an undiversified sample (Tracy, 2013), and certainly the 30 families I studied cannot represent all the only-children families in contemporary China. As a result, I took the social backgrounds of each family into consideration during the sampling stage in order to maintain the diversity of the sample as much as possible. However, I could only get the details of informants in advance, including their living conditions, approximate economic status, occupation and education levels. Consequently, when I contacted each family I would make a note of their approximate socioeconomic status, and put them into 3

groups: *low, middle, and high*. When they introduced me to other families, I aimed to consciously balance the sample across the three groups.

Despite such attempts at ensuring diversity amongst the sample, I nonetheless confronted the problem of concentrated sample types while I looked for interview participants. When my relative led me to housing compound A to conduct interviews, I later found out that the informants living in this housing compound had similar family backgrounds. Having successively contacted several families, I decided to suspend recruitment in housing compound A, and went to housing compound B to contact other families, hoping they would be from different socioeconomic backgrounds than compound A's residents. It turned out to be a correct decision which helped to maintain the balance among families of different socioeconomic status in my sample.

3.5 Getting in Touch With Informants

Before most of the formal interviews, I tried to get close to my informants and obtain their trust so that they would be willing to tell me more about their family affairs. When my introducer took me to the informants' families, I always took some gifts to them in order to give them a favourable first impression. Gift giving is of great significance in China and is regarded as

both a kind of social exchange, and a medium of social communication (Yan, 1996). Yan (1996) argues that, in China, a debt of gratitude hides behind gifts. Due to my knowledge of the importance of the gift in social relationships, I prepared gifts for my informants in advance of our interview, in order to reduce their worries about me, and to enhance their cooperation in the interview context.

When I met a new informant, I would greet them like say hello, introduce myself, explain the purpose of the research, and present them with the information sheet (see appendix 3) which gave them an overview of how the interview would proceed. I did not use the sociological terms to explain my research topic, but told them that I wanted to chat with them to get some inspiration for my thesis on only-children families. Once they knew the purpose of the research, some informants immediately became defensive and negative, thinking that I had been hired by some government department to inquire into people's opinions on birth-control policies. They worried that the government would hear their words and cause them trouble if their words were not appropriate. Some of them requested that I interview others because they thought the academic studies had no connection with their lives. At that time, I told them that there would be no right or wrong answer in the interview, and they could say whatever they wanted like a casual talk. Sometimes my introducer would help me persuade them and tell them I am a good student that they could help me with my

study.

When the informants agreed to do the interview, I firstly had an informal chat with them instead of immediately starting the formal interview. Sometimes I would ask them to recommend good places to eat in the area and some specialties in their recommended restaurants. When I talked with people who were looking after their kids, I would sit on the floor and play with the children and give them some snacks. Sometimes I saw newly-bought groceries at the entrance door of the interviewee's home and I would ask them about market prices and how to select good fruits and vegetables. As soon as they knew that I was a PhD student studying abroad, some people believed they had nothing in common with me and thought of me as a hardworking woman who only focused on study. Female PhD researchers are often reported in the Chinese media as elderly single women who are interested in nothing but studying. Some media in China has even classified female doctoral students into a third gender, beyond male and female (Yang, 2011; Zhang and Liu, 2008).

Some informants thus had prejudiced viewpoints on me at the beginning of the conversations. However, after our casual chats about daily life, I felt some people warm to me; perhaps they realised that I might not be what they initially imagined. My questions about daily life also seemed to make some feel that they were more experienced than I was in life and this seemed to further narrow the gap between us.

Whilst some participants were suspicious of my status as an overseas PhD student, others were very curious about my life when they heard that I studied abroad. They asked many questions about the lifestyle, living expenses, and weather in the UK. Some asked if the British people were strong and tall, and some even asked if I had seen the Queen. I patiently answered all their questions, and mentioned some difficulties in studying abroad in order to build rapport with them. As a result, they would better cooperate with my interview and even introduce me to new informants. Some respondents with good economic conditions consulted me about studying and travelling in the UK and Europe, in terms of university application, visa application and so on. In general, these chats which appear to have nothing to do with the interview actually narrowed the distance between us, and made participants feel more at ease. This provided a strong foundation for proceeding to the formal interview.

At the end of our informal chat, I asked participants was it ok to record the interview. Most of the participants were ok with this. However, one of the older interviewees did not seem comfortable with this. When I asked for her permission to record the interview, she questioned why a recording was necessary and whether I would upload the recording to the Internet. She worried that the recording would be used for phone fraud. And as so much private information, like names and addresses, was involved she even doubted my identity. I

patiently explained that I took the recording so that I could pay more attention to the interview content instead of taking notes. I also showed her my student matriculation card, but she was not interested in this, telling me she could not read English. At last I showed her my Chinese identity card, and guaranteed that nobody else could get access to it, and the recording, and I also guaranteed that the recording would be permanently deleted at the end of the research. Finally, the old lady agreed my request to record the interview and gave her verbal consent, discussed in more detail below. But I noticed that she held back some answers when it came to her family's economic status, occupations and addresses. The old lady's case was an exception however, and the other informants seemed to have no doubt about my identity.

Like the old lady, some other informants repeatedly emphasised that the names of and information about their family members could never appear in my thesis. One of the informants said, "our names cannot be seen by the frauds", "and do not let others know my family things". I told them that I would anonymise the interviews and replace their residential and working addresses during composing the thesis, in order to dispel their misgivings and meet the ethical requirements of sociological research (Wiles, et al. 2008).

As mentioned above, all participants were given information sheets prior to the interview. Based on this, they were able to make a decision whether to participate in the research or not,

without any compulsion or inducement. Informants were also told that they had the right to quit at any time during the interview. When my informants agreed to be interviewed, I did not ask them to sign a consent sheet, because some Chinese people are cautious about signing paperwork in order to prevent illegal use of their personal information (Yang, 2012). In light of this, I started my interviews after obtaining their verbal consent.

3.6 Data Collection: Interviews

Because my research focuses on how parents and only-children interact with each other and the dynamics of these parent-child relationships, I considered the semi-structured interview a good choice for my project. Interviews could help me to get my informants' subjective interpretation of these relationships. Compared with other methods, an interview is relatively economical in terms of both time and resources. Since I had limited time and financial resources for data collection, the face-to-face interviews greatly enriched my data collection and served as a recruitment tool also. Although semi-structured interviews took a lot of time, the contents always came out relatively thoroughly and deeply, which offered a lot of material for analysis (Silverman, 2014).

This method also offered me opportunities to ask what people actually did in their daily lives, instead of asking them to

comment on it (Silverman, 2014). I asked a lot of questions, like 'what did you do', to examine how the informants dealt with the parent-child relationship. I also asked participants detailed questions about particular times and experiences in their lives, such as 'how much did the wedding cost your family', 'have you helped your child with any financial difficulties', and 'what family duties do you have'. Questions such as these offered me a lot of practical data on interviewees' families, and allowed me to make initial judgments about their family relationships. Moreover, the semi-structured interview allowed me to probe further on useful information (Silverman, 2014). If the research had been carried through quantitative methods, like questionnaires, instead of these in-depth interviews, informants would not have had the opportunity to fully describe their relationships, or provide detailed and real answers on some specific topics. This would mean I would fail to fully explore informant's rich family relationships. Interview as a method is widely used also due to its great flexibility in application (Tracy, 2013). Through interviews I was able to explore informants' personal feelings on family internal relationships and matters, and through face-to-face conversation I could observe their facial expressions to get a better grasp of their words. By doing interviews in the home environment, I was also able to gain an impression of their home and be aware of their manner and body language. Such observations also helped in facilitating the interview, as well as my interpretation of the material generated in this

context (Drever, 1995).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen since I needed flexibility in the interview context. However, I also had a list of main questions that I wanted to address as well as a general structure (Drever, 1995). Before my interviews, I designed open-ended interview questions, which I usually improved and altered based on actual situations that arose in conversation during my interviews (Appendix 2 for the semi-structured interview guide). This meant that I had to be prepared and appear competent during the interview. I listened carefully to the content of interviews and asked questions according to actual situations. For example, I did not ask directly whether the only-child's parents are involved with their romantic relationship or not because of my position outside the family and I did not want them to feel being offended. For detailed answers, I asked them how they met and married their partners. Although some information acquired is unnecessary, it all contributed to me getting a better understanding of the entire family and their relations with each other.

3.7 Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews

Before the formal fieldwork, I conducted pilot interviews with four people from the same family. Through doing this, I

discovered a lot of problems with the design of the interview guide. Firstly, I was not familiar enough with the interview guide, and as a result, our conversation was seriously constrained by the guide. It felt like I was simply asking questions and they were simply answering them. Stylised questioning disappointingly reduced candidates' interests in the interview, and they began to make simple and careless answers to some questions, which made me fail to dig out more comprehensive answers. Based on this experience, I made full sense of the interview guide before beginning the interviews. Rather than sticking rigidly to the interview guide, I was committed to allowing respondents speak their own stories. Because of this, it was important to pay attention to listening to my informants' descriptions and expressions rather than offering my own opinions and feelings. To be a qualified audience I showed that I was carefully listening through eye contacts, nodding, and making a sound like 'yeah'. I avoided making any biased judgement on informants' descriptions. During interviews themselves, I also broke the chains of the outline order, adjusting the question order according to the pace of the interview. When their answers came to be general or unclear I would make a further detailed inquiry.

Additionally, as I made the pilot interview online, I found that when I interviewed the informants individually, other family members sometimes developed interest in our conversation. For example, during an interview with a woman, her mother-

in-law came into the room from time to time for different reasons, despite my request that the interview be conducted one-to-one without disturbance. Whenever her mother-in-law came in, the woman would very obviously answer with very brief descriptions. I thus paid attention to this issue during the formal interviews, and tried to ensure that each informant was interviewed separately. This helped to produce greater candour and involvement in the interview, since interviewees' responses would not be affected by other people's responses or presence (Herts, 1995). This was especially evident in the interview with Mr Liu (P4H), who divulged that he actually does not approve of living with his parents-in-law, but he could not tell me directly what he exactly thought while his wife does enjoy living together with her parents. If I had interviewed Mr Liu's family at the same place at the same time, he would have felt uncomfortable disclosing such feelings. Separate interviews with different family members thus helped reveal more deeply family conflicts and negotiations. Thanks to these pilot interviews, I became aware of some of the challenges of conducting this type of research in advance, and made an effort to counter these challenges through the aforementioned strategies.

During formal interviews, I usually interviewed participants in their homes, and sometimes I met them in the garden of their living area. The interview mainly focused on only-children's married life, including marriage payment, buying or renting a marital home, wedding consumption, grandparenting, daily

life exchange and so on. Each interview usually lasted approximately one to two hours, depending on how talkative the informant was. As the interview progressed some respondents strayed away from the main themes of the research, I observed informants' expressions and attitudes at all times, and I did not strictly control the interview time, if they showed no impatience and a willingness to talk. Even when informants talked about some unrelated issues, I did not interrupt their conversations in order to maintain their motivations. However I eventually managed to steer them back towards the subject matter of the interview by asking some questions.

Furthermore, during the actual interviews, it was of great significance that I guaranteed my informants that everything they told me would never be mentioned to any others, even their families. When other family members mentioned something I already knew, I would pretend that I had never heard, and learn it from a different perspective. It brought me a comprehensive understanding of a certain issue from different points of view. It proves that I had discovered some hidden tensions in some families through the summary of different members' descriptions on the same issue.

I was slightly shy and nervous at the very beginning of the fieldwork as I was unfamiliar with most of the respondents. However, as the interviews progressed, my communication skills improved and the interviews became increasingly

smooth. In addition to conversations, observing respondents' emotions was another effective way to make the interview smooth. For example, a frown as I asked a question usually signalled objection or dissatisfaction. Observing clothes and room layout also offered me a general sense of respondents' economic status. Some only-children's parents would bring their grandchildren with them during the interview, which allowed me to observe interactions between them. Although I did not cover the interactions between grandparents and grandchildren, I could observe grandparents' attitudes towards caring grandchildren to some extent. Moreover, little children often acted as icebreakers at the beginning of the interview. I often observed grandparents and parents become more at ease if we talked about topics related to children prior to the start of the interview.

3.8 Data Analysis

After conducting 120 interviews, I began to transcribe the recordings. All the interviews were made in Chinese, and even though this thesis is in English, I still transcribed the recordings in Chinese in case some information would be missed due to the translation. All the transcriptions were written, edited, and stored through Microsoft Word, and coded with the help of a qualitative software, NVivo. This program provides me with a set of tools that assist me in undertaking an analysis of qualitative data (Bazeley, 2007).

Firstly, I imported the transcription files to the NVivo software, and repeatedly read them. When reading the respondents' descriptions, I used the NVivo tools to highlight the important phrases and sentences as free nodes. I marked my free nodes by dividing different family issues like marriage payments, living conditions and so on. This can be regarded as open coding, which is initial and uncertain (Bazeley, 2007). I also made case nodes by defining participants' family roles. During open coding, I categorised all the information according to its original status, putting aside all my personal prejudices and maintaining as objective and neutral an approach as possible. Then I identified the key themes and labelled them, like "Do the two generations live together or separately", "How much did the parents pay for the only-children's wedding". After labelling, I grouped the nodes like phenomena and concepts into broader categories. Having marked all the free nodes for the first time, I began axial coding which was mainly used to check and classify the existing coding data in order to discover and establish connections among them. Such as 'How does the financial status of parents influence the only-children couple's marital home'. Finally, I used selective coding to analyse the results of axial coding, and concentrate them to several core coding programme. Selective coding consists of examining following data for verification of codes that were developed from earlier data analysis rather than searching for new themes because the move from coding to interpretation involves playing with

and exploring the codes and categories that have been created (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). I can also revisit and revise the concepts, interpretations and themes during the following readings and writings.

Before beginning the write up stage, I studied the free nodes once again, and extracted what I wanted to start from. During writing I could continually discover the problems of coding which I did before. I learned that I needed to keep a whole family as a unit to analyse specific issues not just coding by dividing informants' family roles. Analysing data while diving into my data and doing a deeper coding at the same time proved to be an effective method.

3.9 Ethical Issues

Ethical considerations are implicitly discussed throughout this chapter, from discussions around consent, to issues around anonymity and confidentiality. In this section, I explicitly discuss some sensitive questions and family conflicts I dealt with during my interviews. As my research involved asking some sensitive questions about, for example, family members' economic status, opinions on other members, and family issues, I went to great effort to ask these questions as sensitively as possible. I also told my interviewees that they could refuse to answer questions if they felt not comfortable. Discussions in interviews often centred on the process of

communications and negotiations within a family. This often revealed family tensions, which brought further ethical challenges. However, I also found that some informants would disclose too much to me, a relative stranger, about their intimate family relationships. . At times, I held back from probing too much if I found the participant was trying to avoid talking about it.

During the interview, some participants initially described their families in a very positive light. These interviews did not yield very much material about family relationships. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I planned to lead participants to answer what I wanted to know. However, it would go against research ethics if I pushed them to say what they did not want to say against their will. My research would thus become less credible and reliable if I guided my respondent too much during the interview. As a result, I gave up on my initial plan. I tried to communicate with other family members to explore more when I found some informant did not want to tell me anything substantial.

Moreover, four members in one family were interviewed separately, with each discussing relationships with other members of the family. It was therefore imperative that I guaranteed confidentiality. As some scholars argue, people are less likely to discuss some sensitive topics in front of other family members in case it would hurt others' feelings or follow with others' criticism and complaints (Corbin & Morse,

2003; Dobash & Dobash, 2004). As separate interviews might bring about informants' distrust with each other, I would try to win their confidence, and guarantee them that I would never let the third people know the conversations. Actually, my interview guide included few questions which might infringe upon interviewees' privacy. As I only asked them some questions in terms of daily life and I anonymise my informants in my writing at some point through using pseudonyms and changing some potentially identifying detail, I am confident that the research does not raise other ethical issues.

Some people would describe their families as harmonious as possible to me, but they expressed their dissatisfaction when talking about some details. For example, a mother-in-law rained praises on her daughter-in-law when I asked about the latter. However, when I asked her about their daily communications, the mother-in-law began to say something different about her daughter-in-law, like 'she does not do housework well', 'her family is always in a mess', 'she does not cook well, and her parents spoiled her too much', 'my son always spoke for her after they got married', and so on. The mother-in-law's words, to a large extent, showed her dissatisfaction about her daughter-in-law. But I did not question these inconsistencies when she told me that she was very satisfied with her daughter-in-law. I believed that when spotting latent tensions within the respondent's family, it would be better to remain neutral and keep the interview

flowing naturally without pointing out the tension and potentially embarrassing the interviewee.

On the other hand, I also found that some informants did not feel it inappropriate to talk about their family conflicts, and some respondents would ask me for some advice. For instance, Sun (P9W) showed a lot of dissatisfaction towards her mother-in-law when it came to grandparenting:

My mother-in-law received little education and she feeds my son all kinds of snacks, some of which are of poor quality. Sometimes my son was too lazy to get up at school time, and my mother-in-law always spoke for him. How can my boy develop good habits under such circumstance? Now my son usually disobeys my words. How can I ask her to leave my son's education for me? It worries the hell out of me.

But when I interviewed her mother-in-law before, her mother-in-law told me she spoils her grandson simply because of love, saying, 'I like buying my grandson some delicious snacks, because once he complained that his mom seldom bought him snacks. I think all the children like snacks at this age. I will buy him some if his mom does not buy them'. I, as the researcher, had to remain neutral during the interview, and as a result I did not tell Sun what her mother-in-law had told me, and not offer any suggestion. In this case I just told her that this circumstance existed in many families, and then I went on to another topic. I would never paraphrase any respondent's words to another family member, whether it is positive or negative. I would not get myself involved with

respondents' family issues, even if they asked for my opinions. My fieldwork was based on the principle of being neutral and objective all the time. However, this can be difficult in practice.

Researchers' personal attributes, in terms of gender, ethnicity, social experience and so on may influence the interactions with research objects (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I, like some of my research objects, played the same role in my family as a married only-daughter. My personal family position would also affect my connections with my informants. Therefore, I would think about whether or not to tell my interviewees about my family roles during the interviews. When interviewing only-daughters, I would usually tell them that I was a wife, a daughter and a daughter-in-law, the same as them, in order to find common ground and demonstrate my recognition of their role. For example, compared with interviewed only-sons, only-daughters would talk quite openly about their husbands' families and with less restraint. It might be influenced by gender and personalities, but I believed that the same family roles were supposed to help to some extent.

When I interviewed some only-sons' mothers I would not offer to tell them that I, myself, was a daughter-in-law. This approach comes from one of my personal experiences. When I once took my mother-in-law to a hospital, an about-70-year-old lady next to us praised me for being a qualified daughter. My mother-in-law told her that I was actually a daughter-in-

law. Unexpectedly, the old lady secretly asked my mother-in-law if I showed filial obedience in daily life. 'My daughter-in-law is extremely spoiled in life, and will not offer to do anything', said the old lady. This experience reminded me that some mothers-in-law might hold prejudices against their daughters-in-law, especially in some families with some tension in their relationships. Based on this knowledge I did not usually mention my personal family circumstances when interviewing only-sons' mothers.

When interviewing women, Oakley (2016) believed that a female interviewer would be more likely get close to their interviewee in terms of emotions. Finch (1984) also argued that women were used to communicating on private family topics, and preferred to chat with an understanding listener. As discussed earlier in the chapter, interviews with young only-children wives that were around the same age as me went quite smoothly. These women usually talked a lot. As a female researcher, I have considered how to get on well with informants regardless of gender. Some researchers argue that interviews should turn the research relationship into friendship. As Cotterill (1992) contends, some interviewees are willing to talk to interviewers, because these interviewers, as strangers, will not exert social control on their interviewees. From this perspective, interviewees feel comfortable to talk with friendly strangers who have little influence on their daily lives. Cotterill (1992), in her research on the relationships between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, shared a lot in

common with her interviewees in terms of age and life experience. In principle, these similarities are supposed to easily develop their relationship into friendship. However, she was confused when many interviewees ignored her attempts at forming friendships with them. She understood this to be rooted in how interviewees defined their relationships with the interviewers. This meant that some interviewees regarded the researchers as friends, while others prefer to keep a distance from them. Cotterill (1992) thus suggest that researchers distinguish between friendship and the friendly relationship. Friendships are established on mutual trust and personal information sharing, but an interview artificially creates such a conversation. Once researchers got what they needed, their relationships usually stopped. An intimate friend would never visit you with an audio recorder, listen to you very carefully, and then disappear forever. There maybe some researchers turned these friendly relationships into long-term friendships with their informants after completing the research. However, more commonly, most researchers acted as friendly strangers, disappearing after they finished the data collection period (Cotterill, 1992). Therefore, researchers should have an appropriate expectation on their relationships and ensure boundaries with the informants so that participants also have appropriate expectations of their relationship with researchers. During my fieldwork, I found that although I had pleasant conversations with some informants, I had few connections with them after interviews.

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the methodology for my research. I conducted my fieldwork in Tianjin, China and a total of 120 participants from 30 families were interviewed. My informants came from both the only-child generation and their parents' generation and they were from three different levels of large-scale housing compounds in three different district in Tianjin. The use of in-depth semi-structured interviews allowed for participants' accounts of their family relationships and daily lives. I used NVivo qualitative analysis software to aid the data analysis work. Some ethical issues for my research were also discussed in this chapter. Drawing on the interviews described in this chapter, the next chapter explores how the only-child families negotiate marriage payments and how this process affects their parent-child relationships.

4 CHAPTER FOUR: MARRIAGE PAYMENT AND PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS IN ADULT ONLY-CHILD FAMILIES

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, starting from the preparation period before the couple's marriage, I discuss, mainly in terms of cost, how the families negotiate the quantities of betrothal gift, dowry and the cost of the wedding ceremony. I use the phenomenon of marriage payment to show the changing meaning of these payments and to demonstrate the impact that these negotiations about money investment between adult-children and parents, and between the two pairs of parents, has on their relationships. As discussed in Chapter 1, couples in China are increasingly becoming new entities following their marriage, moving away from traditional norms where brides leave their natal family to become a member of their husband's family. This is the case across the sample in this research. In this chapter, I make the argument that this new way of 'doing family' alters how marriage payments are negotiated and used and introduces new sources of tension as parents try to balance their own interests against being exploited and children try to gain some economic security and independence. However, I also demonstrate throughout that

when the two generations are cooperating and negotiating, they are often conflicting and compromising with each other simultaneously.

4.2 Background

When studying the child-parent relationships in married only-children's families, I take the cost of the wedding into consideration, because it is currently quite common for Chinese people to spend large amounts on weddings, including betrothal gifts, dowries, and expenses on wedding ceremonies, wedding dresses, wedding pictures and honeymoons (Cui & Wang, 2016). The betrothal gifts and dowries alone can easily reach hundreds of thousands Chinese yuan. As a result, weddings often consume a significant proportion of parents' savings, and those who are on lower incomes often incur large debts in order to put on these lavish events. However, it is also quite normal for many parents in China, especially those who have sons, to save money for their children's marriage from their birth or early childhood.

In this chapter, the betrothal gifts and dowries are used as concrete examples of firmly marriage payments. In ancient China, leather goods were used as currency and buckskins became the earliest betrothal gifts, first appearing in the Zhou (ca. 1046–256 B.C.) and Shang (ca. 1600–1050 B.C.)

dynasties (Li, 2008). A betrothal gift can be understood as the wealth transferred from a bridegroom's family to a bride's family (Li, 2008). The marriage contract, to some extent, is symbolised by the transfer of the betrothal gift, and validates a woman being transferred from one family to another (Li, 2008). Drawing on such arguments, the betrothal gift is understood in this thesis as the monetary wealth which a bridegroom's family pays a bride's family. Similarly, the dowry can be understood as symbolic of the economic condition and social status of the bride's family (Comaroff, 1980; Tao and Ming, 1994). Moreover, some believed that a bride took dowry with her to show her family's support of her entering the bridegroom's family (Li, 2002; Diao, 2006). In this thesis, the dowry is defined as money and gifts brought by a bride to a newly-formed family at the start of the marriage, including both part of betrothal gifts from the groom's family and the part which is prepared by the bride's family.

Research on marital payments in the Chinese context tend to fall in two theoretical camps: marital reimbursement theory and marital subsidization theory (Xiong and Mu, 2009). The first of these theory posits that betrothal gifts are expenses that bridegrooms' families pay to brides' families, in order to confirm the transfer of brides' responsibilities of reproduction and housework (Diao, 2006). The notion of compensation is at the core of the marital reimbursement theory. The brides are thus objectified and exchanged for betrothal gifts. Having transferred out of the brides' families, they are completely

incorporated into the bridegrooms' families (Tao & Ming, 1994). However, this approach barely takes into account the influence that marriage payments might have on intergenerational relationships.

The second approach to marital payments, the marital subsidization theory, argues that betrothal gifts cannot simply be regarded as compensation for brides' families. Because these payments tend to flow towards the newlyweds, they can be understood as a form of endowment rather than compensation (Xiong and Mu, 2009). Indeed, Goody (1990) makes the case that neither display nor compensation were the main function of marriage payments. He believed that, in China, wealth distribution to the bride was actually a significant method to endow the newlyweds, since the bridegroom was unlikely to own properties before he lived away from his parents. The marital subsidization approach thus emphasises that marriage payments are ultimately received by the newlyweds.

Whilst these theories have their merits, they oversimplify the influence of exchanging betrothal gifts and dowries and the rest of this chapter examines the nuances of these exchanges and their impact on parent-child relationships. The chapter, starts with the perspectives of members of the families involved. Taking these accounts as a starting point, I reflect on their personal motivations in order to explore the interactions amongst different individuals during the whole

process of marriage payment. I follow every step throughout this process through the eyes of my participants, identifying how they deal with marriage payment at the beginning of only-child couple's marriage and how it affects their parent-child relationships.

4.3 Differences of Negotiating Marriage Payments

Xiaofan's mother used to work as a saleswoman in a tea shop, and I interviewed her at her simply-furnished home which had only one bedroom. Before Xiaofan (P28W) got married, her mother received 100,000 yuan as a betrothal gift. The mother said:

Why not ask for betrothal gifts? We raised our daughter so well. How much we have paid! However, suddenly she belongs to another's family. Marrying a daughter is like pouring out water. After getting married, she came back home obviously less often than before. After she had a baby, I had to serve her as a housemaid. Her husband's family is running a furniture business, and I guess they are not mean. However, honestly, I was not satisfied with their betrothal gift of 100,000 yuan. My colleagues received far more than that when their daughters got married. However, I did not complain to them at all. It would sound like I want to make a fortune if I bargained about the betrothal gift. Besides, most of the money will be finally given to the newly-weds, instead of all being kept by us. My daughter is married to his family for life, and she does the housework and gives birth to their baby. You know, the baby will have their surname. If the baby had

ours, maybe we shall give back the betrothal gifts... But I gave my daughter and son-in-law 50,000 yuan back as dowry. Moreover, I bought them some household appliances, like a TV and a refrigerator. I would not let my daughter lose face in front of her parents-in-law.

The mother in this case regarded her daughter's marriage as a loss to her family, and she thus wanted to be compensated for this loss through appropriate betrothal gifts. However, given the perceived economic status of her son-in-law's family, she thought she should have received more than 100,000 yuan as a betrothal gift. In response to this, she gave half of the betrothal gift back to her daughter and son-in-law, and bought them some extra appliances, because she worried about her daughter's position in her parents-in-law's family if the dowry was perceived as low. In this mother's opinion, a woman's position in her in-laws' household is, to some extent, connected with the amount of the dowry. Based on this extract, it can be interpreted that, due to her material circumstances, she was concerned with money, but nevertheless gave most of the betrothal gift to her daughter and son-in-law. Considering the relationship between her daughter and parents-in-law, she did not want her daughter to be blamed for an insufficient dowry.

In this same family, Xiaofan's mother-in-law (P28HM) told me that:

When my son discussed the betrothal gift with us, I told him that I would follow the crowd, not too much

and not too little. We are all common people, and we ought to follow the common standards. Never make our daughter-in-law's parents think that we are rich, or they will bring us the extravagant wish lists. I do not want to think people are bad in advance, however, it is a cruel reality that this kind of families exist in the real life. In my neighbour's case, his son married a woman from a poor family. Unexpectedly, the woman's parents asked for at least 300,000 yuan as a betrothal gift plus a flat for the marital home as if they were selling their daughter, or they would not agree with the marriage. You cannot imagine that everyone is here in the real world. Therefore, when we went to propose the marriage, we told our in-laws that we would offer 100,000 yuan as a betrothal gift according to the present customs. They agreed immediately without any objections. Actually, whether the betrothal gift or the dowry, both are going through the motions. In the past the reason for offering a betrothal gift was that a man marrying his wife was equal to buying a wife into his family. However, everything now changes. At present, a woman will not be completely separated from her original family due to the marriage. She will look after her own parents if necessary, and she will pay her mother if her mother comes to help her with the childcare. Therefore, the betrothal gift and the dowry are both formalities. These sums of money will no longer stop mutual support, in terms of money, in the future life.

Wanting to avoid being taken advantage of, the mother offered a 100,000 yuan betrothal gift to her in-laws, as per the current 'market price'. In addition, she suggested that betrothal gifts and dowries were not taken seriously in contemporary China, but families only participated in this because it was something they were expected to do and part of the wedding process. She acknowledged that her

daughter-in-law would not completely belong to her family after the wedding, and would not separate herself from her own parents. Now that she was not 'buying' a daughter-in-law, it would not be necessary to provide a large sum of money as a betrothal gift.

Mr Xu (P28H) is the only-son in this family and he works as an accountant in a department store. When we were talking about betrothal gift, he showed no objections to his parents' betrothal gift of 100,000 yuan:

Actually, when I first discussed this issue with my wife, I told her that I would ask my parents to offer 200,000 yuan, in order not to lose face in front of my parents-in-law. But when I discussed it with my parents, they told me that a total of 100,000 yuan was usually enough for the betrothal gift. My parents also told me that it was not the more the better. I did not reject their view because I did not want them to feel as if I stand with my parents-in-law instead of my own parents. Later I thought that it would make sense not to offer so much for a betrothal gift. Because if we offered too much, my parents-in-law might feel uncomfortable and would have concerns in the future communications. Finally, my parents gave them 100,000 yuan as a betrothal gift.

When it came to the matter of the betrothal gift, Mr Xu (P28H) chose to discuss with his fiancée first, and then with his parents. This suggests that his relationship with his fiancée was a higher priority to his relationship with his parents to some extent. This is consistent with Yan's (2009) findings, where conjugal life took priority over extended family issues.

Yan argues that young couples increasingly require more independence from their parents, as well as pointing to the increased importance of conjugal relationships, marking a departure from traditional Chinese family norms. Moreover, Mr Xu was not opposed to his parents' proposal of 100,000 yuan, because he perceived himself as an independent individual, and also took into consideration how he might maintain amicable relationships with all family members.

Mr. Xu's wife Xiaofan (P28W) did not express too many opinions on the betrothal gift:

My parents gave us 50,000 yuan and bought us some household appliances as dowry. They did not have much left. My husband told me that his parents would give my parents 200,000 yuan at first, but they finally gave my parents 100,000 yuan. I did not tell my parents about the shrinking of the betrothal gift. I did not want them to have contradictions because of money before the marriage. On the other hand, I thought it would make no difference if they gave my parents 200,000 yuan, because my parents would finally give the money to us, instead of keeping all of the money for themselves.

Xiaofan feigned ignorance about the shrinkage of the betrothal gift, and did not show any dissatisfaction towards her parents-in-law, in order to maintain a good relationship between family members, which was similar with Mr. Xu's opinion. Actually, all the four family members I interviewed were considering the marriage payment and their parent-child relationships from their own position, which could be

seen as an expression of individualisation.

This particular family's case is fairly typical, in terms of betrothal gifts, of the thirty families in the sample. When discussing children's weddings, most parents make a point of not bargaining with in-laws about betrothal gifts and dowries, probably out of the consideration for their face² or their future relationships. Even if they are dissatisfied with the value of marriage payment, they will choose to tolerate instead of complaining. This may be connected to Chinese family values around the management of family affairs. During my interviews, I heard people mention many times that avoiding trouble whenever possible was a good idea, especially in family matters. It may be this Chinese family logic that shapes my participants' desire to avoid conflict and conceal any discontent about marital gifts and dowries.

Participants stated that approximately 100,000 yuan was the average betrothal gift in Tianjin in 2015 when I did my fieldwork there. When considering how much to pay, a bridegroom's family will carefully consider the overall social status of the bride's family. The amount offered will sometimes be increased if the bride's family has a good economic background and a high level of social status. Some bridegrooms' families believed that offering above average betrothal gifts can help them gain authority in the negotiations of children's marriage. On the other hand, a huge betrothal

² Status or self-respect.

gift is a tangible symbolic capital for the bride's family. Their good reputation and social status is reflected by a high marriage payment. At the same time, the bride's family can be more confident in negotiating a betrothal gift when they have an advantage over the bridegroom's family with regard to financial, cultural and social capital. During marriage negotiations, instead of directly complaining about the amount of a betrothal gift, the bride's parents sometimes create excuses—saying for example, that their daughter is still young or that they are not in a hurry to marry their daughter—to make the bridegroom's family compromise on increasing the marriage payment to meet their expectations.

This form of negotiation is clearly evident in Xiuyu's (P26W) family. Her mother (P26WM) seemed to be dissatisfied with the amount of the betrothal gift, but she did not directly engage her future in-laws about this. Instead, she employed particular strategies to achieve her purpose:

At the beginning my son-in-law told me that his parents prepared 100,000 yuan for his marriage proposal. I did not say anything then, but I was not pleased with it. We prepared a car, which is at least worth 200,000 yuan, for our daughter's marriage. My daughter graduated from a good university in Australia. She is elegant and has a nice personality. How can his family only pay 100,000 yuan for our daughter? After that we never actively proposed a meeting among the four parents. Even when his parents came to propose, we just found an excuse to delay it. Later I disclosed to my son-in-law that we had prepared a car for the marriage, and then he understood.

But her daughter, Xiuyu was unhappy with her mother's attitude to the betrothal gift:

Honestly, we are not poor, and I do not understand what my mother did. In her opinion, the amount of the betrothal gift shows their sincerity and respect to their future daughter-in-law. I told her that I did not care; however, she insisted that it would make them think we were pushovers if we did not have some requirements. I thought I would mainly live a life with my husband, which would almost have nothing to do with his parents.

Xiuyu's fiancé's family picked up on her mother's dissatisfaction with their betrothal offer. Her fiancé's father (P26HF) told me that he picked up on these signals:

I prepared 100,001 yuan as a betrothal gift, which means no one is better than our daughter-in-law in a hundred thousand young ladies. But I could feel that her family was not satisfied with it, and they did not positively discuss the engagement with us. Her family has quite good conditions. Her father runs his own law firm, while her mother is working for the government. Their daughter is a nice lady that we do not want to miss the marriage. As a result, I offer extra 200,000 yuan to her family. I cannot let my in-laws find my faults before my child get married.

This only-son's father actively offered an increased betrothal gift to his in-law's family, but this case clearly demonstrates the influence that the only-daughter's family status has on the only-son's family. In Xiuyu's in-laws' opinion, an insufficient betrothal gift will not function well to promote the marriage.

Eventually, based on their material, social and cultural advantages, the bride's family had their indirect demands for more money met.

The two cases discussed above highlight some of the differences in how betrothal gifts are negotiated, but they also illustrate some important similarities. Firstly, the brides in the two cases do not consider obtaining much marriage payments as a cardinal task when doing wedding, which is different from Yan's (2003) findings that new brides begin to play a dominant role in discussing marriage payments. Secondly, the parents in all of the families involved did not directly discuss the amount of the betrothal gift directly. Mr Xu's mother-in-law (P28WM) concealed her discontent, while Xiuyu's mother (P26WM) implied her dissatisfaction through delaying the meeting of two pairs of parents. These differences may result from the economic and social status of the bride's family. Xiuyu's socioeconomic background was better than her husband's, and as a result, Xiuyu's mother was confident to take the initiative during negotiations.

When doing wedding, people still follow the traditional customs and routines, just like the exchange of marriage payment in my informants' families. However, the two cases reveal the changing norm of marriage payment. Betrothal gift is not being regarded as the reward to only-daughter's family for 'selling' daughter to their in-law's family nor the payment of 'buying' daughter-in-law for only-son's family.

4.4 Marriage Payments as a Way to Enhance Parent-Child Relationships

To some degree parents' expectations of future relationships with children are bound up in the issue of marital payments. On the one hand, betrothal gifts are expected to ease future family life, with some of the husbands' parents hoping for good relationships with their daughter-in-laws. If the bridegroom fails to offer a satisfactory betrothal gift, the bride may feel dissatisfied and instigate family conflict. On the other hand, the marriage payment, to some extent, functions as an understanding and recognition of filial piety. Only children are supposed to provide material and spiritual care for their parents in old age in return for all of the effort, expense and love their parents expended to raise them, including betrothal gifts. Marriage payment thus becomes an essential key to the bridegroom's family's strategies to enhance their intergenerational relationships.

These themes of filial piety and reciprocal support are evident amongst some of the families in the sample. Mr Li (P12HF), for example, owns several chain restaurants in Tianjin, and he is financially very stable. When his son got married, he arranged an expensive wedding ceremony. His daughter-in-law's family were satisfied with his financial capacity and made no demands for the bride price. However, Mr Li still

offered them 180,000 yuan and prepared a marital home for the new couple. During the interview, Mr Li told me:

My son used to have several girlfriends, but I did not think these girls were good enough to be my daughter-in-law. When I met my daughter-in-law, I was satisfied with her. When they got married, I was willing to offer them a grand wedding. Now most people have only one child, and the child will leave us after marriage. The child will remember us if we spend more on them. In other words, what we spend on our child is what we spend for our future. I told my son and my daughter-in-law that they were expected to live a happy life and treat parents well, and when I got old, I would pass my restaurant to them.

Mr. Li's daughter-in-law (P12W) expressed her appreciation for Mr. Li's material support:

My parents did not want a betrothal gift, but my parents-in-law insisted on offering 180,000 yuan as one. My parents-in-law were generous and gave us a lot of money for the wedding. Our wedding was held pretty well, and a lot of friends and relatives admired it. My parents-in-law love us so much and I will always keep thinking about them. Sometimes I buy them some gifts.

These extracts suggest that a betrothal gift actually represents the economic support behind it. No obvious tension occurred in Mr Li's family. Mr Li offered a betrothal whose amount was not discussed specifically. Although the daughter's parents proposed that a betrothal gift was not necessary, Mr Li still gave them an overwhelming sum of

money. In Mr Li's case, the marriage payment is considered as a significant method to enhance their parent-child relationships. While the marriage payment is coming to the young couple's family, it becomes a significant tool for the parents' family to utilise it to make connection with the newly-built family and seek its position in affinity.

4.5 Conflicts between Two Generations over Marriage Payment

Mr Xu's (P28H) case, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, illustrated that his parents made the final decision on the amount of the betrothal gift, while Mr Xu and his wife had no objections. Mr Lv (P13H) similarly wanted to offer a higher betrothal gift but his parents did not agree. Mr Lv dealt with the issue in a totally different way from Mr. Xu however. Mr. Lv's father (P13HF) told me about the divergence:

We are old and both retired. At that time, we sold our commercial housing, on which the rent was our main source of income, in order to contribute to the down payment for their marital home. I thought we had done enough, but my son thought it made no sense if we did not give the betrothal gift to in-law's family. He insisted on it and asked us to prepare gold jewellery for our daughter-in-law. I told him that I should save some money for my aged life, but my son swore that he would look after his mother and me in the future. Honestly, we did not care about the old wedding traditions, but why did these young people care so much? At last we compromised on

the betrothal gift, but we made it clear that we would not pay for the wedding banquet any more, and it was on their own.

Mr. Lv (P13H) works in an investment company and enjoys a very good salary, held different opinions from his father, and said:

My parents probably thought that they had helped us with the down payment on our marital home, and thus they did not want to offer a bride price. I did not think it was appropriate. The wedding is important. I cannot lose face in my wife's family. Besides, we were not too poor to afford this sum of money, and I probably still think differently from my parents. My parents want to save all the money up, but I do not think it necessary to worry about their later lives because I will absolutely look after them when they get old. Therefore, I insisted on offering the betrothal gift. Wedding is a happy thing so why not make everyone happy?

However, when I talked about the betrothal gift with Mr. Lv's wife (P13W), she said:

It seemed that my husband expressed his dissatisfaction on the betrothal gift to his parents. I thought he strived for more benefits for us. That sum of money would finally belong to us, because my parents told me that they would give all of it to us instead of keeping it.

Her mother (P13WM) showed similar points of view, saying that:

We did not care about the amount of the betrothal

gift, because we would give it to the children in the end. Everything needs money especially at the beginning of establishing a new small family. I gave the betrothal gift to my daughter and my son-in-law, and told them to use it to buy anything they needed. What really matters to me is that they could live a happy life. We have only one daughter, and now we have a son-in-law in the family. As we will count on them in the future, it is significant to maintain a good relationship with them. It is thus stupid to have quarrels about the amount of the betrothal gift and the dowry before children's marriage. Those who are in conflicts because of money will suffer losses when they get old in the future.

Mr Lv and his father clearly had different opinions about the offering of betrothal gift, and this led to an obvious tension within the family. Carefully planning for his own care in the future, Mr Lv's father thought that having made an expensive down payment for the marital home, it would not be necessary for him to offer a betrothal gift, while his son insisted that it was necessary to offer a betrothal gift. Moreover, Mr Lv argued that his parents would not have any need for this money in the future, since he would support them in their old age. In Mr. Lv's case, the negotiations surrounding betrothal gifts mainly take place between children and their own parents, rather than between the two pairs of parents as in the past. Mr Lv's mother-in-law (P13WM) believes that the amount of money should not affect the relationships among family members, and their elderly cares closely connect with their relationships with their children-in-law.

Broadly speaking, Mr Lv's case illustrates that children have gradually got more involved with the negotiations around betrothal gifts, increasingly playing an important role in these discussions. This may also be related to their economic conditions. Mr Lv works as a manager in an investment company so he has a good income, and because of this, he may think that it is not necessary for his parents to save money for their future. These extracts capture a phenomenon repeated across the sample. Although divergences exist in these families, children play a decisive role in the final decision-making. With the development of individualisation, the main characters involved in marriage payments have gradually changed from two families to young generation. Instead of a simple money exchange between two families, marriage payments become an arena in which the bride and groom struggle for their own independence, power and interests. It is interesting that Mr Lv utilising the marriage payment custom as a method to gain individual benefit. In this case, both the only-child couples and parents were thinking about marriage payment from their own point of view, and taking their benefits into consideration to negotiate the marriage payment.

Making sacrifices for children is a norm within the Chinese family, feeding into the discourse of filial piety (Zhong & He, 2014). However, parents are limited in what they can give to their children, especially when it comes to money. In a sense marital payments can be understood as a form of inheritance.

Betrothal gifts are not only used to ensure the bride's marriage or establish kin relationships by both families like in the past. Some bridegrooms request to divide their family wealth by directly asking for money as betrothal gifts. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, this marks a significant departure from the previous system, where the betrothal gift was understood strictly as payment for the bride. As the following examples illustrate, the betrothal gift is not only a formal gift exchange or payment method, but it can also be understood as a method to pass the family wealth from one generation to the next. Such a practice is increasingly common and it is becoming clear that the family wealth is inherited through claiming betrothal gifts. This phenomenon is also evident in Yan's (2009) research on dividing up the family wealth. In his opinion, several sons in a family get married successively, and live independently, but their original family, where their parents live, maintains undivided. In families which have several children, those who first get married and leave home can only take away what they get in the marriage, including betrothal gifts which are regarded as their own assets. Only-children have no brothers or sisters to share their parents' wealth, but some of them will claim significant betrothal gifts for their own sake in order to maximise their benefits. Some parents believe offering a satisfying marriage payment help to maintain a good parent-child relationship and to secure their elderly care while some parents think they have already offered too much so they have to save some money for themselves.

Ms. Li (P5W) and I met in a café after she got off work from a bank. She said,

My parents told me that they would not ask for a betrothal gift, or they would leave all of it for us, even if they are given one. I originally did not plan to accept my parents-in-law's money, because they prepared a marital home for us. However, I changed my mind later, because my husband said, 'Why not accept the money my parents gave you? The flat is a flat, while the money is money. They are different. They will give us their money sooner or later. We have no savings at the moment and we can deposit some if they give us money.' That's why I did not refuse the betrothal gift.

However, the husband's mother (P5HM) said:

We felt it unnecessary to give them any more money as a betrothal gift after the marital home purchase. Unexpectedly, my daughter-in-law still asked for it. Actually, I did not want to give them much money because they always blow money. Both of them have good jobs and are able to afford their daily expenses and they had no pressure on housing.

These interviews suggest that negotiations surrounding the betrothal gift have led to tension within the family. The son believed that his wife's claim of marital payment could bring their own family some material benefits, and since his parents' fortune would be transferred to him sooner or later, they might as well request it now. However, his mother thought it unnecessary to give the couple money since she had bought

a marital home for them, and she did not trust the newlyweds' capacity for managing money. She was therefore reluctant to give them any further assets. This example suggests that not all parents are willing to transfer their wealth to the next generation through the payment of betrothal gifts.

Establishing themselves as an independent family unit is a great expense for newly married couples, who are often not financially secure. They often turn to their parents for support when they are confronted with large expenses involved in purchasing home appliances and cars, for example. When preparing for marriage, parents described purchasing some basic necessities for the new family, such as furniture and household appliances. Some parents suggested that their children were 'greedy' at this point. Although some parents make the marriage payment in cash, and some even purchase properties, the requirements for furniture and appliances will seldom be lowered by the fact of these large payments. Besides money, marriage payment sometimes also include furniture and household electrical appliances.

Mr. Lian's (P22HM) mother lives in Wuqing, a suburb of Tianjin. We met in her home in a relatively old housing compound. She told me that:

After my son lives independently he asks me for everything, even an air purifier. I think they just start a new life and it is unnecessary to have everything prepared. I want him to buy the things he needs instead of everything. What if

they are found not commonly used? Will he throw them away?

Similarly, Ms Du's mother (P24WM) said:

My daughter's marital home was purchased by her husband's parents, and my daughter thus asked us to buy a car as a dowry. We initially planned to buy some home appliances for them, and did not expect that she would ask for a car. Luckily, we have only one child. We could not afford it if we had two.

Many of the couples in the research play an active role in the pursuit of material comforts. Some of them claim large sums of money from their parents, which they assume will finally belong to them.

During marriage negotiations, some only-daughters are enthusiastic about getting the husband's families' payments as they see this as a means to secure and protect their interests. Some of these daughters struggle to create a material basis for their new family through betrothal gifts; some want to show their status through high-priced gifts; others want to make sure of their position in the new family through the payment. Some only-daughters may directly or indirectly express their dissatisfaction towards their future parents-in-law, if the marriage payment fails to reach their expectations. At the beginning of this process of negotiation, some only-children will oppose their partners' greediness and argue that their families have already spent a lot on the

marriage. However, when the couple realise they will mutually benefit from striving for enhanced marriage payments, another situation appears, where the couple stand united in their requests.

Ms Liu works in a government department and she does not get a high income. Her father runs a private business so she could usually get economic support from her father. Ms. Liu (P29W) and her husband showed their 'wisdom' of obtaining more for a betrothal gift. She said:

My betrothal gift is the money for a good diamond ring. At the beginning my husband did not want to buy the one I liked for me because it was too expensive. But later it came into his mind that he can let his parents offer the money of the ring as a betrothal gift. As a result, we could save our own money. He asked me to mention it in front of his mother again and again. At last my mother-in-law gave me the money to buy the diamond ring.

However, her mother-in-law (P29HM) was dissatisfied with this requirement.

My daughter-in-law is so extravagant. Before marriage she firmly asked for a Tiffany diamond ring. I could not say no and I asked my son what he thought. My son also thought it unnecessary to buy such a luxurious ring. Then my daughter-in-law came to me to complain about my son's unwillingness to spend money on her. Even worse, they severely quarrelled with each other about it. Actually I did not support her consumer attitudes, but I offered her 200,000 yuan to buy the ring for my son's sake. We have paid a lot for their marriage, in

terms of housing, appliances, and furniture. Comparatively speaking, we are not penny-pinchers. In my opinion, everybody has something they like. When they save money and finally get it, it can be said that their dream comes true. If somebody voluntarily helps you get it, it can be regarded as love. If somebody is forced to help you with it, it should be considered as emotional blackmail.

In Ms. Liu's case, she is the positive actor in seeking more marriage payments, while her husband becomes the backstage manipulator. The couple strategically cooperated through their negotiation for a better betrothal gift, and this strategy resulted in their demands being met. They are seeing their interests as separate from their parents. However, in the process of negotiating more money, tension and mistrust now exists between Ms. Liu and her mother-in-law.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how the direction of marriage payment has changed—most families now make payments to the newlyweds, and not to the in-law's pocket. This transformation is closely related to the changes in living arrangements after marriage, which are described in more detail in Chapter 6. Traditional family norms in the past dictated that the bride's family would be duly compensated due to the fact that the bridegroom's family absorbs a new family member and the bride's family 'loses' a daughter. However, nowadays both families 'lose' their only-children

after the marriage since they now tend to live separately from their parents. The tradition of betrothal gifts thus gradually becomes unreasonable alongside these changes. Rather than brides becoming a member of their husband's family, the couples in this study become a new and separate entity. Additionally, now both families undertake a new mission to economically and materially support the new family founded by their only-children.

However, some parents in the sample felt they had to protect their own interests in the face of their children's demands. With the establishment of the urban pension system, elderly people's later life is guaranteed to some extent. Without this guarantee of a pension or saving, parents in the past have typically relied on their children's performance of filial piety to secure their future care. But the urban pension system appears to have changed attitudes about how much parents offer their children. Some parents in the study clearly pointed out that their children were greedy, and they would not let their children's demands lower their own quality of life. This suggests that, alongside adult children become more individualised, some parents are also changing their views on the traditional role of the dedicated and selfless parents. These parents actively do not want to meet all the demands of their children. Such findings feed into the larger narrative of the thesis that argues that intergenerational relations can be described as cooperative but also simultaneously involve negotiation, conflict and compromise. It is to another area of

cooperation, negotiation, conflict and compromise that the next chapter now turns to, specifically the negotiations surrounding the purchase of the marital home.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: MARITAL HOUSING IN ONLY-CHILD FAMILIES

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will mainly illustrate how the families in this study negotiated the purchase of marital homes for the young couples. Due to the reform of the housing distribution system in China, young couples usually need economic support from their parents if they want to have a property that belongs to them to start their married life. Under the pressure of increasing housing prices, whether to purchase a marital home, who pays for it, and what kind of property is expected will, to some extent, affect relationships between family members. It is the influence of these negotiations on the relationships between only-children and their parents that is the focus of this chapter.

Among all the interviewed families, 24 out of the 30 couples have their own homes. Their parents' financial help was important in the whole process of purchasing these homes, and this could be understood as a reflection of 'descending familism' and an entirely privatized approach to families. Further supporting this argument, the analysis also reveals a change in traditional family norms, where the groom's family were typically responsible for offering a home to the soon-to-be married couple. In terms of home purchase, both the parent and adult only-children's generation shows a tendency

towards individualisation. In some families, the negotiations underpinning such purchases lead to misunderstandings and tension between the generations. This suggests that the influence of property purchase on parent-child relationships cannot simply be concluded that purchasing properties will lead to good parent-child relationships.

5.2 Chinese Marital Home Background

Two young people separate from their natal families respectively, and walk together to establish a new family of their own. And the marital home is regarded as a significant sign of the establishment of the new family. In China, a marital home could be regarded as the beginning of the couple's newly-formed family (Wu, et al. 2012). In Chinese culture, the symbolic meaning of a marital home is revealed by the two following aspects. On the one hand, the purchase of a marital home is symbolically related to an individual's 'face'. One's face is closely related to one's dignity and status. The face not only plays a symbolic role in interpersonal communications, but is also related to individual self-identifications (Zhang and Zhang, 2007). Due to the economic value of housing properties, the quantity and quality of properties often become an important reference to evaluate one's or others' social status (Zhang and Zhang, 2007). Therefore, people who own expensive and high quality properties typically also have good individual and

family reputations. Conversely, those who do not own residential property are usually perceived of as failures in their careers and as lacking financial resources. As a result, they and their families will 'lose face'.

On the other hand, the marital home is, to some extent, influenced by the value placed on property ownership in Chinese society. China has traditionally been an agricultural country, and land has had a vital role in agriculture. As a result, love of the land is deeply rooted in Chinese ideological value system (Wang and Wu, 2007). At present, Chinese enthusiasm for real estate is interpreted as an expression of their love of the land (Wang and Wu, 2007). In modern cities, the investment in real estate is hence not only financial, but also emotional, which combines closely individual affective needs with fixed property forms (Wang and Wu, 2007). In this context, the weight that is placed on the purchase of a marital home becomes clear. Whilst it can be viewed as merely a space that is related to an important life stage, the marital home is also a material entity representing the performance of roles, the desire for status and emotional sustenance, and as such it is imbued with human emotions and values (Wu, et al. 2012).

5.3 Marital Home Burdens under Increasing Housing Prices

As discussed in the introduction chapter (Chapter 1), China has witnessed great changes in its housing system over the last seventy years. From 1949 to 1978, almost all urban citizens were eligible for public housing that was built and distributed by their work units and government for low rents (only 1%~2% of family incomes). However, this policy laid an enormous burden on the government and work units. In 1978, the Chinese government began to reform housing policies, and housing increasingly became commercialised and privatised. In 1988, the Chinese government raised rents to reduce financial burdens. The Chinese State Council issued a circular in 1998, which specifically encouraged the gradual marketisation of housing distribution. With the release of this document, the 49-year-old housing system, where dwellings were distributed as collective welfare, became history (Jia and Liu, 2007). Since then, with increasingly soaring housing prices, China's commercial property market has begun to develop at full speed.

At present, China's first-generation only-child couples with children are typically at the start of their career lives, and many of them cannot afford a marital home. However, the demand for property amongst this group is significant. Lower-class and even the middle-class families experience considerable financial pressure when attempting to buy a marital home. The down payment itself could swallow up all of the savings of two generations in a family. The high-priced marital home thus constitutes a significant burden for both the

older and younger generation. As a result of this, housing purchase in contemporary China is usually the result of negotiation and decision-making between family members.

When it comes to marital homes, many respondents claim that their families are willing to make some sacrifice to afford a property, regardless of their economic conditions. For example, Mr. An's (P24H) family was not rich, but they purchased a marital home for him before the marriage, with his parents putting together the deposit for the home. He said:

My family is not rich and my parents do not have much life savings. When it comes to my marriage, they became extremely anxious about the high property prices. All the newly-weds are supposed to have their own new dwellings, and thus, it will be purchased sooner or later. Additionally, the earlier the property is purchased, the less we will pay in rental. We searched a lot of second-hand flats, instead of newly-built communities, on the internet. And we finally decided to buy a furnished old flat. All my parents' savings were consumed as a down payment. You know, the sum of money was originally prepared for my parents' retirement lives.

As Mr. An's father (P24HF) said:

At that time, we had to confront the expensive housing price with little savings. But we have only one son. We cannot let him have no new dwelling after he got married. By the way, we cannot be looked down upon by my daughter-in-law's family. We gave him all the money to cover for the down payment, and he had to rely on himself for the rest. Now we cannot help him even if we want to. It now appears that it would have been much more relaxed

to raise a daughter than a son.

Although coming from a family which is not rich, Mr. An's father still took it for granted that he was responsible for helping his son secure a marital home in the run up to the wedding. He was anxious that the bride's parents would look down on him if he could not afford a home for the couple. He thus used all of his savings to make a down payment on as good a home as he could afford. Mr. An's father also suggests that it would be easier to have raised a daughter, which suggests that *who* is responsible for providing the marital home is gendered. Based on these concerns, he committed to fulfilling what he said as his responsibility towards his son and his daughter-in-law. However, it was not only poor families who felt the financial pressure stemming from these responsibilities.

The majority of families in the sample typically borrowed money to buy homes, due to the economic constraints and investment considerations. Most families in the sample did not make one-time payments for these properties. However, Mr Li (P5H), who is from a relatively rich family, stated that his family paid in full for his marital housing.

My parents wished me to enjoy a brilliant wedding and they bought me a nice flat in a good location. They paid in full in case we would suffer from the financial pressure from the loan. They even sold one of their flats to raise enough money for the new one. The decoration and furnishing almost cost all the money my parents prepared for my wedding. They

originally planned to travel abroad just after retirement, but now they changed their minds due to their economic condition.

The family were clearly under pressure when providing the full payment, with his parents making considerable sacrificed such as selling off other properties and reducing their living expenditures by, for example, cancelling travel plans.

These two cases suggest that, because of families' limited savings and skyrocketing property prices, the purchase of a marital home has become a highly interconnected premarital project in a family. Without their parents' help, a marital home is an inaccessible fantasy for most young people. Even with the family's economic support, the stress from buying a home can hardly be ignored. The phrase 'house slave' is emblematic of many of these stresses (Nan, 2011). A 'house slave' refers to those who purchase properties through mortgages, committing 40%-50% of their income to pay the mortgages over a long period of time (typically more than 20-30 years) which makes them live under long-term pressure (Nan, 2011). High-priced marital homes thus clearly bring considerable psychological and economic pressure to both individuals and families.

Without their parents' help, only-child couples were not in a position to purchase their own marital homes at the beginning of their married lives. As discussed above, most of my participants bought marital homes with their parents' financial

support, and this can be regarded as a type of family wealth transfer, from parents to children. Tianjin's high housing prices have exerted a tremendous burden on parents, but this did not have too much impact on the children's expectation that their parents would support them in purchasing their homes. Requests for high-priced marital homes thus became a cause of tense parent-child relationships in many families in the sample.

5.4 Who will Pay for the Marital Home-- Only-Son or Only-Daughter?

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, 24 out of the 30 couples in the sample had bought their own flats with support from their parents. In 14 of these families, the only-sons' parents made the down payment or bought the dwelling outright. In 7 families, the parents of only-daughters made the purchase, while in the other 3 families, both sets of parents combined resources and paid for the marital homes together. What is important to emphasise here is that in most cases the marital homes are purchased by only-sons' or only-daughters' families. However, this does not mean that their partners' families did not contribute to the purchase of the marital home at all.

Among families in which the husbands and his parents bought the homes, Ms Ye (P22W) argued:

It is unquestionable that men are supposed to buy the home. It is the same all over the world. I cannot imagine marrying anyone without a place to live. How can a man guarantee a woman's married life without offering a dwelling?

Ms Ye strongly believed that it is a family norm that husbands are supposed to offer marital homes. Mr. Lian (P22H) similarly noted the gendered norms as to who was responsible for providing a home by saying 'men are definitely obliged to purchase houses. It is a default rule despite the high house prices'. Another informant, Mr. Lv (P13H) stated:

Although my parents are not rich, we are still determined to raise money to purchase a property regardless of the size and the location. Men have to satisfy the women's parents on the housing issue. If I did not buy the flat, my mother-in-law would surely give me dirty looks.

According to Mr Lv, his parents-in-law would not approve of their daughters marriage to him, and would look down on him if he could not afford a marital home. The data thus shows that more marital homes are purchased with the help of the men's family, although meeting this responsibility is increasingly difficult for many men and their families, due to increasing housing prices. In this context, women are increasingly playing a more direct role in the housing market. If the man's family fails to offer a satisfactory marital home, women's families appear to be increasingly willing to step in

and support their daughter and her husband in the purchase of a new home.

Amongst the women's families who initially purchased properties for the newly married couple, the belief that the husband and his family were responsible for the purchase of the marital home remained strong. Parents in these families observed that men ought to buy the marital homes. However, before the wedding, they had strongly considered the possibility that they would have to pay for the marital home, because they observed that their daughters' fiancé's families were not very affluent, and would probably not be able to afford to help out. This seemed to be the case for Ms. Xu (P2W):

We have fallen in love with each other since we were on campus. I knew clearly about his family status, and discussed it with my parents. His family could offer only 60,000 yuan for our marriage. At the beginning, my parents disagreed with our wedding, and they preferred a well-matched marriage. But at last they approved of our marriage at my insistence. As my husband's family could not be counted on, the marriage home was completely prepared by my parents. Anyway, only my name is on the property ownership certificate, as it were, to be on guard against my husband. We all knew it, but no one would talk about it openly.

Her mother (P2WM) also discussed buying her daughter a marital home:

My daughter found a partner who is from a poor

family. As we can hardly count on him to purchase the marital home, we have to buy it ourselves. Seriously, it was definitely a correct decision to buy our daughter a flat then. Over these years the housing prices have risen at a horrible speed. It will never be a loss to buy a property, especially for our own daughter. We want to give her an economic guarantee for the future. When her father and I get old, we cannot help her more but leave her a property. Besides, our accommodation will belong to her in the future as well. She thus will have two properties in total.

Ms. Xu's mother regarded it as a good decision to purchase her daughter a flat, but throughout the interview she kept pointing out that she bought the property for her daughter, without mentioning her son-in-law. Considering that Ms. Xu's parents objected to her marriage at the beginning, and they only put their daughter's name on the property ownership certificate, it appears that the mother was not satisfied with her son-in-law being unable to afford the marital home.

As suggested above, the data also revealed another situation, whereby the men and the women purchased their marital homes together. In some cases, the men's families had limited economic resources and were only able to buy homes that were unacceptable for the wife-to-be and her family. Under these circumstances, the women's families stepped in to help with the purchase. Wang Lan (P16W), an only-child wife said:

When we were planning to get married, my partner's family made it clear that they would offer us a marital

home. When they showed me the flat, which was small-sized, remote and inconvenient to get to work, it was far away from my imagination. After my parents saw the flat, they felt unsatisfied as well. Then they made half of the down payment with my husband's parents together to purchase another new property. I did not feel very satisfied whenever I thought of it. I wished to marry a man with a good economic status but finally they could not fulfill what promised me. In the end, I still had to ask my parents for money.

However, her father, Mr Wang (P16WF), told me that he did not believe it unacceptable to help his daughter with buying a house:

We have only one daughter, and we wish she would live a happy life. Honestly, we are not wealthy enough to make the full payment for the property. As we are a working class family which does not have a high income, and we had to consider our future life, we told our daughter then that we could only help with up to half of the down payment. My daughter was considerate and never asked us to help her with the marital home. But the property her husband's parents offered was inappropriate to live in as a marital home, because it was in a poorer condition than our present one. We have only the one kid. We offer her help when necessary, and she will definitely be grateful for it.

Wang Lan's family was finally involved in housing purchase, but Wang Lan's words suggest that she was disappointed that her husband's family could not provide her with a satisfactory marital home. In the other case outlined above, it was Ms. Xu's mother (P2WM) who appeared discontented with her son-in-law. As mentioned above, a total of 7 only-

daughters' parents offered marital homes. In 5 of these cases, the parents purchased the properties as marital homes knowing that their daughters were going to get married. However, in the other 2 cases, the parents bought properties for their daughters not explicitly for marriage preparation, as seen in the following example.

Ms. Ji (P21W) studied in a university in Tianjin, and continued to work in this city after her graduation. After she decided to stay in Tianjin for long-term, her parents thought it necessary to buy accommodation in Tianjin for their daughter. Ms. Ji said:

I will feel relaxed only when I own my property. One of my friends used to quarrel with her husband, and her husband asked her to get out of his house. She was sad and came to me crying. At that time I began to think that a woman should have her own accommodation.

Her mother expressed similar opinions:

My kid lives in Tianjin, far away from us. It feels like roaming outside if she does not have her own place to live in. We did not consider buying her a property as a marital home, but just for living. No matter how her career is, she will at least have her own property. If she marries someone who has a property, her accommodation can be kept for us when we get old and move to Tianjin. If she marries someone who has no property, it is not a possibility that they will have nowhere to live. It is never easy for a woman to work far away from her family. We cannot help her too much in her career or other things, but at least we can do something to remove some of her

burdens. Luckily, we bought her the flat then. My son-in-law grew up in Tianjin, but he did not own a property. After they got married, he moved to my daughter's property. Nowadays most young people are eager in the pursuit of material wealth when they are hunting for Mr. Right. However, I think the personality and characteristics should be the first priority. Although my son-in-law is not from a rich family, he is diligent and hard-working. He does almost all the housework and he is good at cooking. Whenever we go Tianjin, he treats us very well.

Ms. Ji's mother was not dissatisfied that her son-in-law could not afford to offer a marital home, and on the contrary, she praised him a lot for his behaviour. Ms. Ji's husband (P21H) said:

The flat now we live in was purchased by my wife's parents a long time ago. Before we got married, I told my wife that I could not afford a new property, but she did not care too much. She said it would be enough to have a place to live in, no matter whom it belonged to. I, as a man, live in my wife's property. I owe her a lot.

In this case, the adult children and their parents have a relatively good relationship with each other and the stress of buying a marital home did not bring strains to their intergenerational relationships. Due to Ms. Ji's husband's feeling of ashamed and gratitude, he put a lot of effort into his relationships with his wife and parents-in-law. All of these cases, where the parents paid for marital homes for their daughters and son-in-laws, illustrate that whether actively or

passively purchasing the properties, some females began to act as buyers in the marital home market.

Among the 7 families in which the parents of only-daughters assisted with the purchase of marital homes, only 2 families did not consider the purchased property as a marital home. In other words, the other 5 sets of parents purchased the properties on the premise of knowing their sons-in-law were unable to afford a marital home. The remaining 14 couples in the sample who owned their own home had been enabled to do so through the support of the husband's family. This clearly suggests that, although some only-daughters' parents provide significant support in the purchase of marital properties, the majority of marital homes are typically purchased by the husbands' parents. Such patterns are reinforced by the existing family norm that a 'good' husband should be able to afford a marital home.

In my view, this issue is reflective of how the push for gender equality is simultaneously challenging but also reinforcing gender stereotypes. There is an increasing number of Chinese women strongly advocate the gender equality nowadays. During the interviews, some female respondents asked rhetorical questions such as 'why do women have to obey men's opinion?', 'what are the men doing, when women get pregnant and give birth to children?', and 'what is wrong about having a daughter?' Questions such as these suggest their dissatisfaction with the fact that modern women

continues to be overwhelmingly responsible for the family and domestic duties. Despite such statements and the increased awareness of gender inequality, many of the women comply with traditional social norms whereby women 'belong' to men. This is particularly evident when it comes to discussions about *who* should be responsible for the purchase of marital homes—many respondents still believe that men and their families are primarily responsible for buying these homes, and the data suggests that the majority of people adhere to these norms. Additionally, in many only-daughters' families who purchase the marital homes, both parents and daughters still suggest that they have undertaken the responsibility which belongs to the husbands. This can be understood as a stereotype that is linked to the notion of the 'male breadwinner', a gendered norm that puts responsibility on the male head of the family for financially providing for his family. It is another kind of gender stereotype to require the male to purchase the properties and support their families, just like asking the female to do the housework and take care of their children.

The role of the parents in the whole process of property purchase is significant, even if a husband or wife contributes most of the money for the property. Many parents expect that they will give their children a sum of money to purchase properties sooner or later and they will not feel relaxed until they buy one. This idea reflects the parents' perception of realistic risks and the 'descending familism'. Many parents

show their concern about their children's future marriages, unstable careers, and fierce competition in the market economy. They buy their children a property in order to offer them stable accommodation in this risky world. Additionally, due to the fact that one family has only one child, the property purchase, to some extent, promotes the intergenerational relationships between parents and children. During the interviews, many parents mentioned that they had only one child, and they could not pass the burden to others. As a result, many parents purchase their children's dwellings based on considerations of their parent-child relationships. Given that this is an important factor motivating parents in their purchase of marital homes, it raises questions about how this financial support influences generational relationships. The following examples address this issue.

5.5 How Purchase of Marital Home Affects Parent-Child Relationships

Among the interviewed families, the husbands' parents were more likely to take responsibility for property purchases than the wives' parents. Li Ming(P12H), for example, told me:

At the beginning, my wife and I found a flat which we both liked, but when discussing with my parents, they preferred another property in another residential community, because it was located near my parents' home. They deemed it a convenience

to take care of each other. However, the flat which we selected enjoyed good property management and environment. Besides, it had its own fitness centre. My parents even phoned my parents-in-law to ask for their opinions. They told us that they would unconditionally support my parents' idea. Finally, we picked the flat which my parents preferred.

Mr Li's family clearly took the main role in the purchase of the marital home and paid for it. In cases where the wife's family did not provide money, the family seemed less likely to raise or voice any objections, as Mr Li's mother-in-law (P12WM) suggests:

My son-in-law's family bought the flat, and as a result, we did not express any opinions, irrespective of its location or its size. Those who pay make the final decision. Besides, we did not live in Tianjin, and it was inappropriate to be that choosy.

However, Mr. Li's wife (P12W) voiced her dissatisfaction about the involvement of her parents-in-law in the couple's choice of housing:

The flat was bought for us to live in, instead of them, but his parents made the final decision. They were used to making decisions, and they seldom listened to others' opinions. Nevertheless, I had to comply with them, because I was dependent on them helping us with the housing purchase.

Mr. Li's father (P12HF) did not mention this incident that occurred during the process of buying his son a marital home, and he probably did not realise that other family members

might have a problem with his decision-making. In fact, he seemed quite satisfied with the accommodation that he chose for his son's new family:

Young people at his age seldom have their own properties and do not need to make a payment on a loan every month. Provided young people purchase properties all on their own, they will have to get into debt for decades. As a result, many families will choose to live together, even if their children get married. Our economic status is fine, and it is thus not necessary for our kid to live a hard life.

In this case, the only-son's parents offered financial support to purchase a marital home, and therefore, the only-son's parents held the decision-making power. Even though some family members were not fully happy with the decisions that were made, it was not appropriate for them to voice their dissatisfaction, due to their economic dependence on the husband's parents.

Across the sample, there were a lot of similar situations, whereby the parents' financial help with the property purchase resulted in family conflict. For example, Mr. Chen (P14H), his parents and parents-in-law gathered the deposit for his marital home together, and he has to pay a large sum for the mortgage every month. His wife (P14W) and his mother (P14HM) complained about each other in the interview context, specifically over the housing issue, and as time passed, their relationship became strained.

Mr Chen runs a small take-away restaurant where I met he and his wife. Mr Chen's wife, Meiling (P14W) was not satisfied with the property her parents-in-law purchased for her family, saying:

They lived in a big flat themselves, but bought us a small one with a loan. Other parents always leave big flats for their children. What makes me unhappier is that they always think they offered us a great deal of help. After they made the down payment, they told me that they had taken all the available money out, and asked us not to ask for help any more. You know, my parents also made part of the down payment, but my parents told me that we could ask for their help at any time. That must be the difference between one's own parents and parents-in-law. My parents-in-law must deem me a debt collector. But we are actually living on a shoestring budget. We hardly have anything left after paying the mortgage and spending on our kid.

In contrast to this, Mr Chen's mother (P14HM) claimed:

The housing price is now so expensive that even if we take all the money out we could not buy them a satisfactory flat. If they want to change a bigger one, they are expected to work hard and save money. It is impossible for us to put everything in place for them. You know, when I got married to his father, we had nowhere to live but the company-distributed quarters which even did not have a private toilet. We have earned what we have today, and if we spend all the money we have, we have to live as past. Besides, no matter how good the flat you buy, there will be always someone else living in the better ones. You can never make a picky person happy.

Confronted with the conflict between his wife and his mother,

Mr. Chen (P14H) felt quite helpless:

Actually I knew my wife was unsatisfied with our marital home long ago. Once when we came back from my friend's home, she talked to me with a lot of implications. I felt upset for not arranging for my wife to live in a satisfactory accommodation. Honestly speaking, my parents' economic status was better than that of my parents-in-law but they did not help us much. My parents made half of the down payment which was the same amount as my parents-in-law paid. Once I did not have enough money to pay for the loan and I asked my mother to lend me some money. However, she only gave me the money for the loan repayment. Later my father-in-law gave me some more living expenses money. There are more cases like this. Besides my wife, even I was dissatisfied with my parents sometimes. After all, they are my parents, and it is their freedom to do whatever they like. I cannot and will not bother them.

Mr Chen suggests that he feels ashamed at not providing satisfactory home for his wife. These feelings appear to have impacted on his relationship with his parents. The strains in their relationships is reflected not only in terms of housing purchase, but also on other issues. For example, when asked how often they met, Mr Chen told me that, as he was busy, he would visit his parents about once a month. And when asked about the issue of child care, Mr Chen's mother said that they were in such poor health that they were incapable of taking care of their grandson. It is evident that although Mr Chen and his wife live in the same city as his parents, they do not meet each other often. The conflicts in his family appear to have stemmed from negotiations about the marital

home. Based on their need for elderly care in the future, Mr Chen's parents said they refused to provide he and his wife with too much of their savings. However, Mr Chen and his wife deemed his parents misers because they did not offer Chen sufficient help.

Although tensions and misunderstandings appear to be common across the sample, Mr. Chen's case is unusual among the 30 respondent families. Many parents complained in interviews about their children's requirements for homes, but most of them helped their children as much as possible nonetheless. Because they considered their potential dependence on their children in the future, they strived to maintain harmonious relationships with their only children. Mr. Chen's parents are relatively rich among all the respondents, and it is likely that this reduces their economic dependence on their son and daughter-in-law. Due to their confidence in having a good future life, they dare to say no to their son and daughter-in-law, unlike many interviewed parents who care about their children's opinions and sacrifice their own interests to meet their children's requirements.

Whilst some members of families may be happy with the housing situation whilst others are unhappy, multiple members of Mr Shao's (P1H) family are all dissatisfied with the marital home. Because they did not have enough savings, Mr Shao's parents could not purchase a decent dwelling when their son got married. They gave Mr Shao their

renovated flat as his new home, and then bought a second-hand one-bedroom flat for themselves. Before the wedding, Mr Shao's wife, Jinjin (P1W), never voiced her dissatisfaction to anyone. However, after marriage, especially after her daughter was born, she constantly expressed her wish to move to a bigger flat:

At present, it makes me feel extremely insecure that both my flat and their flat are under my father-in-law's name. My parents-in-law are very smart. Neither of the flats belongs to me, and I have no property in my name. Commonly, the husband's parents purchase the marital home for marriage and both the husband's and the wife's names are written on the property ownership certificate. However, it is quite the opposite in my case where my parents-in-law keep a firm hold of the property. Now the only way is to sell the current flat where we live, and ask my parents to give us some more money to buy a new one. And it will be reasonable and appropriate to add my name to the ownership certificate.

Mr. Shao himself also complained about his small flat, saying that both he and his wife advised his parents to sell both of the flats and buy another big flat. Mr. Shao also told his parents that he would give them a grandson, if they bought him a bigger flat. He deemed that his idea would make perfect sense:

My parents, actually, want to have a grandson very much. They envy those who give birth to sons. But a requirement for raising another child is a large accommodation. My wife, my daughter and I are now living in a flat with two bedrooms which will not be large enough if we give birth to another child. We

mentioned this issue to my parents several times, but they all vaguely changed the subject.

Mr. Shao's mother (P1HM), who was a laid-off worker, quite clear about her rejection of her son and daughter-in-law's plans:

We have already given them the better and bigger flat as their marital home, and we moved to this shabby small flat. You see, our living room is also the bedroom, and tea table is also used for dining. The next room is the kitchen, and the small-sized toilet is just located next to the entrance of the flat. I also feel embarrassed to let my relatives and friends to visit me in such a small place. Is it the ideal place where we want to live? Frankly speaking, I think they are insatiable. They clearly know our family's economic status. They want to live in a big flat all the time, but the question is 'Can we afford it?' Once when we participated in a Man Yue Jiu³ held by one of my relatives, my son told me in front of many people that he would let us have a grandson only if we bought him a larger flat. It made me extremely ashamed. I do not ever want him to give us a grandson. You know, I take care of my granddaughter every day. I will be tired to death if I have to look after another grandchild.

Mr Shao's mother in this case was clearly discontented with her son and daughter-in-law. Mr. Shao's parents were retired and lived on their pensions. In order to meet the young couples' desire for a bigger flat, the older couple would have to use up all their pension savings. Mr. Shao's parents felt

³ A party for relatives and friends to celebrate the newborn baby's first month of life.

angry and helpless, arguing that their greedy and selfish son and daughter-in-law put their own desires first, clearly ignoring their parents' economic status. In this family, the individualised young people are making some 'strategies' to utilise family as a tool to meet their individual demand. This case is similar to Yan (2003)'s proposal of the 'triumph of conjugality', discussed earlier in this chapter, which suggests that conjugality has defeated the vertical parent-child relationship. Families still exist, but individualistic young people are more concerned about their personal requirement rather than responsibilities for their parents and the whole family. Young people achieve their personal and family happiness through looting their parents' fortune (Yan, 2003). However, the parents in this family are also showing some characteristics of individualism because they are also take some actions to secure their fortune such as keeping the only-son's father's name on the property ownership certificate and they are not compromising with their son and daughter-in-law's requirement.

Whilst these cases have clearly illustrated some points of conflict over the purchase of a marital home, many couples in the sample discussed their gratitude for their parents' contributions, rather than expressing dissatisfaction. This is particularly evident in Weiwei's (P18W)' case. Weiwei is a architect and I met her in her home where belongs to a very good school district.

When my daughter, Qianqian, reached school age,

we went to find out about the primary schools nearby in advance. We found that none of the schools in this area were selective schools with high-quality education or good facilities. My daughter would lose out at the very beginning if she failed to study in a good learning environment. I thus discussed the issue with my parents and parents-in-law and suggested purchasing a flat in a good school district. As my parents always supported my idea, I only worried that my parents-in-law would disapprove. After all, they bought us the flat where we were living then, and they also spent a lot on the decoration. I feared that they would think me insatiable if I asked for purchasing a new flat. Then I came up with some ideas. For example, sometimes I read them some news of tragic events which happened in some bad schools, and forwarded them some articles on WeChat on the importance of children's education environment, in order to gradually change their minds. The school district housing was really expensive, and I heard from a real estate agent that we would need to spend over 1 million yuan more on a smaller-sized and second-hand flat, even if we sold ours. It took the whole family a long time to think about it, and one day my parents-in-law gave me a debit card with a deposit of 1 million yuan. I was very touched and grateful, and I would always remember that.

Weiwei's mother-in-law (P18HM), a retired staff in a university, also spoke of helping her son's family with the school district housing:

I was actually a little reluctant to help them to purchase another flat. The first flat, which cost most of my savings, was just purchased for their wedding, and well decorated. Therefore, I disagreed with her at the beginning when my daughter-in-law referred to the flat change. I did not think it necessary to send the kid to the best school at the very beginning.

Even though the teacher did not teach well, we could hire a private teacher at home. Besides, there were a lot of extracurricular lessons which we could choose for the kid. But having more considerations I thought I could not obstruct my daughter-in-law's plan, in case of the situation in which my granddaughter became a poor student due to the bad education quality of her school. She would blame me for that for the whole life if it came true. Nowadays it is difficult to be mother-in-law and much more difficult to be a qualified mother-in-law. Luckily, at that time I still had some more savings which could be used to help her. Moreover, a school district property can maintain its value, we will not lose money even if we sell it to change another one in the future. We all did this for the kid, and my son and my daughter-in-law were also grateful for what we did. So why not offer the kid a good education environment? In my opinion, it is much more beneficial for us to sometimes comply with children's opinions rather than object against them with parents' authorities all the time. My son and my daughter-in-law treated us pretty well after that. They paid for our vacation tours, and often bought me gifts.

Instead of putting family interests as a priority, the individual respondents in this family pay more attention to their individual identity and relationship with other individuals, making the most favourable choices after shrewd analyses. Although Weiwei's case above is not directly related to the marital home, the process of their flat change also reflects the negotiations and choices of the property between the two generations. At a cursory glance, it appears that Weiwei's mother-in-law has sacrificed herself for the next generation, but her generosity has actually resulted in a reasonable and advantageous settlement. Moreover, when I met this family

together, I observed that they interacted harmoniously with each other. During the separate interviews with each family member, they did not voice complaints or dissatisfactions. However, behind these good relationships lay their separate analysis on the advantages and disadvantages of sharing resources and their maintenance of their relationships, instead of blind sacrifices and contributions. This can be interpreted as another dimension of individualisation in Chinese families.

5.6 Only-Child Families without Purchased Marital Home

This chapter has so far focused on cases in which parents help their children with the purchase of marital homes. However, not all the parents in the sample are economically capable of affording their children's marital homes. A total of 6 only-children couples do not have their own marital homes; 3 of these couples live with their parents, and the other 3 live in rented homes. Zhang Yi (P9H) lives with his wife, child and mother, and this case is one example of the families who co-reside:

My father passed away many years ago, and it was really hard for my mother to bring me up alone. My family does not have the ability to buy a new property, and my wife is also from a common family which does not have too much money. In my opinion, since I could not afford the marital home, I could not

force others to purchase one. Now I find it pretty good for us to live with my mother, who always helps us with the childcare and housework. Besides, this property will belong to me in the future. It, thus, is unnecessary to buy another property. Just enjoy life.

The 6 families that were unable to purchase a marital home were all positioned in the lower socioeconomic classes. Most of the couples do not typically express any tensions caused by their parents' failure to offer marital homes. They likely have a clear awareness of their own family status, and thus could well understand their parents' or parents-in-law's situations. Due to their recognition of their own economic status, they did not hold unrealistic and high desires about the marital homes before their marriages. Some respondents without properties told me that they might consider a property purchase as economically appropriate in the future, but they would not think about it at present.

5.7 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has demonstrated that, generally speaking, a family usually plays an active role in the couples' purchase of a marital home. In many of the families participating in this research, the parents help their children afford these properties, even against the background of soaring housing prices. The housing purchase can thus be interpreted as a kind of distribution of family resources. If parents invest their economic resources into their children's homes, they usually have to spend all or at least a significant

portion of their savings. If parents refuse to help their children, the parent-child relationship may be negatively affected. Given the importance of this for intergenerational relationships, one of the most important issues in my research is how only-children settle any problems regarding marital housing following their marriage.

Parent-child relationships within Chinese only-child families are clearly influenced during the purchase of marital homes. On the road of individualisation, the young generation gradually gain freedom and power in their family lives, pursuing a good quality of life. For example, most of the children participating in this research chose to live independently away from their parents after their weddings. Some couples even discuss and reach an agreement with each other prior to negotiations with parents. Individualism-oriented young people pay more attention to their newly-established families instead of their natal families. When they feel dissatisfied with the marital home, they may successfully improve their living conditions by asking for further support from their parents. Some interviewees use their parents' deposits to purchase their properties away from their parents in order to escape their parents' constraints and achieve their personal happiness. Some parents are reluctant to meet all of their children's demands. Some parents are anxious about being exploited, and try to secure their own futures by ring-fencing their savings for their future care, rather than spending it in the present on their children's properties. From

this perspective, both the parent generation and only-child generation show a tendency towards individualisation, when facing some problems such as housing purchase where misunderstandings and tensions may appear between the two generations.

However, not all of the children in my sample suffer alienation from their parents because of tensions over the purchase of these properties. On the contrary, family relationships are maintained and reinforced through parents helping their children with accommodation in some families. With the reform of the housing system and the development of housing market, the challenges that individuals face as a result of these social reforms are often alleviated through parent support. Some scholars (Jones, 1993; Goodman & Peng, 2004; Gough, 2001; Holliday, 2000) posit that in East Asian societies that are influenced by Confucianism, commonly held values such as filial piety generally mean that families play a significant role in offering welfare. Some scholars find that although there are many different kinds of political and economic systems in East Asia, housing marketisation occurs together with the redevelopment of family culture (Forrest & Hirayama, 2009; Izuhara & Forrest, 2012). Housing prices in this part of the world have been increasing rapidly and unstopably and it becomes more and more difficult for young people to independently solve the housing problems, especially in some big cities in East Asia, like Beijing, Tokyo, and Seoul. These challenges, to a great

extent, reinforce young people's reliance on their family resources, and as a result, a family becomes an important means to supplement personal welfare. However, a family cannot be simply regarded as a mechanism to help individuals solve personal difficulties. The analysis presented here shows that individual family members are often concerned about their relationships with other family members, and it is these considerations that influence their decisions around the purchase of marital homes. Buying the properties or not is significantly influenced by the value that children place on their relationships with their parents, and the kinds of compromises they are willing to make.

The analysis in this chapter has demonstrated that purchasing properties does not automatically lead to good parent-child relationships. Every family has its own story. In some families where parents could not afford marital homes, the children did not have any complaints, but showed sufficient understanding and tolerance instead. On the other hand, there are tensions amongst some families where the parents were in a position to buy their children properties, with some parents describing their children as insatiable, whilst some children think their parents are selfish and mean.

Therefore, both the process of housing purchase and its subsequent effects may bring about tension. When exploring the situation of purchasing a property, some scholars (Zhong, 2015; Zhong & He, 2015) pay more attention to the positive

influences which caused by the family members' cooperation. However, this chapter shows that this kind of cooperation and support will not necessarily provide the impetus for harmonious intergenerational relationships. During the process of individualisation in Chinese families, as a consequence of the high uncertainty of interactive relations among individuals, the conflicts, negotiations and compromises between the two generations cannot be ignored when it comes to housing purchase.

Having learned about the negotiations underpinning the purchase of marital homes, I believe that some parents play a decisive and dominant role in their children's housing purchase. Whether to buy a property or not, to a great extent depends on whether the parents have accumulated sufficient wealth, and whether this wealth is available to support these only-children. There are 6 families in the sample who failed to purchase their marital homes, as it is impossible and unrealistic for them to afford one. Moreover, the chapter also demonstrated how other parents, who were in positions to help their children, refused to give more on the basis of not wanting to be economically exploited by their children. These parents also made their old age security their first priority, compared to others who eagerly and actively involved themselves into their children's marital housing purchase. Instead of selfishness, many children show their gratitude to their parents' sacrifices and contributions, repaying their parents in their daily lives. From this perspective parents'

support for children's housing could, to some degree, offer closer parent-child relationships. Hence, it is different from the argument proposed by Yan (2003) that children's exploitation of their parents' resource would lead to distant generational relationships. This difference in findings may well stem from methodological differences between mine and Yan's research—my research is based on contemporary, urban, only-children families, whilst Yan focuses on general families in rural areas in China. Although the quantity of my sample is not large enough to be representative of all the urban only-children's families in contemporary China, these cases discussed in this chapter could, to a certain point, faithfully reveal the complex relationships between adult only-children and their parents in different families. However, parent-child relationships are not expected to be determined simply by the purchase of marital homes. These intergenerational relationships are also influenced by living arrangements more broadly, and the following chapter focuses on the negotiations underpinning living arrangements for the families participating in this research.

6 CHAPTER SIX: LIVING ARRANGEMENTS IN ONLY-CHILD FAMILIES

6.1 Introduction

Only-children's marriage is both the starting point of their new families, and an important life event that means they may leave their families of origin (Wang, 2008). Children leave their natal homes for different reasons, such as education, careers, property purchases, and marriage, and marriage is understood to be one of the most common reasons for departure from the family home (Wang, 2008). From a family life course perspective, once children leave the home for marriage, the parents witness the size of their own families shrinking and their children's new families forming and developing (Peng, 2002). The living arrangements of children's families can be understood as one of the most significant factors influencing the links between parents' families and children's families. These arrangements will also impact the dynamics of the parent-child relationship (Wang, 2008).

Newlyweds in contemporary China increasingly choose to live in nuclear families. However, research on family living arrangements in Chinese society have generally focused on the relationships between elderly care and living

arrangements (Yan, et al, 2001; Yao, 2001; Zeng and Wang, 2004), or emphasize the tensions caused by two generations living together (Wang, 2012). Through their emphasis on elderly care issues, they have neglected the decision-making processes that take place between the two generations regarding their living arrangements and the influences that living arrangements have on intergenerational interactions and relationships. Indeed, the majority of the thirty families participating in my research live in nuclear family structures, where most of the only-children couples prefer to live independently from their parents while only eight couples live with their parents. Either independent residence or intergenerational co-residence is closely related to adult children's personal willingness to live with parents and economic status, and greatly influenced by resource differences between couples and between parents, by parents' elderly care requirements and expectations, and also by the cultural traditions of Chinese society (Wang, 2008). In order to understand intergenerational interactions upon living arrangements, it is therefore necessary to start from the only-children couples' living arrangements, and the impact that distances between residences have on parent-child relationships.

The decision-making related to parent-child living arrangements is far more complicated than general family decision making, such as household expenses, deposit investments, and children's education (Freedman et al, 1994).

Such family decisions are usually made by the couples separately or together based on the balance of their interests, and seldom involve any others outside of the family. However, newly-weds do not make decisions on living arrangements independent of their parents' views (Freedman et al, 1994). As each member of the couple are from different natal families, they are obliged consider the arrangements for taking care of four parents after their marriage (Freedman et al, 1994). The Chinese government still provides very little support for elderly people which makes most of the ageing parents have to rely on their children for their elderly care (Xu & Feng, 2012). When the couples live together with or near one set of parents, it is less possible to live together with or near the other set. The living arrangement of the nuclear family is the result of contests among family members under many different considerations, which possibly be determined after the family's negotiation (Zeng and Wang, 2004). Family negotiations and power interactions about parental care responsibilities not only exist between generations, but also between the husband and the wife (Lee, 1994). The decisions made about living arrangements, therefore, cannot be understood if the essence of these power interactions is ignored.

The existing literature on parent-child living issues mostly discusses this within patrilineal families, and focuses on sons' elderly care behaviours instead of daughters' elderly care behaviours (Yao, 2001). Scholars rarely pay attention to how

the living arrangement decisions are shaped by power interactions among daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, and parents of the couples who are not lineal relatives by blood. In response to this gap in the literature, this chapter illustrates the collective negotiations between both families regarding living arrangements. Compared to existing literature which commonly focuses on the issues of lineal parent-child living arrangements, my research concerns the interaction between husbands' families and wives' families, and the constellation of family members who have a stake in these decisions.

6.2 Decision Making Process on Living Arrangements

My participants' living arrangements can be divided into two groups: those who live away from their parents and those who live with their parents. Some of the only-children purchased their marital homes by themselves or with the help of their parents, while others live in rented residences. As mentioned above, although most only-children couples live independently, eight young couples still live together with their parents. These can be further divided—two couples live with the husbands' parents and four couples live with the wives' parents. The remaining two couples' parents take it in turns to live in in the couples' home in order to provide childcare support. Given the variations in the sample, it is

useful to examine what factors are influencing whether young couples live with their parents or not.

6.3 Only-Child Couples Co-Residence with Parents

In the following cases the two generations live together with the only-son's parents. Mr Huang (P17H), for example, lives with his parents because of financial factors. As illustrated in the following quote from Huang's mother, Huang's parents planned to purchase two neighbouring small sized flats so that their son and his family could live close by. However, their plan was not realised and the two generations eventually came to live together.

It is a little crowded for five of us living in such a small flat. But our home is in a convenient location and it only takes me a few minutes to walk to the market downstairs. In the evening I can go *guangchangwu*⁴ with my friends. My son works near our home and he can have lunch at home every day. So it is not too bad to live here. Anyway, the condition is much better than that of Beijing and Hong Kong. You know, the housing price has been soaring up rapidly these years. Those who do not buy a property now will hardly be able to afford one in the future. Six years ago, two neighbouring one-bedroom flats were on sale in my community, although their size is small. His dad and I planned to sell our present property, and take some more

⁴ 广场舞 public square dancing

money to buy the two flats, one of which could be given to my son as his marital home. In that case we could live next to our son, keep everyone's privacy, and look after each other. We had already made the decision, but the seller sold the property to a higher bidder. As a result, the property purchase was suspended. But, unexpectedly, we could not catch the increasing speed of housing prices. Nowadays, we dare not imagine to buy a property at such a good location in the city centre. It is also not cost-efficient to rent a flat. Their salaries cannot cover raising a child and renting a flat at the same time. We can do nothing but save money. They have to rely on themselves if they want a new flat.

Mr Huang's mother clearly planned to live away from her son. However, these plans did not come to fruition due to family's economic limitations.

Discussing their living arrangements, Mr Huang said:

When we live together my mother does all the housework and takes care of my kid. Every day when I come back home my mum has already prepared a meal for me. Isn't that great? My mum talks a lot and cares about a lot, but she is in the age of menopause (laughs). Honestly, we could save a lot of living expense because of living together with my parents. I give my mum several hundred yuan for grocery shopping every month and I can save the rest of my salary. Luckily, my wife has a good temper and has no complaints about living with my parents the whole time.

There are clearly a lot of advantages for Mr Huang to living with his parents, from saving money and not worrying about the housework. Whilst Huang suggests that his wife finds the

arrangement satisfactory, it is worth examining how she discusses her living situation.

There is no choice but to live with his parents, as we cannot afford a flat for ourselves. We will live in great pressure if we have to pay a loan every month. Moreover, even the down payment is an astronomical figure for us. I once thought about renting a flat, but my mother-in-law, who considered it a waste of money, did not agree with it. When my kid grows up, I will definitely move out to live on my own. Now we are living in a two-bedroom flat. We take our kid to sleep in one bedroom, while my parents-in-law live in the other. I do not think it is good for my kid to sleep with us all the time. Besides, in the hot summer I have to be well dressed at home because my parents-in-law live with us. Moreover, sometimes I feel like an outsider to the family, as they are my husband's parents who have been looking after him for over 30 years. I just begin to have contact with my parents-in-law after I got married. There will be inevitably many contradictions in life, but I have nobody to pour them out to. I cannot confide my emotions to my parents-in-law, because I do not want them to think that I eat their food, live in their flat, but am still picky. On the other hand, I cannot tell my husband as well, because he is a straight-out person who does not know how to hide his feelings. It makes no sense if I force him to choose a side to stand on, and I do not want him to be blamed by both sides. It would be good for me to neglect annoying troubles. I do not have a good job now, and my parents can hardly help me more. So I sometimes listen to what my mother-in-law says, and avoid of quarrelling with her. It will be embarrassing to have a fight with those who live under the same roof with you.

These comments suggest that, contrary to Huang's insistence that the family living situation is agreeable to all,

Mr. Huang's wife Xiaoling is not particularly happy about these arrangements but instead hides her dissatisfaction. Because Xiaoling lives in her parents-in-law's home, she receives a lot of help from them, and thus feels that any expression of her discontent is disrespectful. Although living together brings about many conflicts, Xiaoling considers her relationship with her parents-in-laws from her own view as she represses her feelings to avoid conflict with her parents-in-law and her husband. In this family, although the three generations currently live together, this living arrangement could be seen as a compromise to their financial status as both Mr Huang's mother and wife showed a preference of living separately.

Among the sample, four only-children couples live with the wife's parents on long-term basis. Mr Zhang (P10H), for example, lives with his father-in-law in order to give him elderly care. Following the death of Mr Zhang's mother-in-law in 2014, his father-in-law remained in his hometown. However, he was in poor health and could not take care of himself:

My father-in-law has lived with us for almost a year. We cannot leave him in his hometown alone in such a health condition. It is expensive and inconvenient to hire a housemaid to look after him. Now my wife does not go out to work because she is looking after our kid at home, and she can thus take care of her father as well. Her father may feel embarrassed so that he often gives us some money. Actually it is not bad to live with him. He is a quiet man who always watches TV and reads books in his bedroom every day. He is never fussy about what we cook, or

disturb our daily life. It is obliged for us to take care of him, because he gave us some money for the down payment on our flat. He is a poor man being left alone after my mother-in-law's death. He has only one daughter, and we will be the last persons who will look after him.

Living with parents due to declining health conditions was not a common experience amongst the sample, since the majority of the interviewed only-children's parents are in their 50s and 60s, and do not need too much support from their children in their everyday lives. Mr Zhang (P10H) described a good relationship between him, his wife and his father-in-law and this may be due to his father-in-law being 'not fussy'. Moreover, he also usually gives his daughter and son-in-law money to compensate his daughter's loss of not going to work, thereby reducing any potential for conflict over finances within the family.

Mr. Zhang's father-in-law (P10WF) spoke slowly but not clearly. Taking his health condition into consideration, I did not ask all the questions during our interview. When it came to living with his daughter, he said:

I am old and become a burden to my child. I can offer them nothing but some money. My daughter does not cook well, and my son-in-law will cook the breakfast and lunch for us before he goes to work on weekdays. He will also make the dinner after he comes back home. He does not like eating pork, and he thus never cooks pork. I don't mind. People cannot be too picky especially when they get old. They buy me a small TV in my room. They can have their privacy and I can also enjoy my time.

Although Mr Zhang (P10H) lives with his father-in-law, they have their own spaces, and there is not any obvious tension in their family relationships. Besides, the father-in-law in this family did not take the young couple's care for granted, on the contrary he gave some money to them as reward. This is different from the traditional family norm which it is children's duty and obligation to take care of elderly parents.

Ms. Kuang, Yingying (P4W) is a teacher in a middle school. She has her own flat in the same city where her parents-in-law live, Tianjin, whilst it takes her six hours to drive to her own parents' home. Since Yingying had her baby, her parents moved to Tianjin to help her with childcare. Mr Kuang, Yingying's father, retired from a state-owned enterprise. Reflecting on their living arrangement, Mr. Kuang said:

My son-in-law is from Tianjin, and my daughter thus insisted to move to Tianjin after her marriage. Originally I did not plan to move here. I like to live quietly and it is not convenient to live with so many people. Now my daughter is pregnant again, and my son-in-law is busy working, and always goes on business trips. My wife has her hands full to take care of our daughter and grandchild, and I thus moved to Tianjin to live altogether. Now we live in the flat which was purchased by us for our daughter's marriage. Fortunately, it is large enough for us to live in. It is very convenient for us to take care of our daughter and grandchildren. It also good to be close to my daughter and son-in-law as now we live together, who said 'the married

daughter is like the poured water'⁵? We feel that we do not lose our daughter, we also get a son!

Mr Kuang was not planning to living with his daughter's family at first and he preferred to live independently. However the demand of his daughter made him moved to Tianjin. Mr Kuang's daughter, Yingying, likes to live with her parents:

I think it is wonderful for a big family to live together. After my child goes to kindergarten in two years, everything will be fine. But at present I can hardly take good care of him all by myself. Now I live with my parents, and I feel much more relaxed. I do not need to do housework because of my mom. When we were just married and my parents lived in my hometown, I can only see them every couple of months. Before we had our first child, I discussed with my husband about whether we could bring my parents to Tianjin to live with us. At the beginning he suggested to ask my mother-in-law to take care of me. But I told him that I would find it more convenient if my mother looked after me, and that my mother was good at taking care of children. As a result, he telephoned my parents and invited them to move to Tianjin. You know, now we are happy to have dinner and chat together every day.

From the above sentences from my interviews, both daughter and father seem to be considerably satisfied with their present living arrangement. Before making the decision about co-residence, Yingying discussed this with her husband, and he agreed to her proposal to invite her parents to live with them. Yingying's father specifically mentioned that

⁵ Chinese saying of a married daughter no longer belongs to her natal family.

he paid for his daughter and son-in-law's residence, and as a result, he did not feel inappropriate to live there. However, when discussing his present living arrangements, Yingying's husband, Mr Liu, suggested that he was not completely happy with the present living arrangements:

When my parents-in-law lived in their hometown, we did not usually go back to visit them because of our busy jobs. Before we had our first child, my wife suggested to me that we invite her mother to take care of the baby. If her mother came, her father would absolutely come, because her father could not live without her mother. In fact, I thought we could hire a baby-sitter if we could not take good care of our child. And baby-sitters are very popular at present. But my wife insisted on asking her parents to come, and she might have the baby soon at that time. I did not want to make her angry then, and my mother-in-law often called me to ask when I need her to come to Tianjin. As a result, I followed their suggestions and brought my parents-in-law to Tianjin. I think that my parents-in-law will move back to their hometown as soon as our children grow up. I do not think we can keep living together all the time.

Mr. Liu would clearly prefer to be living with his wife and baby separately from his parents-in-law, seeing their support as easily replaceable by, for example, a paid babysitter. In addition to this, Yingying mentioned that her husband suggested that they invite his mother to look after their child. Despite this, Mr Liu did not propose clear opposition to the present living arrangements, possibly because his marital home was purchased by his parents-in-law. However, his mother was more vocal about her dissatisfaction with her

son's living arrangement:

When they just got married, they often came to my home. But they, especially my daughter-in-law, seldom visit me since they lived with my in-laws in recent years. Conversely now I have to visit them when I want to see them. Once I asked her mother if it is fine for her home in the hometown to be left without care for such a long time. But she told me that what she was most concerned about was her grandson, and she had ignored all the other things.

It seems that Mr Liu's mother is not very pleased with her son living with his parents-in-law. In her opinion, her in-laws appear to 'occupy' her son's family and home. When Mr Liu's mother implicitly asked whether they would move back to their hometown, her son's mother-in-law missed the implication and expressed her wishes that she would keep staying in Tianjin to take care of her daughter and grandchildren. As can be seen by the different views expressed about this family's living arrangements, children's marriages clearly play an important role in maintaining both the relationship between the two children and the interactions amongst the three families. It also appears that, in this case, the interactions between the young couple and four parents, both the two parents' families expect to gain an advantage in the relationship between them and their children.

Four of the couples live with the wives' parents like Yingying's family, twice more than those who live with the husbands' parents. My data shows the changing family norm of

patrilocal residence which challenges Yang and Li's (2009) arguments which it is still common for newly-weds to live with the husband's parents after they get-married . As described earlier in this chapter, Mr Kuang (P4WF) lives with his daughter's family while Mr Zhang (P10H) also co-resides with his father-in-law. Only-daughters could still keep a close relationship with parents after they get married. Although the sample number is small, the comparison suggests that the traditional patrilocal residence is no longer prominent in terms of only-children's living arrangements. Xu (2013) analysed living arrangements of children and parents based on data collected from 25 provinces from the 2010 Chinese Family Panel Study (CFPS), and reported that throughout the country, 69.1% of couples lived independently, 27.6% of couples lived patrilocally, while the other 3.4% lived matrilocally. The proportion of patrilocal residence is about eight times as big as that of matrilocality. Based on this, Xu (2013) argues that matrilocality is not a noteworthy living arrangement in contemporary China. In contrast to Xu, who focused on families based in rural and urban areas, my research is based solely on urban only-child families, which may explain the differences in our findings.

Similar to the situation of Yingying's (P4W) family discussed earlier in the chapter, Mr Chen (P3H) and his wife also have their own flat and still live with their parents. But unlike Yingying's family, both sets of parents take turns to live with Mr Chen and his wife.

Both of us are busy working, and thus our parents come to help us with our child in turns. It seems like they go to work in my home, usually in shifts every half month. Hah! Both of us are only-children, and our parents have no one else to worry about in the family except us. Moreover, all the four parents are retired, and they have nothing to do at home. It can be regarded as an exercise to help us take care of our child.

Both sets of parents raised no objections to the arrangement of living with their children in turns. Mr Chen's mother thought it made sense for both the families.

You know, my daughter-in-law's parents and us all live in Tangshan. It takes us about two hours to drive to Tianjin. My son and his wife set up their home in Tianjin, which is not far from us. When we had our grandson, we began to come here to take care of him, and usually lived with them for two weeks. When we felt tired, we could go back to our own home to have a rest, and ask my in-laws to take our place. We cannot do all the things all the time, especially when our present health is poorer than before. I think it is fair enough for both families to come to Tianjin in turns. In our community a lot of parents complain that they look after their children and grandchildren all the time. In comparison our living arrangement is much more reasonable.

All the six family members are in agreement that both sets of parents will take turns to live with Mr Chen's family. Parents on both sides express no dissent in living with children together. Another family in the sample which I describe in the grandparenting section (see Chapter 7), Dr. Gao's daughter,

Fangyuan, has also negotiated similar living arrangement. These two families have two things in common: the adult only children originally live distantly from their parents, and they have strong demand for childcare. Whilst other families in the sample rely on grandparents for childcare (see Chapter7), what is unique to these families is the living arrangements brought about by the need for childcare. In both the cases of Yingying (P4W) and Mr Chen (P3H) above, the preference is that only-children couples would not live with their parents as soon as their new families are established. The intergenerational living mode is changed by the demands of taking care of the third-generation family members. At this point, the intergenerational relationship inclines to the grandchildren and this could be seen as a trend of descending familism, similar to Yan's (2016) research in Xiajia village where he found that the norms of filial piety were changed by abandoning unconditional obedience and submission from the children to the parents' generations, thus paving the way to intergenerational intimacy.

6.4 Only-Child Couples' Independent Residence

Impacted by individualisation, the proportion of generational co-residence shows a constant drop (Feng, 2006). This research confirms these findings, with the majority of children and parents living separately from each other in 22 families.

Even without purchasing a marital home, three couples in the sample still moved out of their parents' homes to live in rented accommodation. Among those who lived away from their parents, some of the couples live near parents of one side, while very few of them live near parents of both sides. In my finding, living in proximity can be regarded as an alternative to generational co-residence. In such cases, the married couples can enjoy their independent living space, whilst simultaneously performing filial piety and showing respect to their parents and receiving help with childcare. Because of the advantages of such situations, the below extracts demonstrate that an increasing number of people prefer this kind of living arrangement in which they live in proximity to their parents.

When Ms Ye (P22W) got married, her marital home purchased by her parents-in-law was still under construction, and she had to live with her parents-in-law whilst waiting to move into her new home. However, due to the challenges of sharing a home with her in-laws, she and her husband moved out to rented accommodation less than a month after their marriage:

When our wedding was coming, my marital home was not ready on schedule. As a result, I had to live with my parents-in-law. It was fine for us to live together at the very beginning. But after a few days, I began to feel it was unbearable to live with them. We had different lifestyles and different timetables. Sometimes we came back late after a movie, but they went to bed early. We had to be extremely quiet

in case we would wake them up. Sometimes we did not take a shower to avoid any noise. Moreover, we had different food preferences. I did not like what they cooked, but I could not always ask my husband to eat out with me. Besides, my parents-in-law zealously opposed eating out. It was so annoying. We almost had no common interests even in watching TV. They preferred watching dramas, while I like watching variety shows. It is inappropriate to change the channel to watch what I like when we watch TV together. Therefore, only a few weeks later I discussed the matter of moving out with my husband because I was afraid of quarrelling with my in-laws. It really required hard thinking. At first I needed to make my parents-in-law realise the inconvenience of living together, and then I had to do some ideological work with my husband. Actually he did not prefer to still live with his parents especially after he got married. Later we moved to a rented flat which was near my parents-in-law, and we can walk there in a few minutes. When my husband discussed with his parents, they agreed with him.

When talking about the marital home, Ms. Ye's mother-in-law said as follows.

My son lived with us when he just got married, but soon he moved out to another place. I guessed my daughter-in-law might not get used to living together with us. Actually, I thought it would be much better for us to live separately without disturbing each other. Luckily, they live near us, and our grandson goes to the kindergarten in our community. And I can pick him up after school every day. My son and his wife sometimes come to my home to have dinner after work, and take their son back home then.

In this case, the generational co-residence changes into

living in close proximity. At first Ms Ye thought a lot about moving out, and asked her husband to negotiate with her parents-in-law. As it turned out, this did not cause tension between the generations since Ms Ye's mother-in-law also did not prefer the two generations living together. Living close together, yet independently, was therefore a satisfactory arrangement for the two families.

Some researchers also argue that many elderly people prefer neolocal residence which makes them become neighbours of their children (Du, 1998; Zeng and Wang, 2004). When parents are economically independent and have their own residences and savings, living independently makes them much more relaxed and comfortable. Neolocal residence maintains an appropriate living distance between children and parents, and causes less conflicts and contradictions in parent-child relationships. For such reasons, neolocal residence was one of the most popular living modes among all the interviewed families. Some young couples choose to live near the husbands' families, while some select to live close to the wives' families. However, whose parents the young couple lived close to triggered another round of family negotiations.

Mr Zhou is an engineer in a research institute. Before Mr Zhou (P25H) got married, his parents bought him a flat, about 5-minute walk from his parents' home. Before Mr Zhou and Ms Zhang (P25W) got married, Zhou's parents clearly told

them that the flat could be used as their marital home. However, Ms Zhang's parents still insisted to buy another new marital home for her, which is located much closer to Ms Zhang's parents.

That flat we purchased for my son's marriage is located near my home. We have only one son, and we want to live nearby in order to take good care of each other. To tell the truth, I am not willing to let my son live in the flat bought by my daughter-in-law's family. It takes us two hours to get to their new home. By the way, it makes me feel as if my son has become others' son, because he lives so close to my in-laws. Due to the fact that my grandson lives near his grandparents-in-law, I am still extremely worried that my grandson may prefer my in-laws to us. (P25HM)

Mr Zhou's (P25H) parents bought him a flat specifically because of its close proximity to their home. They assumed that this would keep their son geographically close to them. Yet Ms Zhang's father (P25WF) bought his daughter and her husband a different flat specifically so his daughter would remain close to him and his wife, revealing some of the tensions involved in decisions about *where* to live. The following sentences are from my interview with Ms Zhang's father:

My daughter told us that we did not need to buy a marital home, because my son-in-law's family had one old flat. At first, I felt quite good, because it could save us a large sum of money. But later I knew that the flat was a second-hand residence which was located near my in-laws in the suburbs of Tianjin. In my opinion it would be much more convenient to live

in the downtown area than the outskirts. By the way, if my daughter lived in that place, it would not be convenient for her to either visit us frequently or go to work in the city every day. Therefore, we insisted on buying our daughter another new home, and we borrowed some money to make it happen at last. Now they send their baby to us before going to work in the morning, and grab a dinner here after work. We gain a lot of fun and they harvest convenience.

Ms Zhang's father (P25WF) and Mr Zhou's mother (P25HM) both have very different preferences about where their child should live, they both desire that their children live closer to them. For this reason, Ms Zhang's father spent a lot of money to buy a marital home for his daughter. This suggests that parents' economic resources play a vital role in the decision making of their children's living arrangements. Like Ms Zhang, some other only-daughters arrange their residences in proximity to their natal families, since they are not restricted to the norms of traditional patrilocal residence.

Adult children living in proximity to their parents is a new type of living arrangement in contemporary China. In fact, for both parents and children, living in proximity can offer support to both sides, and effectively avoid potential challenges and tensions caused by co-residence. Bian et al. (1998) argued that in mainland China, parents and children who lived in proximity typically engage in mutual care and regular visits every week. The authors also argue that the geographical distance between parents and children directly influences the frequency of how often children took care of their parents. At

that time, Bian et al. (1998) also believed that being chronically impacted by the traditions of patriarchy, Chinese parents preferred to live close to their adult sons. In contrast to such findings, my research finds that the phenomenon of patrilocal residence is not a significant factor in shaping the living arrangements of only-children families. The role differences between daughters and sons in elderly care have gradually narrowed down with the sharp reduction of fertility rates and increasing gender equality (Yi, 2016). Across the sample, daughters maintained contact and dependency on their natal families after their marriages, instead of the alienation described in Bian's research I mentioned above. Furthermore, these findings illustrate the changing norms around gender in contemporary China, where the traditional roles of sons and daughters appear not to significantly influence the choice of where to live of these only-children families. However, the strength of patriarchal norms may still influence responses to certain types of family arrangements, just like Mr Liu (P4H) who was not satisfied with living with his parents-in-law.

When only-children couples live close to parents of one side, they sometimes will live relatively far from the parents of the other side. If parents of both sides live in the same city, proximity will not be a sensitive issue. However, when parents of both sides live in different cities, those parents who live far away from their children are commonly understood as 'empty nesters' (Zhao & Xu, 2003). In this regard, the spatial distance

reflects and influences people's social distance (Du, 1998). Since some of the parents in this research live lengthy distances from their adult children, it is worth exploring if the spatial distance between the generations influences their interactions and mutual support?

Six pair of parents in my sample lived distantly from their children, and they have very limited say in their children's living arrangements. Ms Li (P5W), for example, lives in Tianjin, about seven hours car drive from her parents' home. After graduating with a Master's degree, Ms Li got married and employed in Tianjin, and can thus be considered as one who lived a long distance away from her parents. Ms Li's mother (P5WM) said:

My daughter went to Tianjin, so far away from home. To tell you the truth, I did not agree with her at the very beginning. We raised her up and we were not willing to let her go that far. But after her graduation she got a wonderful career opportunity in Tianjin. She could never find such a good job in our small county. She was excellent enough to stay in the big city, and we could not constrain her at home. Now she works hard and we seldom urge her to come back. It makes me comfortable and pleased that she often calls me. When we miss her so much, we will take a train to Tianjin.

Ms. Li's daughter (P5W) expressed her guilt towards her parents during the interview:

I am the only daughter in my family. Now I feel sorry for my parents because I live so far away from them.

As a result, sometimes I make some material compensations to them. My husband understands my feelings. Sometimes when I want to buy something for my parents online, he asks me to pay with his credit card. When my parents come to Tianjin, my husband treats them very well. As he treats my parents well, every time after he buys something for my parents, I will buy my parents-in-law some gifts. Everyone is happy then. Fortunately, nowadays telecommunication can connect every corner of the world. We usually make phone calls, or FaceTime, and chat through WeChat every day. Sometimes when I want to cook something, my mother will teach me through FaceTime, as if she is around me. Actually I do not think it a problem if we contact each other frequently. When I was at home, I always quarrelled with my father because he had a bad temper. Now we live far away from each other, but we feel much closer to each other.

There are some parents like Ms Li's mother across the sample. Their children live in Tianjin, a long distance from them, and their children were not in positions to offer them help and support in daily life. However, some parents did not completely oppose their children's living choices. On the contrary, when it came to their children's employments in Tianjin, they were proud of the professional achievements and capabilities. Although they did not like their children living away from them, these parents did not ask their children to stay around them or come back frequently, understanding the pressures their children were under in their work and daily lives. In this context, these parents actively and reluctantly chose to live independently without disturbing their children. Taking the family background into consideration, it becomes clear that most of these parents live in small towns or rural

areas, and their family conditions are inferior to those of their in-laws. As a result, when their children chose to live away from them, they had few objections. Some parents even told their children not to return to live in their small hometown when they found good jobs in big cities. The choices of these 'empty nesters' are actually their choice to confront the reality.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I analysed the living arrangements of only-children couples and their parents by discussing some typical cases. The twenty-two couples living independently from their parents occupy a dominant proportion of the sample of families. Moreover, the living arrangements of these families tend to be neolocal residence, which conflicts with Feng's (2009) argument that only-children are much likely to live with their parents because they are easily dependent on their parents' childcare and domestic support.

Not only do young only-children couples tend to live independently, but this chapter also reveals that many parents also say that they prefer to live independently from their children. This discussion reveals the tendency towards individualisation in these only-children families in terms of living arrangements. Although these findings are not representative of all the first generation of only-children families, the findings nonetheless demonstrate people's

desires to live separately, and most families actually did so. Some respondents who could not live separately due to objective limitations also expressed their desires to live in a nuclear family.

My findings also show that some conflicts exist significantly between parents and children in the families where they live together, although this was not true across all families in the sample. For example, Mr. Zhang (P10H) and his wife live with his dependent father-in-law, but they both described harmonious relations. This appears to be related to the characteristics of their living arrangement. Although they live together, Zhang's father-in-law does not get completely involved in the young couple's life, regularly offering his daughter and son-in-law private space by retreating to his room. Living under the same roof, they can offer help to each other, but also keep their own privacy.

In contrast to some literature (e.g. Bian et al. 1998) contending that living distantly leads to distant parent-child relationships, the findings in this chapter demonstrate that parents and children separated by vast distances often enjoy much more harmonious parent-child relationships than those who live together or live in the same city.

Intergenerational conflicts may decrease and parent-child relationships may be positively promoted when only-children live separately from their parents. In these independently-

living only-children families, many children choose to live in close proximity to their parents. The discussions and negotiations among three families are not often evident in this kind of living arrangement. However, this chapter has highlighted some of these discussions and negotiations underpinning such living situations, illustrating, for example, how some parents in weak positions may offer to make compromises for the sake of their children.

Although the sample is limited in terms of its representativeness, this chapter has revealed the tendency that parents and children prefer to live relatively independently. The limitations of my sample selection may have led to the low proportion of families who co-reside, since the couples are relatively young, and most of their parents are in good health. Some of the parents are still at work, and the eldest one is about 70 years old. As a result, these parents currently have low demand for their children's care. Whilst the findings illustrate that neolocal residence is a significant type of living arrangement amongst the sample, as time goes on, care needs may change and the proportion of co-residence may rise. In this event, both the husband and the wife may need to simultaneously take care of four parents and their own young children. It can thus be imagined that participants' future living arrangements may be far more complicated than present ones.

7 CHAPTER SEVEN: GRANDPARENTING IN ONE-CHILD FAMILIES: GRANDPARENTS WORKING AS CAREGIVERS?

7.1 Introduction

When only-child couples have their own children, the childcare work becomes a priority in the family. In contemporary China, there is no public childcare system, and childcare, especially for children under three, is typically the responsibility of family members. Under these circumstances, how is childcare distributed among only-child couples and their parents? Who takes responsibility for the bulk of childcare? And what happens if couples and their parents are all in employment? What kind of pressure is exerted on both generations? In this chapter, I describe the varying childcare arrangements of the families in my sample. Across the sample, most of the only children rely on their parents to take care of their own children. However, many of their parents did not deem it an obligation or responsibility to raise their grandchildren as some literatures claim (Goh, 2009; Li, 2003) with many of the grandparents even regarding it as a heavy burden. Both the only-children and their parents demonstrate some of the characteristics of individualisation when it comes

to their accounts of their childcare arrangements. However, I also show in this chapter that the grandparents typically compromise and take on a lot of the work of caregivers to their grandchildren.

7.2 Background of Child Caring in China

In contemporary China, many problems in the public sphere, such as the shortage of public support resources, and the insufficient welfare system, that influence the predominance of the phenomenon of grandparent-centred childcare. Grandparents are typically the main childcare providers to young children, especially young pre-schoolers. Preschool childcare can be divided into two stages: before three years old, and after three years old. Before three years old, children are mostly taken care of by their families, while after this age, they are typically cared for by both kindergartens and families (Luan & Rao, 2012). In China, kindergartens usually do not accept children under three. This has its roots in the industrial development and urban construction that took place in many big cities in China. During the planned economy period, increased numbers of women entered the workforce and many enterprises set up kindergartens for their staffs' children (Mu, 2004). Taking children to work became one of the most common routines for many urban industrial workers at that time. However, this arrangement gradually faded away towards the end of the last century and, unlike the work unit

welfare system, employers are no longer responsible for offering their employees' children nursery schools. Instead, the heavy 'burden' of providing childcare was increasingly farmed out by companies due to China's shift away from communism towards marketization (Mu, 2004). However, the shift away from employer-provided childcare shifted the 'burden' of childcare directly onto their employees and their families (Mu, 2004).

The Chinese government has not yet proposed any systematic and operable policies and measures to help families with childcare, especially dual-income families who usually struggle with balancing their careers and childcare (Chen, et al, 2011). Existing policies on children's welfare usually prioritise abandoned and street children. However, the government has not developed social care services for children from ordinary families. As a result, without state or employer support, most families have to take care of their children within their families which raises issues such as time and manpower.

China's parental care provisions also have an impact on childcare arrangements. According to China's current regulations, female employees can take 98 days maternity leave (The State Council of P.R.C., 2012), whilst there is no universal provision for paternal leave, with different provinces offering differing entitlements for new fathers. For example, according to Tianjin welfare policies, male employees are

entitled to seven days of paternity leave, but only if they choose to have children late (Tianjin Government, 2005). Such relatively short provisions for parental leave raises questions about who will be responsible for childcare as soon as parents return to work.

Hiring babysitters seems like an ideal option for those families who are unable to take care of their children independently. However, a barrage of negative news on babysitters has gradually diminished public trust in this group. For example, recent stories have been published about babysitters' abuse of children, including reports about babysitters who feed sleeping pills to children to make them sleep or beat children if the children are crying (Zhang, 2016; Zhang, 2017). As a consequence, many families do not see babysitters as a safe and reliable solution to their childcare issues. Turning away from babysitters, parents could look to organisations providing for young children. However, the majority of organizations that are available for children mainly focus on early childhood teaching instead of child caring. Moreover, due to the shortage of public funding, many kindergartens are expensive. Childcare, especially for those under three, thus takes place within the family unit, often becoming a burden for many families (Luan & Rao, 2012).

When only-child couples have their own children, they depend more or less on their parents' support whether they are economically-independent of their parents or not. In the

meantime, their parents seem to be the most appropriate ones to take this job. Grandparents play a dominant role in childcare across contemporary China (Goh, 2009), but the experience of this differs amongst the families participating in this research. Some only-child couples expect their parents to help with childcare, while others talked about concerns they had about their parents' involvement in their children's upbringing. On the other hand, some grandparents actively offer to take care of their grandchildren, while others see it as a terrible burden imposed on them by their children. The impact of the third generation is hence an important factor to consider in a research project that focuses on parent-child relationships. Moreover, this chapter examines how the families in the sample negotiate childcare.

7.3 The Arrangement of Grandparenting

Grandparenting is very common among my interviewed families. Lihua (P7W) and Mr Yao (P7H) are both working busily, their first daughter Lanlan was brought up by Lihua's mother, and now Lihua has a younger daughter. Different from Lanlan, the younger sister Anan is now taken care of by Mr Yao's mother. Lihua's mother is quite satisfied with their childcare arrangement.

My elder granddaughter will go to primary school this September. We wished to have a grandson in the family but surprisingly, we got another

granddaughter. After all, it is good to have two children to accompany each other. Both of their parents are only-children who played alone in their childhood. My elder granddaughter has been the only-child in my family for 6 years, and as a result, at the beginning she emotionally conflicted with her parents when she heard that she would have a little sister or brother. She was afraid that we would love the younger child more than her. Nowadays children have too many thoughts. Before Anan was born, and we made a deal with my daughter that her parent-in-law's family would also take charge of grandchild's care. As the first child was raised by us, now it would be their turn to look after the second one. We, after all, took the advantages of the deal. We began to raise our elder granddaughter six years ago when we were still energetic and healthy, and we can thus enjoy a relatively easy life now. You know, it is not an easy thing to take care of children, and therefore, we let their other grandparents look after them this time. Although I still have to take Lanlan to school, I am quite satisfied now.

This extract clearly illustrates that Lihua's mother is happy with the shared childcare arrangement. Her son-in-law's parents have the primary responsibility for looking after the second baby, meaning that she did not have to 'devote herself' to caring for the new-born grandchild on this occasion. However, how did they get the 'chance' to take care of the first-born granddaughter and 'retire' when the second granddaughter was born? The interview with Lihua (P7W) reveals some of the negotiations that led to these arrangements.

My parents-in-law do not speak Mandarin which makes me worry about my daughter's language learning and accent. My parents-in-law are not

educated people, and that was another reason why I did not want them to look after my child at that time. Besides, I think it's much easier to negotiate with my own parents and therefore I asked my parents to help take care of my older daughter. It is really a long journey to raise a child. As my parents are not in a good health condition at present, I think it is time for my parents-in-law to take the baby caring work. For both my husband and I are only-children, it is not equal for my parents to do all the work.

This extract illustrates that Lihua thinks it is 'fair' for her parents to look after the first child and her parents-in-law's to take primary responsibility for the second child. The 'worries' that made her unwilling to ask for parents-in-law's help following the birth of her first child, did not seem to trouble her after she had her second child, or at least she did not disclose this in the interview context. Lihua saw her parents-in-law as an alternative choice, especially since her parents were not in a good health condition. Moreover, from her interviews, she does not plan to look after the second child alone because she thinks it is the grandparents' responsibility to look after the grandchildren.

Whilst daughter and mother seemed quite happy with the childcare arrangements, Mr Yao's mother (P7HM) is not completely happy with being responsible for the second grandchild, saying:

Now I spend almost all my time on my second granddaughter. Unlike in the past, there is no more nursery school at workplace, and people cannot take their children to office. Everything about

childcare now can only be coordinated within the family. When our first grandchild was born, I asked my son if they would like me to look after her. My son told me that it was a tiring job, and he would let his mother-in-law to do more caring work. To be honest, we were happy to hear that. Since then his mother-in-law moved to live with them together. At that time, I thought I was free from troubles, and sometimes I went to help them with some cooking. But my daughter-in-law required too much, and she asked me to speak Mandarin to Lanlan. However, I have spoken Tianjinese my whole life. I thus felt a little bit embarrassed at their place. Now her grandpa and I look after our younger granddaughter almost every day. The young couple live in their own place on weekdays, leaving their younger daughter with us. They pick her up to take her to their own home on weekends, and send her back in the afternoon or the night on Sunday. Frankly speaking, sometimes I feel that this daughter was born for us. (She laughs). They live a comfortable and easy life, but their father and I have to be busy with the child. I still remember one Sunday afternoon when we were at a friend's place, my son called again and again to hurry us back home quickly. They sent their daughter to us earlier than before because they were going to have dinner out. We had to hurry home without finishing our dinner with friends. But when we were at home, we thought it unfair for us. Why cannot they take their daughter together with them? I finally have a relaxing day, but we cannot live relaxed... You know, the less trouble the better. If I talked to them, they would consider it as complaints. And I will count on my only son in the future. After all, we did not offer much help with the first child, and I do not want my daughter-in-law's family to find fault with us in terms of childcare. As a result, I will do whatever they ask me to do now.

Evidently, the intensity of this childcare arrangement has become a burden that the only-son's mother feels obliged to

continue providing. This case is typical in my sample because although most only-child couples rely their parents with the childcare, they seldom send their children to live with grandparents from Monday to Friday. Living with the grandchild increased this grandmother's burden. She has reluctantly accepted the mission of childcare, and controlled the dissatisfaction to the young couple in order to maintain their relationship. Also concerned with maintaining relationships, Mr. Yao (P7H) provided another perspective on the childcare arrangements within his family:

When we had our first child, my wife did not agree with my mom looking after the child. She thought the growth environment was very important for the little kid, and she did not want our child to learn Tianjinese from my parents in her childhood. But I thought she was afraid that the childcare would result in contradictions between my mom and her, and as a result, she found an excuse to exclude my parents from the first childcare. The reason why I thought so was because when we had our second baby, she never expressed the worry about our second baby learning Tianjinese from my parents. In addition, we are too busy to take care of our children. She works in a foreign company and I am busy working as well. My wife's mother clearly proposed that the second child was supposed to be taken care of by my parents. So we left our second daughter with her grandparents. Luckily, my parents have retired, and I think childcare is a good way for them to kill time.

This particular family have not communicated with each other about the childcare arrangements, but the final arrangement has been made. Mr Yao and his wife play a significant role in

the whole decision making process around the care for their two daughters. However, it was not apparent in the interviews whether the couple had taken their own roles as parents into consideration when arranging childcare. Instead, they both consider their parents as responsible for taking care of their children. Mr Yao believes that childcare could 'kill time' for his parents. This suggests that young parents' concept of parenting is undergoing great change. With self-awareness and individualism increasing, the traditional Chinese family norm of filial piety has gradually changed. Based on this data, young only-child parents appear to be increasingly striving for freedom and personal development, and this can be achieved by taking full advantage of their parents' awareness of duty towards their children and grandchildren.

However, some scholars believe that in the deep-rooted idea of family ethics, old people in China regard it as ideal for them to take on the primary responsibility for their grandchildren's care (Goh, 2009; Li, 2003). Under the influence of this tradition, old people perceive grandchildren-care as family extending and continuity of a clan, and as a result they gradually form a new mind-set of dedication to not only their grandchildren but also their children (Chen, et al, 2011). This literature suggests that grandparents offer to undertake the responsibilities of caring for their grandchildren, devoting their remaining years to every stage of their grandchildren's growth. In the process of caring for their grandchildren, the elderly become happy and at peace (Fanti, 2011; Young,

2014; Song, et al, 2013). However, my data challenges such simplistic views of grandparent care, showing at the very least that the grandparents' 'selfless dedication' is not applicable to all only-child families. Across the sample, many of the grandparents do not think it is their obligation or responsibility to raise their grandchildren. Some of them suggest that childcare is forced upon them by their children.

Many families in the sample are similar to Mr. Yao's (P7H) case outlined above. For example, when Mr. Xiong (P30HF) and his wife were asked to take care of their grandson, Mr. Xiong developed a plan that enabled him refuse his son's request. Mr. Xiong (P30HF) was a retired leader of his company, who could receive an appreciable sum of pension every month. Despite this, he looked for a part-time job after taking care of his grandson for a few months. During the interview, he explained his reasons why he chose to work again after he retired:

Since my grandson was born, his grandma has moved to live with him, being busy with cooking, washing clothes and cleaning the room every day. When I retired, our one-year-old grandchild was sent here to live with us. The little boy was so naughty that we could hardly find any moment of quiet. It would be OK if we only look after him for a few hours in a day, but I really could not bear it for all the time. Sometimes as soon as I put food into my mouth, he would drop his bowl to the floor. Sometimes as soon as I took a nap he would cry loudly. Now I would rather go to work than stay at home looking after my grandson. My wife was cruelly tired as well, plus she is not in a healthy

condition. I do not think she could do cooking and the other household work for a long time. So I personally do not agree with looking after our grandson all on our own. We are old now, and we need to enjoy our later life. My wife always asks me to take her travelling when we have time. But how can we have time if we have to look after the child all the time? If they want to hire a babysitter, we could pay for it. But it is impossible to leave the child with us all the time. However, you know, it is inappropriate to refuse to care for our grandchild directly because it seems to be a tradition for grandparents to do this. I thus told my son that as we were old we planned to purchase a new flat with an elevator, and I needed to go to work to earn more. As a result, my grandson was not left for us all day long any more.

Contrary to some literature (Fanti, 2011; Young, 2014; Song, et al, 2013) , Mr Xiong suggests that he did not see grandson-caring as a form of spiritual sustenance. Rather, the strains of the new job, childcare, forced him to return to work. Mr Xiong is quite independent and his strategy to avoid childcare was unique in the sample. He does not take it for granted that he is obliged to be a babysitter. He believes that he has the right to enjoy his retirement life instead of supporting his child and grandchildren. His son, Jianguo, said:

My dad never did any housework in his life. He was busy before, but after he retired, he still preferred to be restless. My dad is really different from other grandparents who enjoy staying with their grandchildren. When I was a child, my parents sent me to live with my grandparents. And I did not return to live with my parents until I went to primary school. Maybe they did not know the difficulties of childcare only because they never did it before. As my dad

goes back to work now, and my mom is not in good health, I have to ask my parents-in-law to help us more with the child. I know that my dad goes back to work so that he does not need to stay at home taking care of his grandson, but I cannot make any complaints. I will let him do whatever he likes, and I do not want to make him feel that I am not satisfied with him because of the childcare.

Jianguo is actually dissatisfied with his father's escape from childcare. This extract suggests that he believes his father is obliged to help raise the grandson. When his father does not devote himself to grandparenting as expected, Jianguo attributes it to what happened in his own childhood. Jianguo thinks his father cannot understand the difficulties of young couples working and caring for children at the same time because his father failed to do his duty in his childhood. However, he will not interfere with his father's choice. Despite this, Jianguo respects his father's choice, and avoids conflict with his father since his father and mother still provide some childcare throughout the week.

Jianguo's wife, Kailing, (P30W) adopted an easier attitude to her father-in-law's choice, and she said:

Actually I prefer to spend more time on my son. Some of my colleagues told me that their children preferred to play with their grandparents rather than themselves. I do not want my son to be like that. When I have to go to work, I will send my boy to my parents. My son will soon go to the kindergarten, and it will be much more relaxed then. Honestly, I did not get used to my mother-in-law coming to help me with the childcare at that time because it was not

an easy time when I was with her. Now my mom helps me with my son, and I think it much more comfortable, because I could say everything directly to her without any worries.

Kailing's mother (P30WM) expressed similar opinions to her daughter:.

I know my daughter better than anyone else. Although it is a tough job to take care of children, they will be much closer to those who look after them. I watch my grandson grow up, and he will be nice to me in the future. And my daughter and my son-in-law are very grateful for my help. They know I am exhausted by looking after the boy, and they always buy me new clothes or some gifts. Last year they sent me a gold necklace for my birthday. My husband used to ask me to hire a babysitter, but I prefer to do everything myself instead of hiring one. Now, baby-sitters will only work for money rather than think for you. I have seen some news on TV that some baby-sitters are very bad, and some even abuse children. These people are psychopaths. I would never ever have them take care of my baby, even if they give me money.

When Jianguo's father is taking some strategies to escape the duty of childcare, Kailing's mother stands out to take over the grandchild care. Her interview shows that she thinks the childcaring is a good way to build intimacy with both grandchildren and only-child couple though it is an exhausting work. Kailing also prefers her own mother to help with childcaring than her mother-in-law therefore she is satisfied with the current childcare arrangement. The only daughter and her mother show the mutual reliance and in this

case, grandparenting does not bring any obvious tension between parents and children if they reach a consensus on the arrangement of childcaring.

7.4 How to Make Choice: Child Caring or Working

Whilst some of the parents in the sample have retired, some of the parents in the sample still have jobs. Dr Gao (P11WM), for example, runs a private clinic with her husband in Cangzhou. Their daughter and son-in-law are both doctors in a big hospital in Tianjin, and the couple are regularly busy with work, and sometimes have night shifts. Although the child's paternal grandparents are retired, when the child was born, all the four grandparents were asked to go to Tianjin to assist with childcare. Dr. Gao expressed her deep dissatisfaction with the arrangement:

I am really reluctant to visit my granddaughter in Tianjin. I have a clinic with my husband, and we need to work there every day, but the child's yeye (paternal grandparents) have retired. Why can't they help more with the childcare? Every time when they look after the child for a month they will find a variety of excuses to go back home, like their attendance at someone's wedding, or some relatives are in hospital. When they leave my daughter's place, my daughter will be too busy to care about everything. She taught my granddaughter to make FaceTime with me, telling me how much she misses me. I know what my daughter thinks about, and I thus joke

at my granddaughter and said that I do not miss her. (She laughs). Honestly, my granddaughter is really clever and cute, but I am also really unwilling to take care of her. It is not convenient to live with them away from my place. Besides, it is unrealistic to purchase a property in Tianjin where all the properties are too expensive. If we really moved to Tianjin, everything about childcare would come to us. Now when we go to Tianjin, we will have to close our clinic. Sometimes our patients see the door closed they may think we are retired and will not come to us next time. When we stay in Tianjin, we will spend a lot on grocery shopping and something for our granddaughter every day. It means that we stop earning to spend money.

Dr. Gao's reluctance to commit to childcare is mainly caused by the fact that she is still working, and she believes that the retired grandparents are better placed to look after the child more. However, the husband's mother, Ms. Zhao (P11HM) thought differently:

Our generation caught up with the birth control, and most families thus have only one child. In the past, nainai (paternal grandmothers) took care of their grandchildren often, because grandmothers-in-law had to look after their sons' children. Now we all have only one child in our families, and it is reasonable enough for all of us to take care of the grandchildren together. I know that my in-laws still run a clinic, but the child cannot stop growing up till our retirement. And it is illogical that all the retired are supposed to stay at home looking after their grandchildren. There is no end to making money, and they need to stop where it should stop. Therefore, we require looking after our granddaughter in shifts with them.

The paternal grandmother thinks that all the four grandparents are expected to take care of their granddaughter together, while the maternal grandmother believes that those who have time should take on more responsibilities. In this case, as the main childcare providers, neither of the grandmothers regard it as their obligation to look after their granddaughter. This raises questions about how the adult children view their parents' commitment to childcare. Dr. Gao's daughter, Zhang Yuan (P11W) said:

I first met my husband in the hospital where we work together. We are all tied up every day, and sometimes we have to work on the night shift. Before marriage we imagined that we would be unable to manage our family well because of the busy job. But at that time we thought that we were both only-child, and our parents were not involved with any other child, and it thus would not be a problem for them to help us with the childcare in the future. Now two sets of parents come to help us with our daughter by turns. But, you know, my mom has her own clinic and is sometimes unwilling to come here while my mother-in-law usually finds excuses to go back home after a couple of weeks. But our daughter is too little to be left alone at present. I thus have to try my best to make everyone happy and satisfied. I always buy them new clothes and shoes, and sometimes take them out to have dinner in some good restaurants. The world has changed (Sigh). I remember that when I was a child my grandparents offered to look after me. Why do nowadays grandparents not prefer to help with the childcare, especially when they are still in good condition? It is unfair that they do not want to give care to the children, but expect their children to support their later life. No one lives an easy life. It does not make any sense that people only enjoy their lives without considering others' feelings or

pressure. When we are young, we have to struggle with our work and childcare. When our children grow up, our parents will become old, and we will have to take care of them. Whenever I think about it I feel exhausted. Anyway, I feel lucky that my daughter can be taken good care of all the time. I can understand all my parents' concerns.

Since Zhang Yuan has a busy job which makes her rely on her parents or parents-in-law for the childcare, and she also believes child caring is an obligation for the whole family to share. However, when she said 'It does not make any sense that people only enjoy their lives without considering others' feelings or pressure', she is making an excuse to transfer the child caring work to her parents and parents-in-law.

Zhang Yuan's husband, Zhipeng (P11H), did not reveal much in the interview about the tensions in the childcare arrangements, possibly because he simply is unaware of it or perhaps because he did not want to draw attention to points of conflict in the family. When we discussed the topic of the childcare he expressed his opinions simply:

My daughter is taken care of mainly by our parents, and they come to Tianjin in turns whenever they have time. The little girl grows fast. I am so busy that sometimes I could see my daughter only once every few days. When I play with her, I always find that she has learnt many new skills.

In this case, every family member considers the childcare arrangement from their personal position and interests. Despite the final arrangement does not satisfy everyone, they

still find a way to work it out. Although Dr. Gao is unwilling to leave her clinic in her hometown, she could still go to Tianjin and act as a babysitter when the other grandmother leaves Tianjin. The paternal grandmother, Ms Zhao, wants to pursue a colourful life after her retirement, not being constrained at home, but she still spends a lot of time with her granddaughter. The adult children want to go to work, but the mother feels the constraint of childcare and the difficulties of achieving work-life balance without the full support of her parents and in-laws. This suggests that individuals within the family are making choices and decisions based on a series of interactions, negotiations and concessions. Rather than being held by duties, tradition and obligations, this case clearly demonstrates that some families make choices and arrangements according to the individual needs, rather than prioritising family. Whilst in the past, the family as a collective unit, this case suggests that in contemporary urban one-child families, the family can be a means or a challenge to accomplish one's own personal targets. Using family as a solution to childcare and as a means to meet personal demands was common amongst the sample.

However, not all the grandparents interviewed resist looking after their grandchildren. Unlike the cases above, one-year-old Dingding is now taken care of by her mother (P15W). She has not gone out to work since Dingding was born in order to give him better care. Seeing her daughter-in-law stay at home all day, Dingding's grandmother offered to help with the child,

but her son and daughter-in-law refused her help. The grandmother (P15HM) said:

I told my daughter-in-law that I had nothing to do and could help them look after Dingding so that they could go to work without worries. But unexpectedly my daughter-in-law turned me down and told me that she would not want us to be exhausted, and it would be better for children to be taken care of by their parents. I thought she actually did not trust me. I have raised my son up well. I am much more confident in my experience of childcare than her. Honestly, I do not think she would stay at home without working until Dingding goes to primary school. She will be soon out of touch with the society if she does not go on working when she is still young. If she fails to save enough money she will ask for it from her husband. My son's salary can hardly support a whole family. She told me that she would take care of Dingding by herself, but actually she hired an hourly maid to help her with the housework. My pension is limited and I cannot save all my pension to support their life.

However, Dingding's mother, Wan Fang (P15W), held different opinions from her mother-in-law:

Everyone has their own ideas, and different ideas will inevitably bring about contradictions. I have different opinion from my husband, still less my parents-in-law. I am only telling a truth instead of talking about whose advice is much more reasonable and scientific. But how should we deal with it when it happens? I think many young parents would agree with me that we should make our own decision for our own children. It is natural to have some different ideas with parents. Even if they do whatever we ask, they will have their complaints after a long while. Therefore, in my opinion it is good

if the children are taken care of by their own parents even though it may be tiring and exhausting, which is better than have conflict with parents-in-law or parents. Moreover, we have our life and our parents also have their life. It is their freedom to enjoy their life, and it is my freedom to take care of my child as I wish. It will be much simpler if we do not interfere with each other...Now it is really tough to be a good mother. I could not count on my husband because he does not do housework at all and has no experience in childcare. As a result all the housework is left for me, which makes me as busy as a bee every day... You know, there is a lot of ready-made food for infants in supermarkets in foreign countries, and mothers can simply heat it up for their children. China has long witnessed serious food security issues. There will be many hidden dangers to feed our children with ready-made food, where a lot of food additives can be tested. As a result I feed my child with what I cook all the time. I also hear that someone even plants vegetables in his own garden for his child. How can't we be tired? I not only need to take my child, but also suffer from another kind of pressure that I worry I will not keep up with the world, trapped in the household affairs all my life. It is really hard to be a woman in China!

Wan Fang (P15W) is relatively unique amongst my interviewees, as she is one of the few young parents who insist on looking after their children on their own. From her own perspective, she weighs the advantages and disadvantages of her mother-in-law caring for Dingding. Although she describes being busy and exhausted from caring for her son, she still refuses her mother-in-law's offer to avoid any potential conflict. She considers her relationship with her mother-in-law, and believes that her small family is supposed to be independent of her mother-in-law's family,

and no mutual interference is welcome. According to her mother-in-law's words, Wan Fang is still economically supported by her mother-in-law, because she does not work outside the home and has no income. It appears that, due to considerations for her future pension security, Dingding's grandmother would prefer to provide her son and daughter-in-law with 'hands on' help rather than economic support. Additionally, she does not mention that she will completely rely on her son for elderly care. In my interviews, many grandparents indicate that grandparenting is a security for their elderly care and they want to build a good relationship with their children in order to get help from them in the future. However, Dingding's grandmother wants to keep her pension secure maybe she is not plan to relying on her son for her old-age care. All of this suggests that there is some divergence between Dingding's mother and his paternal grandmother in the arrangement of childcare, although this divergence does not directly come from the childcare itself.

7.5 Conflicts between Two Generation Regarding Childcare

The contradictions and conflicts caused by childcare are evident across the sample. Many informants did not express their complaints straightforward, while some informants poured out their feelings to me directly. For example, Longlong's grandmother (P19HM) said:

I am tired of serving my daughter-in-law to zuo yue zi⁶. When they had their first child, my daughter-in-law thought she was fatter than before. She gave the soup which I cooked for her to my son, in case she got fatter. She thought I did not know that, but I saw it. As a new mum, she did not put her baby in the first place but cared about her appearance. How could she feed her baby well if she did not eat something nutritious? After all, she was not my own daughter and it would be embarrassing to criticise her too much. However, I could not leave them alone at that time. She would think me lazy if I did not help her then. In the end, I offered to cook for them in case offended her. It is difficult to be a mother-in-law now.

Longlong's mother, Yong Mei, also mentioned that the two generations indeed held many different ideas which caused strains in their relationships at times. Discussing postnatal nutrition, Yong Mei said:

They know nothing about nutrition. They asked me to drink a lot of oily soup full of fat in order to increase my milk. The oily soup is not medicine. It is not helpful.

Although many of the tensions existing between Yong Mei and her mother-in-law are due to their different opinions, Yong Mei's mother-in-law expressed her ideas to me as follows.

In any case never say you do not want to take care

⁶ Chinese saying of 'sitting the month' after childbirth, means a set of diet and lifestyle restrictions for post-natal care

of your grandchild. Your kids will hate you more or less if you say so. Although you brought up your children suffering from a lot of difficulties, although you loved them when they were children, you will not count on them when you are old if you refuse to help them when they are struggling in the society. We for them, them for us. With time flying we will finally be too old to eat and move. The time when we need their care will be much longer than the time when we look after our grandchildren. It will be much easier to look after a little child than to look after an old patient who lies in bed all day long. If I do not choose to look after my grandson, my daughter-in-law will have a reason for not looking after me in the future. My own son will undoubtedly repay my upbringing, but I deeply doubt if my daughter-in-law will. The relationship between her and me has just been cultivated since her marriage with my son. If I fail to build a good relation with her, I will suffer losses in the future.

Although tensions clearly exist in terms of childcare, pregnancy and post-natal care, some only-children's parents still take this job because they have to rely on their children to help with elderly care in the future. The above extract illustrates that the grandmother was afraid of suffering losses in her later life if she could not build a good relationship with her daughter-in-law in the present. Whilst this could be interpreted as a very instrumental view of relations, the mutual dependence in only-child families is evidence, whereby the only-child couples depend on their parents with childcaring but the parents also come to rely on their children for their care in later life.

In some cases, only-children's parents have strong desires

for control which manifest in childcare arrangements. For example, Xiuyu's mother (P26WM) still regards her 30-year-old daughter as a little girl. When it comes to childcare, she believes that young people are too ignorant and inexperienced to take care of a baby well, and she, as an experienced person, thus needs to make all the decisions. She said,

My daughter always surfs the internet about parenting knowledge. Why not ask me directly? Sometimes when I see my grandson crying I want to pick him up, but my daughter always does not allow me. Hugging can make a baby feel the love and safety. Does she really know how to raise a kid? She seldom did any housework since she was a child. She told me that the online experts said we could not pick the baby up as soon as it cried, otherwise it would cry much louder next time. But I do not think so. I do not want my sweetheart to keep crying. I quarrelled with her about it many times.

Xiuyu (P26W) expressed the distress over her ability being questioned and she said:

When I wanted to buy a baby car seat for my son, my mother thought it a waste of money to spend thousands of RMB on a seat. She told me that the safest seat is the arms. She would not listen to me and thought she was right all the time. It is right that my mum raises me up, but she is not sure that she has never made mistakes. Why can't she listen to me? Will I hurt my own son? Sometimes it is really difficult to communicate with her. She cannot listen to what I say, and I thus buy what she does not let me buy. Luckily, she is my mother, and at the worst we will quarrel with each other. But I never dare to do so to my mother-in-law.

Dongdong's grandmother (P27HM) from another family mentions a similar kind of conflict between her and her daughter-in-law:

I come to see my granddaughter from such a distance. But unexpectedly I have to do everything under the supervision of my daughter-in-law. Many times when I want to feed my granddaughter with something, she will tell me not to. I think there is nothing bad for a little baby to try more tastes. I will not poison my granddaughter, will I?

Whilst the grandmother sees her actions as relatively benign, Dongdong's mother, Wang Jing (P27W), is dissatisfied with her mother-in-law's many interferences:

My mother-in-law set herself against Dongdong's swimming class. She thinks that the swimming pool is dirty because its water is changed once a week. Besides the harmful bacteria, she also believes that small children easily get cold when swimming. Anyway, she will be opposed to anything we suggest.

In my data it is common that only-children and their parents or parents-in-law have different opinions on parenting. For those who come to look after their grandchildren from a long distance, it makes them uneasy and disturbed to live in their children's home and temporarily economically rely on their children. Some of the grandparents offer help with enthusiasm, but their attempts are sometimes snubbed. Whilst the parents want to share their parenting expertise, the younger generation have been deeply influenced by the

latest parenting ideas, and most of them have formed their own childcare knowledge. As individuals in their independent nuclear families, they may think the two generations are supposed to have an equal position in decisions relating to children. Therefore, they usually do not accept their parents' 'old' and 'outdated' experiences. The two generations hold many different opinions, from baby food to how to increase breast milk, from safety in the car to swimming class. As the contradictions and conflicts are there, some young only-child couples would not easily give up the power in parenting. Some of them are confident that they are adopting their parenting based on scientific research, and hence, in going against their parents' opinions, they believe they are doing the right thing for their own children. On the other hand, their parents, who have typically been in position of dominance within the family, feel upset at this loss of control and disregard for their experience of childcaring.

7.6 Competition of Grandparenting: Which Grandparent Get More Participation

Besides the aforementioned contradictions and conflicts caused by childcare, some of the conflicts in the families in the sample arise out of the fact that the husband's parents and the wife's parents are in the competition of grandparenting. After Li Yue (P23W) got pregnant, her

mother (P23WM) insisted her daughter stay with her:

The birth of a child is an important thing, so I have to take care of my daughter myself. My daughter is too shy to complain about her dissatisfaction. Therefore, I urged her to come back earlier before the due date, and I could take care of her during her confinement. Besides my home is spacious and comfortable, it is convenient for me to cook for her. However, her mother-in-law did not agree with me, and insisted that my daughter was supposed to give birth in the Tianjin Maternity Hospital, which enjoyed brilliant facilities and reputable doctors. At last, I compromised and came to help my daughter with childcare here.

Li Yue's mother-in-law (P23HM) held negative opinions about the proposals for childbirth put forward by Li Yue's mother:

Her mother asked her to give birth in Baoding, such a small place without good medical conditions. By the way, how can our grandson be born in their family? It will feel as if the child belongs to them.

These extracts suggest that the battle for grandparenting had begun even before their grandson was born. Following his birth, a new round of competition inevitably started. Li Yue's mother said:

It will not be a permanent solution to live in my daughter's home in the long run, and her father also felt uncomfortable to live there. Moreover, my mother is over 80 years old now, and I have to take care of her daily life. If I stay in Tianjin, then I could not look after my elderly mother. Hence, I was planning to take my grandson back to my own home as soon as my daughter finished her maternity leave.

Later, when her mother-in-law argued that Baoding was distant for them to take care of their grandson, we had to negotiate with them, and soon we reached an agreement that we would look after our grandson in turns. Honestly, I will feel worried about leaving my grandson with them, as they do not cook well and know nothing about nutrition. It concerns me a lot that my grandson will be dwarfed by malnutrition. Now we have this only grandson, the most treasured one in our family. Although the kid is still little, he knows something, and he likes me because I spend more time with him and treat him very well.

Further illustrating the intense negotiation and competition existing between the two sets of grandparents, Li Yue's mother-in-law said:

Once when my in-laws sent our grandson back, he unexpectedly held my in-law's leg, crying out that he would not leave her. It made me extremely embarrassed, and I felt that this kid got much closer to my in-laws. How can this happen? He is our grandson. I hope him to be closer to us. As a result, sometimes when it is time to send him to Baoding, I will send him there a few days late.

Li Yue's husband, Mr. Zhang (P23H), discussed how his mother was not satisfied with the current childcare arrangements:

My mother easily has contests with others. She once told me that as my wife and I did not take care of my son ourselves, my son got closer to his grandmother-in-law. It is so funny that, as my mother-in-law keeps a dog which my son likes playing with very much, my mother plans to get one as well so that her grandson will like coming here.

However, Li Yue told me that:

My mother-in-law implied that she would not take care of my son before my son was born. She told me that when they are cared for by grandparents, grandchildren would be badly spoiled, and I quickly got her implication. Therefore, I asked my mother to help me more with childcare. It is not easy for my mother to look after my grandmother and my kid at the same time. My husband gives my mother 2000 yuan each month, and sometimes buys her some gifts.

Initially, Li Yue's mother-in-law (P23HM) hinted to Li Yue that she would not help her with the childcare. However, when she discovered that her in-laws had developed a close relationship with her son and daughter-in-law through grandparenting, and that even her grandson seemed to prefer her in-laws to her, a sense of crisis occurred and she started to struggle to raise her grandson. Li Yue's mother-in-law's words, 'it will feel like that the child belongs to them', can be understood as based on a strong desire to develop a closer relationship with her son, daughter-in-law and grandchild. Although the issue of competition of grandparenting like Li Yue's family is rare in my sample, we can nonetheless understand the intense struggle for family as connected to the declining birth rate. As parents have only one child, they progressively focus on their relationships with their child and even their grandchild. The competition of grandparenting in this family is a bit different from descending familism because they focus more on their relationships with

younger generations.

7.7 Conclusion

When the first generation of only-children reach reproductive age, they suffer from the reform of the social welfare system, which means there are no more employee-sponsored nurseries and a shortage of kindergartens. Because both members of the young couples in this research are only-children, close family relationships seem to easily form an interdependent and mutually-trusted family community. However, when the third generation of the family enters the world, the dynamics of the three families change again. In most cases, following the birth of a grandchild, the family has to arrange who and how to take care of the baby.

Among my sample, most only children rely on their parents to take care of their own children. The data reveals that many only-children's parents did not deem it an obligation or responsibility to raise their grandchildren as some literatures claim. Many of the grandparents regard it as a heavy burden, while some of them even strategised to escape from this arrangement. Negotiation thus becomes central when deciding whether the children should be primarily looked after by their parents or their grandparents. The analysis revealed that both the only-children and their parents demonstrate characteristics of individualisation, where they made their

decisions based on considerations for their personal position and interests, instead of assuming they have to abandon their own interest for their extended family.

Now that both generations of parents and children are shifting towards individualisation, why are most parents still constrained by grandparenting? This chapter has demonstrated that, apart from the personal emotions, it is a kind of compromise which parents make based on their attention to parent-child relationships. Having obtained their parents' help, some only-children may repay their parents, in terms of emotions and economy. Hence, not all the problems will lead to distant parent-child relationships. In my opinion, the characteristics of individualisation in Chinese only-children families can be illustrated by the fact that both the generations carefully think about not only their personal lives but also their relationships with other individuals within their families. The two generations make compromises and contest with each other, because neither of them will simply contribute nor completely dominate everything.

Moreover, I find that most grandmothers take the responsibility of grandparenting within the interviewed families. Consistently with many existing literatures (Wheelock and Jones, 2002; Chen, et al, 2011), family gender divisions of labour still incline towards a traditional model, where the males act in the role of breadwinner, while females undertake more housework and childcare. Under the

present circumstance of high-consuming childcare, fathers devote more attention to feed their families, offering economic support to their children, which makes it, to some extent, reasonable for their absence in the childcare.

Many interviewed grandmothers are still not retired, some of them also have to look after their old parents, but they still help their children with childcare to a certain extent, regardless of their willingness to help. When children ask for their help with childcare, some parents probably would prefer to help pay for childcare services, but many families have lost trust in the paid childcare service provided by strangers due to the excessive negative news and evaluations on babysitters and maternity matrons in China. As a result, these parents, as is often the case, have to juggle their own paid work and grandparenting tasks.

The present retirement policies in China, to some extent, supports only children's requirements for grandparent support in arranging childcare. In contemporary China, the mandatory retirement age of male employees is 60 years old, while that of female employees is 55 years old. According to the common childbearing age in China, it shows that the present retirement system can basically meet the requirement of grandparenting. Both parenting and grandparenting will be, to different degrees, influenced by a postponed retirement, as the grandparents have to work for an extended time which will overlap with their grandparenting.

The present retirement policies were established at the beginning of 1950s after the founding of New China, and remain officially unchanged, even though China has experienced great changes, and life expectancy has increased to 70 years. Keeping the retirement age as it is may be a method for the government to put some problems aside, as well as the lack of social support to families and individuals.

Raising a child is not an easy thing. For retired grandparents, it eats into their leisure time; while for those who are not retired, they may face the choice of whether to reduce work or not. Some parents even need to leave their hometown for their children's homes to act as babysitters. This chapter has illustrated the dedication made by those who take on the responsibilities of grandparenting. There may be competitions between in-laws. Dissatisfaction and conflict may break out if grandparents are not relieved effectively and timely by their children. The difficulties of grandparenting are reflected not only in physical exhaustion but also in the psychological preparation for the changes in family relationships. Lying in the cradle, crying to the strange world, the young child does not realise that it is its arrival that presents a range of new challenges to the family. The child caring arrangement is a test to the relationships among the three families after the grandchild arrives, but it simultaneously also offers an opportunity to reconstruct family relations.

8 CHAPTER EIGHT: PARENT-CONSUMING IN ADULT ONLY-CHILD FAMILIES

8.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, some scholars argue that ideal intergenerational relationships in Chinese families balance mutual benefits among generations, and perform as a process that the parental generation raise the young generation, and the adult children generation supports the parental generation (Li and Li, 2008). These relationships are expected to be based on reciprocity, obligation, mutual communication and support (Li and Li, 2008). However, the reduction in family sizes following the introduction of the one-child policy have led to a series of subtle changes in intergenerational relationships (Zhang and Goza, 2006). As discussed in the literature review, increasing numbers of adult children in China are leaning heavily on their parents for material support. These children are called ‘kenlao’—literally, people who nibble on their elders, or parent-consuming people. In this chapter, I describe the different ways in which adult only-children rely on their parents and the impact of this reliance on parent-child relationships within their families. In general, parent-consuming is a common phenomenon among my interviewed families. Many adult only-children take it for granted that their parents will fully support them.

Some parents do not complain about this, but they nonetheless expressed their dissatisfaction with their children's consumption patterns. In many ways this suggests that the two generations are closely bound together through this sharing of resources. However, this chapter also demonstrates that the two generations also show signs of individualisation.

8.2 The Definition of Parent-Consuming

In this thesis, I refer to some respondents as parent-consuming or not mainly based on whether he or she overly relies on his or her parents. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, evaluating the degree of dependence is a difficult task, since it is a norm within Chinese families the parents and children to help, support and benefit each other (Li and Li, 2008). Despite such difficulties in definition, parent-consuming people are broadly grouped into two groups in academic literature: those who totally rely on their parents and those who are partly dependent. The distinctions are referred to as explicit and implicit parent-consuming people. Those in the former group are typically unemployed and living with their parents (Mei, 2008), whilst those in the latter group typically have their own income through employment, but turn to their parents regularly for economic, labour and social network support (Jiang, 2012).

Based on these distinctions and the patterns within the sample of families interviewed, I use the term parent-consuming to refer to those young adults who have labour capacity, but who still accept different kinds of support from their parents for long periods of time, regardless of their employment status. In the interviews, it was apparent that most respondents regularly ask their parents for financial and labour help, especially at particular points in their life when their needs become more acute, such as supporting with the costs of wedding ceremonies and house purchases or following the birth of a new child. However, whilst parent-consuming refers to children's constant and one-way dependence on their parents, not all the parents' support can be simply considered as parent-consuming. This concept will be further clarified through the analysis presented in this chapter.

8.3 Parent-Consuming: Approved by Parents

Some researchers believe that only-children are likely to be overly dependent on their parents (Li, 2006; Jiang, 2012). They argue that this explains the timing of the emergence of the parent-dependent group as a growing phenomenon, since this first generation of only-children are now at an age where they are interested in career development and marriage. Some scholars believe that only-children have

been spoiled by their parents since childhood, leading to a lack in social adaptabilities and living abilities in adulthood (Shot, Zhai, Xu, Yang, 2001). These authors argue that adult only-children expect to depend on their parents. In this context, it is thought that if parents show no objections to their adult children's dependency and requests for support, the younger generation take it for granted to live off their parents. Some of these issues are evident in the following case.

Jiang Xin (P6W) quit her job to stay at home since she got pregnant. She has not tried to find another job in the two years since her child's birth. When the couple had no children, their income just covered their living expenses, including their mortgage. Now, however, almost all of her husband's salary is used for mortgage repayments. Added to the expense of raising a child, the only daughter has turned to her parents for support. Jiang Xin said:

At present it is rather difficult to find a good salary and relaxed job. I used to earn about 4000 yuan monthly until I quit. At that time I went off in the early morning, came home late, and seldom had a meal regularly. After I got pregnant, I quit my job in fear of miscarriage. Now my kid is still so little thus I look after her at home every day. Because my parents are both working, I have to find a full-time baby-sitter if I go to work now. However, I will feel worried about my kid if I leave her with a baby-sitter. A baby-sitter will not be patient enough to teach what her needs. Being a housewife is good, especially when you have good parents.

At the beginning, Jiang Xin had no choice but to depend on her parents. However, after careful consideration, she thought it best not to return to the paid workforce, but instead becoming a full-time housewife and rely on her parents for regular financial assistance. Jiang Xin's words reveal that she rationally weighed up her options, making the most cost-efficient decision that allowed her to stay at home to take care of her family. She did not express any shame at her actions, and on the contrary, she outlined many of the reasons justifying her decision to stay at home, such as the lack of decent job opportunities and the distrust of baby-sitters.

Jiang Xin's mother (P13WM) said that:

My daughter used to go to work after graduation, but I would rather ask her to quit that job. Her office was far from home, and she had to transfer from subway to bus to get there. It took her almost 2 hour to get there. She had to be at office before 8 o'clock in the morning. She always left home at 6 o'clock in the morning, and got back at 7 o'clock in the evening. Sometimes she had to work overnight. I was extremely worried about her health at that time. When she had her baby, I asked her to quit that job, and we could give her the living cost. My daughter had been in poor health since her childhood. It was laborious to take care of her own child, and she could not sleep well at night. How could I feel relaxed if she still went to work? Her father and I run a small company at present, and it is thus no problem to support her. But it will not be a long term plan for the future. After her child is sent to a kindergarten, I think it would be good to for her to find a job. But now it is ok for her to stay at home.

Faced with Jiang Xin's economic dependence, her mother did

not raise any objections in the interview. When talking about the future, Jiang Xin's mother expressed her concerns, suggesting that staying at home was not a preferable option for her daughter in the long term. Jiang Xin was doing housework and looking after her child, while her parents were doing business. This differs from the social norm whereby the young adult makes a living outside of the home whilst the parents take care of the family affairs (see also chapter 7). However, it is regarded as the most realistic set-up by both generations. In this case, parent-consuming behaviour is acceptable and allowable because both parents and children have similar values. Jiang Xin's mother does not feel dissatisfied with her daughter's economic dependence, and Jiang Xin also does not feel any self-accusation or self-abasement for her reliance on her parents.

However, Jiang Xin's mother-in-law who used to be a teacher in a primary school, holds a different opinion on Jiang Xin's staying at home status:

My daughter-in-law has stayed at home for a long time. I really do not understand what she is thinking about. Young people who staying at home without working are seldom found in today's society. However, as a mother-in-law, it is not good for me to say too much. Anyway, her parents are 'feeding' her.

Jiang Xin's mother does not show her disapproval of her daughter-in-law's parent-consuming, from the consideration of their relationship and avoiding conflict. In addition, Jiang

Xin is consuming her own parents, not her mother-in-law, which maybe another reason for her mother-in-law's non-interference.

Among the parent-consuming people in the sample, some do not struggle to make a living, and conversely, many enjoy a comfortable income. One only daughter in my sample, Liu Xiaoxue (P29W), has a job in a government department and lives in an affluent family, but she affirmatively claims that she continues to live off her father:

I do not know why I always go shopping. Maybe I am a shopaholic. I earn a lot every month, but I can always spend more. Therefore, I have to ask my father for some economic support, but only paying off my credit cards.

Liu Xiaoxue's father (P29WF) spoke highly of his daughter, but he also felt concerned about his daughter's high-priced consumption:

She has four credit cards, and sometimes all of them are maxed out by the end of month. Although her salary is good, she cannot afford the bills. If the credit cards are not paid off, a sum of interest will be charged and accumulate. If I do not pay her bill, she may need to ask for more money from my son-in-law. Then maybe her mother-in-law will know she spent too much money. It is not a good thing for maintaining a good relationship with mother-in-law. That is why I pay off her credit cards every month. My daughter spends much more than she earns. I am not parsimonious in spending money on her, but money is not supposed to be spent in her way. Now I can economically support her within my ability,

because I want to compensate her for my divorce with her mother. What if she cannot rely on me in the future?

Liu Xiaoxue's reliance on her father can be understood as an example of implicit parent-consuming. She has a good income but still asks her father to pay off her credit cards. Liu Xiaoxue's father (P29WF) does not blame his daughter for her financial dependence. Rather, he, like many of the parents in the sample, helps his daughter to solve the problems. From Liu Xiaoxue's father's words, we can see the approval of parent-consuming is because the father is taking the relationships with his daughter into consideration. Due to the divorce, Liu's father feels ashamed to his daughter, and on the other hand, it also reflects his consideration of maintaining a good relation with his daughter and want to help avoid conflicts between Liu Xiaoxue and her in-laws. This case is not simply like the 'descending familism' which the centrality of a family is on the young generation.

Parent-consuming does not seem to cause any obvious tensions between the adult children and their parents in these two cases. This may be due to these families' financial stability and relative wealth, as well their similarities in terms of family values. The two parents in both cases have neither the traditional Chinese expectation for the young generation to make great contributions to the family nor the expectation that their children should be living independently. Due to these parents' care, wealth and non-objection, their children

do not seem to engage with the meaning of independence. However, both of the two parents realise their children cannot always being reliant given marketisation and other social change.

8.4 Parent-Consuming: Disapproved by Parents

Chinese society widely recognises a family moral of benevolent parents and the filial children which regulates an individual's recognition and behaviour (Logan, Bian and Bian, 1998). The parent-child relationship itself is a mutual relationship of duties and obligations, and two relational orientations thus exist in the parent-child relationship. On the one hand, filial piety shows children's obligations to their parents, especially in old age care. However, Yan's (2003) research proposed that filial piety is changing due to the individualisation of Chinese society. On the other hand, parents are regarded as fully responsible for their children, throughout their lives, when they suffer from financial difficulties (Li and Li, 2008). Therefore, it becomes a norm of life in China that parents and children help and support each other in material and emotional terms.

One only son informant in my sample, Mr. Niu (P20H), quit his job in a state-owned enterprise because of his low salary, and started his own business years ago. However, the

business was not successful, and he had to ask his parents for financial help. Mr. Niu did not tell me the details about his business problems. However, when talking about his parents' financial support, he disclosed that his parents helped him when his business was in trouble, noting that his parents' wealth would eventually be left to him, suggesting that he thought his parents should support him completely. However, Mr. Niu's mother expressed dissatisfaction with the current situation of her parent-consuming son:

He told me that he wanted to start a company independently, but at the beginning he took a large sum of money from us, and he did not make any profit. He always told us that he would make a profit soon, but now I still have to raise his family. His previous job in the state-owned enterprise was hunted out through his father's guanxi (social network resources), but he found it boring and poorly-paid. He insisted on quitting that job and running his own company. Since he started running the company, every year he wasted money which was originally prepared for our elderly care. I really wish that my son would have stayed steady in his previous job which is much better than now. I thought that we would be free from worries when he got married, but I was wrong. But he is my only son, I have no choice but to support him. I still need to rely on him in the future.

Mr. Niu's mother complained a lot about her son, but the value she placed on parent-child integration was simultaneously evident throughout her interview. Her words repeatedly and strongly show that she wanted to have a good relationship with her son, as well as pointing to her expectations for the

future. This led to a sense of ambivalence, where she dislikes her son's decision but feels bound to support him constantly. Mr Niu as an only son in this family, takes his parents' financial help as granted because he believes the wealth in his family will eventually belong to him. There is a tension in this family, however both parents and the only son do not change the current situation of parent-consuming as Mr Niu wants to keep relying on his parents and Mr Niu's mother considers to count on his son for elderly care. This confirms Li and Li's (2008) research that parents are expected to be responsible for resolving children's financial difficulties. Although the parents are not willing to be depended by the adult son, they do not refuse to offer help. In return for parents' savings, young adults are regarded as their parents' financial security for old age.

8.5 Parent-Consuming of Household

Labour

My research shows that only-children not only materially rely on their parents, but also depend on parents for housework and domestic support. Many respondents discussed how, after marriage, they continued to go to their parents' home for meals instead of cooking themselves, as well as requesting that their parents visit their homes to provide some housework. After having their own children, some only-children appeared to rely even more on their parents. Ms Xu

(P2W) and her husband, for example, have their own flat and car, but currently they live at Ms Xu's parents' home with their son. She said:

When I had my son, my mom was just retired from her job, and took good care of my son at home every day. At the beginning we didn't live together, and we sent our boy to my mum's home every day. But currently my husband was always on business trips and I was busy working all day. It took me a lot of time to send and pick up our son. Therefore we moved to live with my parents about two years ago. I think it is perfect to live with my parents. It is no longer necessary to worry about the housework. My mom cooks for me every day, and I even do not need to do the laundry myself. My mom is a perfect 'Tian Luo Gu Niang'⁷.

Ms. Xu's words reveal how much her mother has done to support her in her daily life. This can be understood as a form of implicit parent-consuming, whereby Ms Xu is reliant on her mother's support in terms of her labour. Ms Xu's mother (P2WM) said:

I think it is ok for them to live with me, and I feel much relieved when my daughter lives with me. There is a market near my home, and it is so convenient for me to prepare food for them. My husband has been employed again after his retirement. I would feel bored if I were at home alone. Now we live together and I can do something for them. I am satisfied with it. But to tell the truth, it is really tiring to take care of my grandson besides

⁷ A character in traditional Chinese fairy tale which voluntary help to do all the housework and cooking.

housework. I am kept as busy as a bee every day as soon as I wake up. Many mothers in our neighbourhood help their children with housework and grandchildren every day, and none of them has their hands free. Moreover, my daughter is a filial girl. She often makes me happy and sometimes buys me new clothes and shoes. Her family live with me and I pay their expenses, but I do not ask them anything in return. My daughter works hard and always works overtime late at night. But her husband extremely likes computer games. When he rests at home, he will never actively help me with his son. I do not understand how a man can be so addicted to gaming in his thirties.

Although this mother lived a laborious life, her dedication for her daughter was a way of realising her self-worth. In the following interview, Ms. Xu's mother told me that she would keep on helping her daughter if her daughter had a second baby. Both mother and daughter seemed comfortable and satisfied with their current situation in which they live together. The daughter enjoys her mother's care, while the mother feels tired but does not show any unwillingness or resentment. The parent-child relationship remains a harmonious, where the parent offers labour support and the child offers emotional returns. The agreement reached by the two generations, to some degree, makes parent-consuming an intergenerational reciprocity. However, it can be found that although Ms Xu's mother has no complaints about her daughter, she dislikes her son-in-law playing computer games without helping her. Perhaps Ms Xu's mother can tolerate her daughter's parent-consuming, but fails to accept her son-in-law taking advantage of her labour.

Generally, most of the interviewed only-children will leave their parents to live a relatively independent life. Even if they ask their parents to take care of their little children, most of them do not live with their parents full-time. It is unusual to move back into the parents' home and live together for long periods of time as in Ms. Xu's case. She abandons her own independent life but receives much in return. Her gratitude to her mother is notable in the following conversation:

I have discussed with my husband that I would take my parents to live with us. After all, we live in a bigger and much more comfortable flat than my parents'. But my mom did not want to leave her own home and her neighbours. As a result, I moved to her home. When I came back to work, basically my mom took care of my son all by herself. I wanted to hire a baby-sitter to help her, but my mom had a lot of concerns about the baby-sitter, and insisted on taking my son herself. My mom is not in good health and had hypertension so it is not easy for her to take care of the baby and do all the housework. I always try to amuse her and never annoy her. Whenever I have holidays I will take a trip with her for recreation.

Ms. Xu's mother is clearly willing to be relied on, but neither of the generations ever considers this support from the perspective of fairness. Ms. Xu's mother is busy from morning to night, but she is emotionally pleased and she realises her self-worth in the sacrifice. In addition, Ms Xu feels relaxed and delighted under her mother's care because she did not need to do any housework herself. Both generations can get what they need, and they live in a harmonious parent-child

relationship. This is a typical case of parent-consuming and it is considerably common in China that children, to different degree, count on their parents in their daily life.

8.6 Conclusion

Among the interviewed families, the adult children all appear more or less reliant on their parents' help. The Chinese context may make it difficult to distinguish between common reliance on parents and more exploitative parent-consuming. In this chapter, I have employed a definition of parent-consuming as the constant and one-way reliance on parents. The analysis has revealed that some only children heavily rely on their parents for economic or hands-on support with everyday life. In these families parent-consuming has become a mode of parent-child communication, which is practice by parent-child exchanges. The two generations are cooperative in terms of financial and labour support, whereby some parents offer material and labour help while children provide some labour (like Jiang Xin's case) and emotional returns (like Ms. Xu's case). As Popenoe (1999) claimed in his intergenerational exchange theory, the exchange relationship is closely related to family intergenerational relationships. An individual or a group contacts with others in some way, aiming to obtain some rewards or returns to form an exchange which can be intangible and emotional.

This kind of parent-child exchange relationship usually exists between adult children and late middle-aged parents, just like the only-child families I interviewed. During this period both generations are somewhat independent from each other and the exchange relationship is performed as mutual cooperation and interdependence (Wang, 2008). However, the exchanges between parents and children are not necessarily equivalent, but rather depend on the needs of both generations. Some only-child respondents are only beginning to establish their own newly-founded families, and, for different reasons, often require a lot from their parents. Emotional exchange acts as an important mediator between the two generations in parent-consuming families (Xiong, 1998; Wang & Li, 2011). When analysing parent-child relationships in Chinese families, existing literature mainly focuses on material support and continuity of the family line, ignoring the emotional needs of the two generations (Wang, 2011). The analysis in this chapter shows that intergenerational emotions play a significant role in mutual beneficial cooperation. Parent-child emotional bonds work as a bridge linking the parents' support with their children's dependency on them for material, childcare and domestic support. Therefore in some sample families, the parent-consuming behaviour of adult children does not inevitably lead to a tension in their parent-child relationships.

In the past, when a family was large but poor, close intergenerational relationships were basically supported and

maintained by the family line and filial piety. Now, with enhancing material conditions and the reduction in the number of children, some older people could live a much more affluent and relaxed life than in previous years. However, parents have nearly endless responsibilities for their children according to Chinese family norms, from bringing them up to helping them marry, and from baby care to housework (Chen, 2012). Although the only-children in this study are already grown up and married, some parents still offer infinite help and support to their adult children's life, while some adult children seem to take their parents' assistance for granted. As discussed in Chapter 2, the only-child is often regarded as the core of the family by many parents. Even if only-children are now fathers and mothers themselves, they are still considered as children in their parents' eyes. This could be understood as an example of 'descending familism' strengthening the value of parent-child integration, and blurring the duties and obligations of the two generations. As a result of this, the children in this sample seem to take their reliance on their parents for granted, whilst many parents appeared willing to be overly depended on.

In general, parent-consuming on parents is a common phenomenon among my sample families. Parent-consuming is not restricted in the daily financial and labour reliance cases which I describe in this chapter, the overly dependent on parents' help with payment of wedding, marital homes, caring of children could also be seen as parent-consuming.

For example, the cases like Mr An (P24H) (see chapter 5) who spent most of his parents' pension to buy a marital home; Li Hua (P7W) (see chapter 7) leaves her second child to her mother-in-law all day long from Monday to Friday and makes her mother-in-law exhausted; and so on. These adult only-children transfer their burdens or problems to their parents and realise their individualised aims. As I mentioned in the earlier data analysing chapters (see chapter 4,5,6,7), some parents in my interviews expressed that their children achieved their personal goals through exploiting their parents' values. At present, many parents are generally consumed by their children. Some parents justify this dependency by pointing to the role it plays in maintaining their relationships with their children, while others consider their reliance on their children for care as they age. However, as illustrated in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, many of the parents expressed dissatisfaction and complained about their children, despite these justifications. The real dissatisfaction which parents have towards their children is likely far more than that disclosed in the interview context. When facing strangers, many people are likely to withhold their true feelings and may not discuss tensions and conflict between their family members.

However, the analysis presented here suggests that some parents are dissatisfied with their children's dependency on them. These parents, not completely willing to devote themselves fully to their families, make compromises based

on their attachments to the relationships among individuals. It illustrates that the parents' generation are also becoming more individualised. Many parents consider their relationships with their children from their own perspectives, while many only-children couples are pursuing independence and self-satisfaction. Individualisation is thus evident in both generations, but is expressed in different ways.

9 CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

The first generation of only-children have grown up under a historical background which was completely different from their parents'. Firstly, the one-child policy and work unit system reform meant that their parents had to think seriously about their careers when planning their family. Parents in this new era were supposed to make arrangements and decisions for their children's' kindergartens and schools after their only-children were born. When the only-children grew up, their parents would have a new series of concerns about their children's' spouse selection, wedding ceremony, marital home, residence arrangement, and even the birth and care of the next generation. These were not severe problems that families typically experienced during work unit period. Many problems which used to be solved by the work units now could only be managed within the families (Ye, 2008). The first generation of only-children in China were thus seldom influenced by the ideas of primacy of the collective. Chinese private lives have thus experienced great changes alongside such rapid social transformations (Yan, 2003).

The transformation from familism to individualism turns the Chinese family from traditional to modern (Yan, 2009). In the past many families were organised through family benefits, whereas an increasing number of contemporary Chinese families are established upon individual benefits. Choices and decisions within family are made more by negotiations

and compromises between family members, instead of the unconditional compromises which individuals make for the greater benefit of the family. The definition of the Chinese family as a corporate unit is no longer relevant. Family identification, the management of family relationships, and the distribution of the family resources all reflect individual considerations, rather than unified family concepts and unified family coordination. This is especially the case for the younger generation in which a family is regarded as a platform to pursue individual development. Some individuals are more able to be self-reliant, which is a necessary condition to be individualised, when they possess considerable resources or better socio-economic conditions.

An important point to clarify at this point is that individualisation is not exactly the same as individualism. Individualism is a term used to describe a process of how a person becomes an independent individual, while individualisation illustrates 'the beginning of a new mode of socialisation, a kind of metamorphosis or categorical shift in the relation between the individual and society' (Beck, 1992). This difference explains that the result of individualisation is that an individual pays more attention to their interactions with other individuals rather than being isolated. Due to the fact that an individual becomes disembedded from the system, before making a decision an individual will have to negotiate, compromise and try to get support from others in order to achieve their purpose (Beck &

Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). Individualisation does not, therefore, necessarily produce a 'selfish' society. Rather, individualisation encourages individuals to focus on themselves, whilst on the other hand, it can cultivate people's moral standard of altruism. As an individual, one does not automatically stop caring about others. Actually, living in a highly-individualised society means that it requires you to stay social, rational, and care about others, in order to manage and organise your life (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001).

Throughout this thesis I have shown that the tendency towards individualisation existing in the parent-child relationships within the first generation of only-children's families. With only children continually raising awareness of their rights and emphasising their personal interests, parents are consumed by their children under many circumstances, but they sometimes evaluate their own benefits first and do not always compromise with their children. An individual within a family will construct the family relationships in a self-centred mode, based on their own personal needs and requirements. In the process of getting married and having children, some cultural traditions—such as sending marriage payments, preparing wedding ceremonies, and purchasing marital homes—become available resources for individuals. In this series of processes, young adult children extract money, properties, and even care for the next generation from their original families, reconstructing the relationships

with their parents through many interactions and negotiations with each other.

The first generation of only-children families are thus individualised with significant Chinese characteristics. Fei (1992) pointed out that an individual's network was egocentric which everyone stood in the centre of their network and their network was defined by the different level of relationships (*guanxi*). Fei also believed that this could be defined as egoism rather than individualism. Egoism makes people become accustomed to behaving in accordance with the goal of maintaining the different level of relationships, rather than purely based on individual needs. However, his theory is challenged by my finding that both generations in a family make decisions based, at least initially, from their own personal perspective. This is not to say that these interviewees did not consider their mutual relationships. Rather, the point I have made is that they balance their relationships from their individual perspectives, unlike Fei's statement that a relationship acts as a dominant norm when people deal with matters.

With changes in intimate relations (Giddens, 2001), emotions are increasingly relevant to Chinese families, especially since conjugal relationships are now so important. This does not imply that conjugal relationships have replaced the parent-child relationships however. This finding challenges Fei's (1992) contention that parent-child relationships are more

important than conjugal relationships. Having analysed the data collected from 30 interviewed families, it appears that both the conjugal relationship within the children's generation *and* the parent-child relationship are important in a family, neither of which could completely place itself above the other one. Conjugal relationships between young couples and generational relationships between children and their parents enjoy different priorities due to varying individual backgrounds and personal experiences in different families, whereas both relationships are weighed and judged by individuals within families.

Although the reliance on parents could be widely noticed from my data, none of the only-children completely exploit their parents all of the time, and none of the parents can be said to coldly push away their children when assistance is required. The adult only-children among my sample show many characteristics of individualisation. They put their own needs ahead of their parents', pursue a better material standard of living than their parents, prefer to live independently, and leave many difficult issues, such as housing purchase and childcare, to their parents. Only-children become individualised quite quickly, whereas they are still the group who rely on parents most. This seems to be apparently paradoxical, but it is, actually, quite closely related to social development in China. Such changes and the reform of policies have brought about a lot of pressure, and this encourages the younger generation to request a lot of

support by taking full advantage of traditions and norms of Chinese family life.

In a society that has undergone much transformation since the era of collectivism, Yan (2006) contends that some individuals who pursue their own self-interest are immoral. In contrast to this, the analysis that I have presented here implies that these individuals should be understood as 'shrewd' rather than immoral. These shrewd individuals seek a material foothold fully consider their individual desires and evaluate their relationships with other individuals in their families, in order to maximise their self-interest. Many only-children often justify their demands to their parents with many seemingly good reasons. For example, when Mr. Shao (P1H) wanted his parents to purchase him a bigger flat, the reason which he proposed was that he planned to have a son, and the present flat would not be large enough to raise a second child. When children put forward these outwardly reasonable arguments, many parents find it difficult to refuse their children directly, although they often inferred their children's motives, seeing their requests for more resources as connected to their personal aspirations. This goes some way in explaining why, despite the tensions in their relationships with their children, parents continue to maintain ostensibly harmonious relationships with their children, without intensifying conflicts.

Not all the only-children are planning on consuming their

parents and securing material transfers though, as some children expressed their gratitude towards their parents during interviews. On the other hand, not all the parents felt that their children were calculating for their personal gain. Indeed, some of the parents themselves are thinking about their own needs in advance. For example, many interviewed parents mentioned that they helped their children mainly because they would rely on their children in their later lives. Some parents ensure that they leave themselves with sufficient pension funds prior to providing their children with economic help, while others described their attempts at avoiding becoming responsible for providing childcare. In these cases, parents, no longer acting as victims, make choices and manage their relationships with their children from their own perspectives.

Although these only-children's parents grew up in the era of collectivism, they keep pace with the social reforms. During the process of social reform, individuals of different generations, different genders and different classes acquired asymmetric information, which led them to different degrees of individualisation. In general, my interview data demonstrate that parents make more contributions for their children than what their children give to them, while parents rely less on their children. This may be because the only-children's parents are relatively young and do not need too much daily care from their children. The balance may change in the future as they are aging and require more care.

Furthermore, the different extents of asynchronous individualisation of the two generations bring not only conflicts but also benefits to both generations.

Due to the existence of conflicts and complementation, only-children's families appear diversified during the process of individualisation. Every family has its happiness and sorrows, with different performance and degrees of individualisation. Moreover, the sample of 30 families is not representative of the experiences of all Chinese urban only-children families. Additionally, paying attention to the life course suggests that respondent families are changing continually, with interviewees experiencing changing roles according to their different life stages. For example, some only-children couples plan to have second babies, while one interviewed couple had gotten divorced after the interview (which I can guarantee it was definitely not the trigger for the divorce). What my research can reflect is only a tendency as time passes by and individuals in families change constantly.

The process of Chinese families' individualisation is far from over. As China has moved from a planned economy to a market economy, the collectivism which focused on collective benefits has gradually changed to privatisation. These changes are particularly evident within the Chinese family and relationships between family members. Both individual and family, tradition and modernity cannot be completely separated, but are rather interrelated across time.

Marketisation and privatisation actually changes two key factors required in the establishment of a family – the material base, and individuals themselves. Regarding accommodation, for example, marketisation and privatisation significantly influenced the family's housing conditions. When residences were allocated by work units, the dwellings on offer provided poor living conditions and limited space. In this context, there was not much difference in people's living conditions, and as a result, individuals did not typically have too much personal desire for better properties. Having begun to work, adult children could obtain new accommodations from their own working units, and thus, they seldom relied on their parents for accommodation, especially after getting married. Under the background of marketisation however, the reform of the real estate market encouraged people to improve their personal living conditions. The individuals who enjoyed good economic capability and consideration social resources could seek better residences. Alongside rising consumerism, individuals have gradually come to hold higher standards and require more from their accommodations. In the meantime, the attenuation of working unit welfare housing distribution system raises individuals' requirements on family resources. In other words, the adult children become much more dependent on their parents than before. The young adults with general incomes who want to have their own accommodation have to request financial support from their parents. Therefore, it can be argued that marketisation actually challenges individualisation by making children less

likely to be self-reliant. Under the influence of marketisation, the parent's generation also suggests trends towards individualisation, where many begin to reconsider the parent-child relationships from their own perspective. As a result, the changes caused by marketisation, including changes in family material resources and changes in the individuals, bring about significant impacts on both generations in a family.

The parent-child relationships turn out to be diversified among the 30 interviewed only-child families. In some families parents offer a lot of economic support or domestic help, but great tensions also exist in their parent-child relationships. In some poorer families, although parents fail to meet all their children's needs, they manage to maintain harmonious relationships with their children. I cannot guarantee that their accounts of the relationships represent the reality, but I did observe mutual understanding and reciprocal emotional support during the interviews. For example, some parents could not afford to help their children with the marital homes, but their children expressed no complaints, and they generally maintained good interactions with their parents in their daily lives. Thus, it would be too simplistic to conclude that paying out or receiving help automatically leads to good relationships, since different only-child families have greatly diversified relationships between the two generations.

My study also illustrates the changing gender practices and

norms in only-child families. Some only-child couples, for example, live in marital homes that were purchased by only-daughter families, or live with only-daughter parents after getting married. This challenges the traditional Chinese family norm where a man is expected to purchase the marital home. My study confirms Choi and Peng's (2016) argument that many practices of male dominance in Chinese family have been challenged and transformed by social and material realities. In the meantime, my data reveals that people's recognition of gender inequality appears to be contradictory. On one hand, many interviewees appealing for gender equality in the new era of China proposed that women ought to live their lives instead of being constrained by their families, but many of these women continued to be primarily responsible for housework and childcare. On the other hand, many interviewees voiced their expectations that a marital home should be purchased by the man's family. This feeds into the stereotype of the male breadwinner, who is fully responsible for purchasing properties and supporting their family. Such stereotypes appear to be highly constraining for some of the men in this study. .

Whilst the findings presented in this thesis are based on a strong research design and rigorous analysis, there are some limitations to reflect upon. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the analysis is based on an unrepresentative sample of 30 only-child families. Moreover, I conducted the research in one particular location in the city of Tianjin because of budget and

time limitations. This means that the sample was limited in terms of its diversity. For example, I did not include immigrant or rural families who had moved to Tianjin; these would have no doubt added further complexity to the analysis. Additionally, my research was focused on the relationships between two generations and I did not take the third generation into consideration. However, if I have further opportunity to study intergenerational relationships in China, I would pay attention to these limitations and make future studies more diversified.

Through the process of social reform, the Chinese government quietly transferred some inextricable problems to families through establishing a series of systems and policies. Although people have been marching towards individualisation for some times now, many existing systems are pulling them back. Among the interviewed families, a number of challenges such as housing and child caring were typically resolved within the family. For example, the government makes school district housing policies to bind the properties with children's educational resources by making the policies which require children's household registration in these school district. That means if parents want their children to enter a good school, they have to buy the expensive properties to get their household registered in a good school district. As a result, housing prices of good school districts roar up to several times more than those of other places. Against this backdrop, even a couple with

moderate income can hardly afford a school district property to ensure their children access to a decent education. However in the hot and crowded school district housing market, the sky-high housing prices fail to block many young parents out of these communities, since most of them are able to rely on the support of their parents to help them purchase a home. On the other hand, the employment situation in China remains highly competitive, but most of the young couples manage to secure full-time jobs, albeit they work without adequate and affordable social childcare. This pattern can be said to attribute to the design of another policy. The policy of retirement sets an earlier retirement age for ageing workers. With their parents retiring earlier than before, the young couples are able to fill childcare gaps by relying on their parents. This suggests that the government has thrown problems which cannot be totally and effectively solved by the system to individual families. As a result, individuals are often prevented from living completely for themselves, their bodies confined in the realities whilst their individualised minds fly high and dream. Like the only-children and their parents in my research, when they are pursuing their individual well-being, they are inevitably twined together like the vines on the tree.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Table of information of informants of my interviews.

No.	Husband	Wife	Father(F) or Mother(M) of Husband	Father (F) or Mother(M) of Wife	Only-Children's Home & Socio- economic status	Husband's Parents Home & Socio- economic status	Wife's Parents Home & Socio- economic status	Number of Children
1	Shao	Jinjin	M	F	HONGQIAO Low	NANKAI Low	JINGHAI Low	1
2	Wang	Xu	M	M	HEXI High	BAODI Low	HEXI High	1

No.	Husband	Wife	Father(F) or Mother(M) of Husband	Father (F) or Mother(M) of Wife	Only-Children's Home & Socio- economic status	Husband's Parents Home & Socio- economic status	Wife's Parents Home & Socio- economic status	Number of Children
3	Chen	Xiong	M	F	HEPING High	TANGSHAN Medium	TANGSHAN High	1
4	Liu	Kuang Yingying	M	F	HEXI High	HEDONG Medium	HEXI High	1
5	Li	Li Zong- ping	M	M	HEPING High	HEPING High	QINGDAO Medium	2
6	Wang	Jiang Xin	M	M	HEXI Medium	DONGLI Low	HEXI High	1
7	Yao	Li Hua	M	M	XIQING Medium	NANKAI Low	BEICHEN Medium	2
8	Xu	Liu	F	M	HEDONG Medium	NANKAI Low	HEDONG Medium	1
9	Zhang	Sun	M	F	HEXI Medium	HEXI Medium	XIQING Medium	1

No.	Husband	Wife	Father(F) or Mother(M) of Husband	Father (F) or Mother(M) of Wife	Only-Children's Home & Socio- economic status	Husband's Parents Home & Socio- economic status	Wife's Parents Home & Socio- economic status	Number of Children
10	Zhang	Wang	F	F	TANGGU Medium	NANKAI Low	TANGGU Low	1
11	Zhipeng	Fangyuan	M	M	HEXI High	CANGZHOU Medium	CANGZHOU High	1
12	Li Ming	Lin	F	M	HEPING High	HEPING High	GUANGZHOU Medium	1
13	Lv	Si	F	M	HEPING High	WUQING Medium	DAGANG Medium	1
14	Chen	Meiling	M	M	HEXI Medium	BAODI High	JIANGXI Medium	1
15	Yi	Wan Fang	M	M	HEPING Low	WUQING Medium	HEPING Medium	1
16	Wang	Wang Lan	M	F	HEXI Medium	BINHAI Medium	JINNAN Low	1

No.	Husband	Wife	Father(F) or Mother(M) of Husband	Father (F) or Mother(M) of Wife	Only-Children's Home & Socio-economic status	Husband's Parents Home & Socio-economic status	Wife's Parents Home & Socio-economic status	Number of Children
17	Huang	He Xiaoling	M	M	NANKAI Low	NANKAI Low	NINGHE Low	1
18	Tong	Weiwei	M	F	HEPING High	HEPING High	ANHUI Medium	1
19	Zhang	Yongmei	M	M	HEPING High	HEBEI Medium	HEPING High	1
20	Niu	Xie	M	F	XIQING Medium	BAODING Medium	HEXI Medium	1
21	Xiao	Ji	F	M	HEPING Medium	NINGHE Low	JINNAN High	1
22	Lian	Ye	M	F	HEBEI Medium	WUQING Medium	NANKAI Low	1
23	Zhang	Li Yue	M	M	<u>NANKAI</u> Medium	<u>HONGQIAO</u> Medium	HEBEI Medium	1

No.	Husband	Wife	Father(F) or Mother(M) of Husband	Father (F) or Mother(M) of Wife	Only-Children's Home & Socio- economic status	Husband's Parents Home & Socio- economic status	Wife's Parents Home & Socio- economic status	Number of Children
24	An	Du	F	M	HEXI Medium	DONGLI Medium	XIQING Medium	1
25	Zhou	Zhang	M	F	HEPING High	DONGLI Medium	HEPING High	1
26	Xi	Xiuyu	F	M	DAGANG High	HONGQIAO High	HEPING High	1
27	Li	Wang Jing	M	M	HEBEI Medium	HEXI Medium	XIQING High	1
28	Xu	Xiaofan	M	M	HEDONG High	DONGLI High	NANKAI Low	1
29	Guo	Liu Xiaoxue	M	F	HEDONG Medium	NANKAI Medium	HEPING High	1
30	Jianguo	Kailing	F	M	BEICHEN Medium	JINGHAI High	NANKAI Medium	1

Appendix 2: Semi-structured Interview Guide

Questions for Parents:

Let's begin with some questions about grandchildren.

1. How old are your grandchildren?
2. What's your relationship with your grandchildren?
3. When your grandchildren are born, were you there? What did you do at that time?
4. How often and what do you take care of your grandchildren?
5. Have you got some problems when taking care of grandchildren?
6. Do you usually spend time with your child and grandchildren together? What do your family do when you are get-together?
7. Do you usually spend money on your grandchildren?
8. Do you enjoy taking care of your grandchildren?
9. (If the grandchild was a boy) Do you prefer to have another granddaughter?
(If the grandchild was a girl) Do you prefer to have another grandson?
Have you ever persuade your son/daughter to have another baby?
10. Does your child hold some different ideas to yours of caring your grandchildren? Who has the final say in this kind of situation?

Here comes with some questions about only-children and their spouse.

11. What's your child's job? Did you help him/her to find the job?
12. Did your child keep the salary himself/herself or let you keep it before he/she got married?

13. Did you live together with your child at that time?
14. Did you take care of your son's/daughter's daily life at that time?
15. How did you meet your child's partner?
16. What did you think about you son's/daughter's partner at that time? What do you think about daughter-in law/son-in-law now?
17. How long did they get married after they met each other?
18. How long have they been married?
19. How did you help your child preparing the wedding?
20. How about the marriage cost in your family? (home for the new couple/wedding/furniture/appliances/wedding photos)
21. Do you live together with your son/daughter now?
22. If they live together: How about the household expenses? Who do more housework?
23. If they don't live together: What's the distance between two homes? How and how often do you contact each other?
24. Do you have some different living habits with your son/daughter?
25. Does your child usually give money/presents to you?
26. Does your child usually help you with the housework?
27. Does your child usually take you out for travelling?
28. Have you helped your child with some financial difficulties?
29. What are the differences between you and your child, like marriage or lifestyle?
30. What family duties do you have?
31. What's your plan about your later life?

Questions for only-children

1. How did you meet your partner?
2. What job do you do? Did your parents help you to find the job?
3. Did you keep your salary yourself or let your parents keep it before you got married?
4. Did your parents take care of your daily life at that time?
5. How long did you get-married after you meet your wife/husband?

6. How long have you been married?
7. How did your parents help you to prepare the wedding?
8. How about the marriage cost in your family? (home for the new couple/wedding/furniture/appliances/wedding photos)
9. Do you live together with your parents now?
10. If they live together: How about the household expenses? Do you help your parents with the housework?
11. If they don't live together: What's the distance between your home and your parents' home? How and how often do you contact each other?
12. Who do you live nearer, your parents or your partner's parents?
13. Do you have some different living habits with your parents?
14. Do you usually give money/presents to your parents?
15. Do you usually help your parents with the housework?
16. Do you usually take your parents out for travelling?
17. What's the relationship between your child and your parents?
18. Did your parents are there when your children were born? What did they do at that time?
19. How often and what do your parents take care of your children?
20. Do you usually spend time with your parents and your children together? What do your family do when you are get-together?
21. Do your parents usually spend money on your children?
22. Whom do you prefer to take care of your children, your parents, your parent-in-law or you?
23. Do you have some different ideas to your parents regarding the care of children? Who has the final say in this kind of situation?
24. Have your parents or your parents-in-law ever persuade you to have another child?
25. Have your parents ever helped you with some financial difficulties?
26. Do you think there are differences between your and your parents, for example marriage or lifestyle?
27. What family duties do you have?
28. How do you plan for the future of your family?

Appendix 3: Information Sheet



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Parent-child Relations During Only-children's marriage

process

Information about the study

I am a Ph.D. student in Sociology at the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh. My study is about the only children's relationships with parents during the process of their marriage. Therefore I need to conduct interview and would like to know your experiences of being only-child or only-child's parents. I hope that a deep interview with your cooperation will help enable me to provide information that could help to get a better understanding of the first generation of urban only-child families and have a reflection of the One-child Policy.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview which will take approximately one hour. You will be asked questions about parent-child relations in your family. With your permission, I will audio record the interviews in order to accurately capture what is said. I just need a verbal consent by audio recorder before the interview to show you agreed to take part. The recordings will be transcribed, but your name will not be included in the transcriptions. All the information you give will be anonymised. The recording and transcription will be kept on a password-protected computer and will be destroyed after the study is completed. No one but myself will have access to the audio recording and transcript of the interview you give. There are no known risks or disadvantages of taking part, as I strive to protect your confidentiality. You are under no obligation to take part in this research. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions, that is fine. You can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and there will be no adverse consequences if you do so.

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Thank you for taking the time to read this Information Sheet.