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# A Harmonious Family Prospers in Everything: China's One-Child Policy and Dynamics of Parent- Child Relationships in Beijing Families

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家和万事兴 (A Harmonious Family Prospers in Everything): China's One-Child  
Policy and Dynamics of Parent-Child Relationships in Beijing Families.

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by

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## **Introduction**

In 1978, Deng Xiaoping regained his leadership as the chairman of the Central Advisory Commission of the Chinese Communist Party, making him the most important leader in China. Under Deng's regime, China embarked on an unprecedented journey toward globalization. Economically, Deng and his team of reformers adopted a series of policies in an attempt to integrate China into the global economy. In the domestic economy, Deng's Economic Reform policies proceeded with privatization of public business sectors and expansion of private business sectors. In the outward or international economy, Deng employed and promoted the "open-door" policy that initiated foreign trade and investment. Deng and his team believed that "global economic integration not only would allow China to exploit her unique comparative advantage [abundant labor and a huge domestic market] in the emerging global economy, but the flow of Western technology, capital and management practices would also enable China to advance the ambitious goals of socialist modernization more rapidly" (Sharma 2009: 55). Compared with economic reform, political reform in China was relatively slow and it was handled with tremendous caution. However, Deng still managed to transfer Mao's "class-struggle" political mentality into an economy-based political guideline (Sharma 2009: 73-75). Deng introduced his theory of democracy<sup>1</sup> during the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Central Committee. Deng's democracy theory targets democracy as the

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<sup>1</sup> The democracy discussed here differs from the common Western notion of democracy. Democracy in Deng's theory is a centralism democracy, which "rejects the Western multi-party and advocates the sole leadership of the CCP and the system of People's Congress under the leadership of the CCP." (Yu 2008)

central goal of the Chinese Communist Party, and it emphasizes “the institution of democracy, economic democracy and the development of a legal framework (Yu 2008: 254-256).” This political reform allows more equal opportunities for free competitions and less authoritarian control over the citizens’ social and political life (Sharma 2009: 73-75). In order to further strengthen China’s global power and to create a generation of global elites, Deng and his team implemented the One-Child Policy in the 1980s, a state-coerced population control policy designed to reduce China’s fertility rate in a relatively short period of time (Fong 2004: 2-3). Beijing, the capital of China, was one of the Chinese cities that have been greatly affected by the One-Child Policy. A majority of Beijing urban youth born after the 1980s were the sole bearers of their families.

In recent academic discourse on globalization, the globalization process is often referred to as the “the process whereby the world is said to be transformed into a single global system” (Chan 2007: 2). The role of globalization in the world’s economical and political development has been widely discussed.<sup>2</sup> However, globalization is not only an economical or political phenomenon; it also has far-reaching cultural consequences. Various scholars have argued that globalization creates inherent tension between the local culture and the global, majorly Western culture (Chan 2007: 2-4). How will globalization affect China’s existence, where Confucian culture has been one of the dominant cultures that permeate the lives of the Chinese throughout centuries?<sup>3</sup>

In this study, I will approach the issue of cultural globalization from the perspective of family. As Bihira Trask suggests in 2010, while globalization is both an

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<sup>2</sup> For example: Barran Sweezy’s work on monopoly capital and Wallerstein’s work on international trade and development of labor.

<sup>3</sup> See Stole and DeVos’s book *Confucianism and the Family* for more specific arguments on the dominance of Confucianism in East Asian cultures.

economic and political issue, it is within families that “globalization is realized.” According to Trask, “Ideological and material changes in the national and transnational arena intersect with personal decisions that are arrived at in family contexts” (2010: 21). Across the globe, family has been at least a part of the basic units of a society. It has been the main site where “material, economic, emotional and ideational” exchanges happen (Trask 2010: 21). Furthermore, families function as the primary environment for socialization. Children often encounter their first socialization process in the domain of family. Therefore, families offer the initial space for children’s integration into larger-level communities (2010: 22-23). In Confucian culture, family also has been considered to be the basic unit of society. The stability of a society cannot be achieved if the harmony within the individual families is disturbed (Yan and Sorenson 2006). As China enters an era of globalization, how do Chinese families respond to a changing global environment? More specifically, how do individual members in the family unit react to the socioeconomic reform policies that aim to facilitate China’s rise as a global power?

In order to answer such questions, I went to Beijing, China during the summer of 2011 and conducted 24 interviews with Beijing only children who were born from 1989 to 1990. The interviews normally lasted from 30 minutes to one hour. As I traveled through different sites in Beijing, sat in a variety of local coffee shops where most of my interviews were conducted, and listened to the family stories concerning parent-child relationships of the 24 Chinese singletons, I gained a personal perspective on how cultural globalization unfolds in the singleton children’s families. While cultural globalization is probably an alien word for most of the singleton children, they have experienced it on the most intimate level. I selected four case studies that are the most

representative of the Beijing 24 singleton families in order to illustrate the effects of cultural globalization on Beijing urban families. Before the analysis of the case studies, however, I will first discuss the two reform policies that closely related to Chinese contemporary families: the One-Child Policy (Chapter One) and the social welfare reform policy (Chapter Two).

## **Chapter One: The One-Child Policy**

### The Background:

In 1949, upon the foundation of the People's Republic of China, China's population reached 544,950 and the population growth rate continuously exceeded 2% in the subsequent two years. The discussion of population control since 1949, however, has been largely confined within political domains and heavily affected by political winds; independent and objective assessment of China's population situation was absent. During Mao's regime from 1949 to 1967, China's population problem was not a scientific, but a political issue.

Despite some occasional shifts<sup>4</sup>, the political atmosphere during Mao's period was in favor of a large population. Mao denied the potential for China's overpopulation to become an obstacle toward economic development. In a 1957 article, he states, "it is a very good thing that China has a large population. Even if China's population multiplies many times, she is fully capable of finding a solution: the solution is production...of all things in the world, people are the most precious. Under the leadership of the Communist Party, as long as there are people, every kind of miracle can be performed" (quoted in Kane 1987: 58).

Under Mao's favoritism toward a large population, the rationale behind the first population control policy that was officially promoted in 1956's "Second Five-Year Plan for the Development of the National Economy" was carefully calculated. The focus of the

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<sup>4</sup> In 1957, Mao made an antinatalistic statement that "the human race is in its procreation has been in a state of total anarchy and had failed to exercise control. In 1965-74, Mao again suggested a second birth campaign plan facing the birth boom in 1965.

population control policy was placed on the welfare of children and women. The policy states “If a child continues to be born to a mother every year even if she is no longer medically fit or when her burden has already proven too much for her, even if we disregarded the sufferings of the mothers, it is no easy job for the state to place all the mothers under its protection” (quoted in Kane 1987: 66).

Under the name of promoting women and children’s welfares, “Regulation of Contraception” was issued by the Ministry of Health in 1956 and research on contraception techniques was in progress. National media were utilized to disseminate information on birth control. Also, restrictions on abortion and sterilization were relaxed. Termination up until the 10<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy was permitted regardless of a pregnant woman’s age (Peng 1991: 20). By the end of 1957, the population growth rate was successfully controlled to 1.46.

Despite the efforts to avoid direct confrontation with Mao’s ideology, the first population policy failed to survive China’s political environment. It was abandoned after 3 years and prior to the Great Leap Movement in 1958, when the debate over China’s overpopulation issue was discarded and the major concern shifted from “whether China was overpopulated to whether “China had enough manpower to meet the needs of its socialist construction” (Peng 1991: 21).

The population control policy was further attacked during the years of the Cultural Revolution. “The six outspoken advocates of a stronger population policy were accused of being anti-party, anti-people, and anti-socialist, anti-democratic dictatorship and harboring political ambition” (Kane 1978: 73). The political agenda behind population policy overwhelmingly out-weighted an objective evaluation of China’s

population problem. Advocacy of population control was aligned with “bourgeois ideology” and the advocates were condemned as “bourgeois academicians” and “capitalist roaders” (Peng 1991: 22).

Upon Mao’s death, the political attitude toward population control was altered. Deng Xiaoping, the new reform leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), possessed an opinion that is radically different from Mao’s on the population issue. China’s population, by the year of 1970 already at 815,950.9, is not portrayed by the CCP as a major force for production anymore, but as a major barrier on China’s march toward modernization (Greenhalgh 2008: 87). In his 1984’s speech “Uphold the Four Cardinal Principle”, Deng expressed his concerns about China’s population: “to achieve the Four Modernizations and make China a powerful socialist country before the end of this century will be a gigantic task... we have a large population but not enough arable land. Of China’s population of more than 900 million, 80 percent are peasants.... When production is insufficiently developed, [a large population] poses serious problems with regarded to food, education, and employment. We must greatly increase our efforts in [birth] planning” (Deng 1984[1979]: 171-172).

Under Deng’s political guidelines, population control campaigns were launched among other Fourth Five Year Plans with an explicit political goal: to achieve economic development and modernization. At first, the population campaign aimed to achieve the goal of “晚，稀，少 [ later marriage and childbearing, longer birth interval and fewer children].” The standard marriage age was suggested as “in urban area 27 for men and 25 for women and in rural area 25 for men and 23 for women” (Peng 2001: 23). The interval between first and second births was likewise set up as four years. Moreover, the slogan

“一个太少，两个正好，三个多了[one is not enough, two is alright, three is too many]”

was promoted to recommend two children per family as the perfect number (Peng 2001: 23). By the year 1978, the population growth rate dropped to 1.4 and displayed a trend of continuous decline. Meanwhile, a more drastic population policy, the One-Child Policy, was brewing among the CCP's top leaders.

#### The Making of the One-Child Policy:

In January 1979, the One-Child Policy was formally announced by the Chinese Communist Party: “ Women who give birth to one child only will be publicly praised; those who give birth to three or more will suffer economic sanctions” (quoted in Banister 1987: 184).

At first, the implementation of the One-Child Policy was voluntary and reward-based. The government announced certain financial incentives for urban couples who signed the “ 独生子女光荣证 [ single-child certificate],” a pledge stating that they will have no more children. The reward system for urban residents included “a monthly cash payment while the child is growing up, preference in housing allocation and job assignment, free medical care for the child, priority for kindergarten and school enrollment, and free schooling for the child.” Two children were allowed by the policy, and only couples who bear the third children were punished with reduced salaries, no additional housing and funds for childbirth, medical care and schooling. By the end of 1979, the “single child certificate” acceptance rate already reached 29% of the total urban population. However, the national shortage on resources such as housing, nursery and kindergarten facilities left the incentive only an empty promise. From 1979 to 1983, the

family-plan policy in the urban regions transformed from reward-based to penalty based. By mid-1982, the births of the second children were forbidden. “Local officials must prevent the conceptions of the second and higher order children, and when that fails they are required to see to it that women have abortions” (Banister 1987: 191). Due to the Party’s efforts, by the year 1983, the “single children certificate” acceptance rate rose to 72% in China’s urban areas (Banister 1987: 188).

However, what is the logic behind the One-Child Policy? Is it based on scientific analyses of China’s demographic reality, or is it based on the political environment and political ideology of CCP’s leaders from that era?

According to Greenhalgh, the basis of the One-Child policy is indeed Western science and technology. However, the “science” on which the Party’s leaders’ based the policy on, is largely confined within political domains. Under the influence of Mao’ Era, the CCP often articulated the importance of natural science, especially in strategic defense. Social science, on the other hand, was largely overlooked (2008: 82-83). In 1952, when the country resumed institutions of higher education, curriculums involved sociology, political science and economics were excluded from the realm of higher education. Social science has never been favored by the CCP (Kane 1978: 60). Therefore, it was almost no surprise that the selection of the theories supporting the One-Child Policy were biased on theories that emphasized natural science.

Missile scientist Song, who later was delegated as the head scientists for the development of the One-Child Policy, introduced the ‘Optimum Population’ theory, which says that the optimal population size is the size that matches the available national resources. This theory met the nation’s need for a politically correct Western science

theory seamlessly, and it was soon selected as the core theory basis for the upcoming One-Child Policy. Song, with his team of natural scientists<sup>5</sup> later crafted a mathematic model based on the Optimum population theory with economic development, food resource and diet, ecological balances and freshwater resources as input variables. They calculated the desired national population in the year 2080 to be 630 to 650 million based on economic grounds, 650-700 million based on ecological balance, and 680 million based on food resources. The national population, however, was already 980 million by 1980 and continued to grow at the rate of 1.37. The only solution for this pressing population crisis, as Song and his team urged, was to reduce the fertility rate more rapidly and to limit the birth rate to one child per couple (Greenhalgh 2008:158-160).

While the optimum population theory proposes an ideal population condition for the society, it's hardly a valid theory to be utilized as the scientific basis for a nation-wide population policy. In fact, the optimum population theory was outcast by Western demographers about 50 or 60 years ago in realization of its many flaws before it was employed to formulate the One-Child Policy (Kane 1987:91). A majority of scholars criticized it as "not a theory at all." The population optimum theory, they argued is "static in nature." One must assume stationary factors of production for such a theory to be endorsable. The unpredictable fluctuation of variables casts a plausible assumption of the future population beyond the realm of possibility. Also, population behavior is a complex issue that requires certain knowledge of various social and biological mechanisms that would affect birth and death rate. The existence of such mechanisms, nevertheless, is still in debate (Robinson 1964: 375-392). In Song's 1985 publication population theory and

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<sup>5</sup> Yu Jingya, a missile engineer and Li Guangyuan, a mathematician specialized in computer science.

application, he admitted: “we are greatly constrained by the (un) availability of data” (1985: 248).

Moreover, the population optimum theory portrays the population problem as a natural science discipline in spite of the social-cultural consequences. People, as Greenhalgh writes, are “treated as biological organisms” (2008:158). The possible social consequences the One-Child Policy might have on Chinese family structures, intergenerational relationships, or psychological development of the children of the One-Child Policy were ignored for convenience. As Song put it, “if social customs and psychological conditions are considered, it may not be possible for the total fertility rate to go less than 1” (1985: 251). The political atmosphere in China during 1980s, however, required a scientific theory to legitimize its upcoming population control policy, and the optimum population theory was exploited in order to fulfill the state’s agenda.

By the end of the 1970s, China’s population growth rate had already dropped to 1.4. However, confronting the gruesome future depicted by the nation’s scientists, the PPC leaders decided to implement a more extreme population policy, the One-Child Policy, to further hasten the already declining fertility trend. The population growth rate in the year of 2000, 20 years after the policy’s implementation, reached 0.62 and it’s predicted to continue to decrease to 0.069 by 2030 (Bowring 2009). Moreover, low birth rates gradually become a voluntary choice rather than a state coercion because of the rapid urbanization and modernization in the cities. Shanghai, one of the most urbanized cities in China, is facing a future as the world’s lowest fertility rate: “0.7 births per woman of child-bearing age.” The Shanghai residents responded inactively toward the city government’s “selectively easing One-Child Policy to encourage some families to

have two [children]<sup>6</sup>. The increasing availability of jobs and higher education opportunities for women, together with more complex socio-economic factors, delayed urban marriage and child-rearing practices (Bowring 2009). Today's urban fertility rate is declining in a more organic manner in modern Chinese cities. Despite the continuously decreasing population growth rate, the One-Child Policy has been strictly executed throughout the nation's Five-Year Plans and an alternative, according to the recently released nation's Twelfth Five Year Plan, would not occur at least until 2015 (Bai 2011).

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<sup>6</sup> Shanghai residents who are from one-child families or on second marriages are permitted to have more children.

## **Chapter Two: A Historical Review of Confucianism in China**

### Confucian Family in Historical Context

The Confucian family structure is, in theory, an elegant system nestled on the “authoritarianism of the Three Bonds” and the “Benevolence of the Five Relationships.” While the Three Bonds emphasizes the “father over son” hierarchal relationship, the Five Relationships stress the importance of love and respect for the establishment of such authoritarian stratification” (Tu 1998: 129-130).

Confucianism does not exist in a vacuum and its idea of family has been constantly revised and dissected for political legitimacy. The ideologies from the Han dynasty, for example, transformed Confucian family ethics into a “mechanism of symbolic control for the primary purpose of social stability” (Tu 1998: 122). The Three Bonds was greatly promoted since its hierarchical structure conveniently serves the ruler’s goal to defend his own authority. As Tu puts it, “in a hierarchical and patriarchal society, it must seem convincing that the ruler or the husband, like the father, should be the interpreter, the executor and the judge of the moral code, for he assumes full responsibility for the stability and harmony of society...If the inferior challenges the superior...which is analogous to the son defying the father, the moral fabric of society will be damaged.” The Three Bonds, therefore, has been greatly emphasized by the political elites to preserve the hierarchical authority over their subjects. The Five Relationships that emphasize mutual love and respect, however, was largely overlooked (1998: 122-124).

Since the Han Dynasty, the hierarchal familial structure persisted over the whole span of Chinese history and remained intact during historical oscillations that were not in

favor of Confucian cultures. Throughout Chinese modern history, the majority of anti-Confucianism movements targeted the intellectual or political domain rather than the family domain. The May Fourth Movement, for example, considered by Chinese historians as one of the major anti-Confucianism waves, was largely confined in the intellectual sphere. As Rozman concludes, “However unpopular Confucianism had become among cosmopolitan intellectuals, its ethical principles and, to a considerable extent, its political ideology and philosophy remained firmly embedded in the lives of ordinary people” (1991: 185). Even under Mao’s regime when “Confucianism became a prime target” and “virtually all who had been treated deferentially in the past now were officially scorned as not suited and perhaps even useless in the new society...mass Confucianism retained most of its vitality.”(1991: 85-190).

Mao’s policy and other anti-Confucianism movements, however forceful, failed to generate a valid family structure to substitute for the traditional Confucian family unit (Rozman1991: 190-191). Traditional Confucian family values, therefore, persistently exists in Chinese life as an important element. Moreover, in recent years, there has been a revival of Confucian family tradition in Chinese society. Confucianism is utilized by the CCP to compensate for the diminishing social welfare system. In order to smoothly transfer the elderly care responsibilities from the nation state to individual families, the CCP promotes the Confucian family ethics and filial piety as important societal values that deserve to be cherished.

#### The Dream of Egalitarianism: The social Security System in Mao’s Era

Mao’s vision of Chinese society is a society of egalitarianism. When responding to an English correspondent in 1983, Mao depicted his utopian dream of the new China

where “every man has food to eat and clothes to wear. Every man understands the rights and duties of citizenship and has a fair chance of education and amusement... no man oppresses another. There is equality and universal love. Together all [will] build the peace of the world” (quoted in Meisner 1982: 186). Based on Mao’s utopian ideology, the policies from the Chinese Communist Party during Mao’s regime mainly served to achieve the goal of egalitarianism (Xing 1999: 87). In terms of the economic domain, the major aim was the “elimination of the system of exploitation and the oppression of men by men” (Li 1999: 88). The property and wealth of the state are the property and wealth of the people. The distribution of wealth, thus, should be according to basic needs rather than productivity.

The egalitarian policies were followed by a sequence of economic reforms to transform China’s industrial, commercial and handicraft economy into “socialist capital”. Throughout 1949-1952, the bureaucrat and foreign capital were converted into state-owned properties. At the end of 1949, the CCP confiscated 2,677 industrial firms that were previously owned by the Nationalist government. Moreover, private industrial, commercial and handicraft sectors were liquefied into national capital (Prybyla 1970: 60). They are, as Mao put it, “important economically” and “it’s possible and necessary for us to unite them...to win over the majority of the national bourgeoisie and isolate the minority” (quoted in Prybyla 1970: 65) As a result, the gross output of the wholesale from private firms dropped from 55.8% of the nation’s total output value in 1949 to 17.1% in 1952. Furthermore, some private industrialists and merchants became victims of the 1951 “Three-Antis” and “Five-Anti” Movements (Prybyla 1970:77). They were accused by the CCP as being part of the bourgeoisie class and the punishments ranged

from “residence under the supervision of the mass” to “summary execution” (Prybyla 1970: 77).

The transformation of private property into national property allowed a so-called “iron rice bowl [ 铁饭碗 ] ” social welfare system. The first 劳动保险条例 [ labor insurance regulation] published in 1951 clearly states that “[permanent] employees of state-owned enterprises (SOE) were tied to their respective work units or 单位 and enjoyed cradle-to -grave benefits, including lifelong wages and housing”(quoted in Song and Chu 1997: 85). According to this labor regulation, men who serve for 25 years by the time they reached 50 and women who serve for 20 years by the time they reached the same age would receive 50-70% of a working salary as a retirement fund until their death. All workers can be re-employed based on the needs of enterprises. The re-employed workers will enjoy the original salaries as well as 10-20% working salary. The amendment promulgated in 1978 increased the retirement benefits to 60% - 90% working salary for all retirees from SOEs. Further, “in the case of invalidity, death or retirement, one of the employee’s family members, the wife or the eldest son or daughter who reached working age, would be employed in the same or other enterprises as ‘compensation’. The expenditure of the social welfare is on the shoulder of the nation state rather than on each individual SOE, and the SOEs only needs to contribute 3% of the retirement fund (Song and Chu 1997: 86-87). This welfare system, as various scholars suggest, is “comparatively much more profound than that of many other developing countries” (Xing 1999:89). Its comprehensiveness and generosity are even superior to “the most advanced welfare states in the West” (Xing 1999: 89).

## The Egalitarian Dream Shattered: Social Welfare Reform in Deng's Era:

Deng Xiaoping, unlike his forerunner Mao, took a drastically different perspective on the understanding of China's future. Deng firmly believed China is still at the "primary stage" of socialist development and in order for it to "reach the level of developed countries by the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century"; it is necessary to "encourage some people and some regions to get rich first" (Zhang 1996: 213). Moreover, Deng and his reform team advocated the ideological concept of "building capitalism with Chinese characteristics". Deng stated: "in carrying out our modernization program we must proceed from Chinese realities... We must integrate the universal truth of Marxism with the concrete realities of China, blaze a path of our own and build capitalism with Chinese characteristics" (quoted in Zhang 1996: 49). One important aspect of this ideology is to promote the formerly discredited "market economy". To justify his attempt, Deng claimed that market economy is not only confined to capitalist economy; socialism can engage in market economy as well (Zhang 1996: 60). Although Deng and the reformers agreed that "the private sector economy in China did contain a certain degree of exploitation, they nevertheless also felt that it promotes production, stimulates the market and provides employment and helps in many ways to meet people's needs" (Zhang 1996: 198).

The market economy promoted by the new reform CCP leaders possesses distinctive features that differ dramatically from the previous socialist economy. The state began to encourage micro-level economic activities of private enterprises, households and individuals. The business actions are regulated by economic interests rather than state considerations. Also, the egalitarian system of distribution is abandoned

and replaced by a combination of both material incentive and social justice (Zhang 1978:145-146). As a result of these reforms, the non-state industrial gross output values increased from 23% in 1978 to 45.4% in 1990; the retail sales from non-state enterprises increased 15% during the same year interval. The free markets were established in urban areas. According to the report from *Beijing Review*: “In 1986 the nationwide sales of pork in free markets equaled one-fourth of the sales by state-owned stores, while sales of poultry products outstripped state sales by sixty-five million kilograms. Individual enterprises in urban areas also rose from 120,000 to 670,000 by the end of 1990” (Chan 1994: 101-102).

The initiation of the market economy created a great impact in Chinese society. On the one hand, it promoted China’s economic development and modernization process. “From 1978 to 2004, China’s average annual GDP growth rate was 9.4 percent. During the same period, China’s per capital income grew from 379 yuan to 10,561 yuan”. China’s GDP grew to 2.3 trillion yuan in the year of 2005 and “China contributed one-third of global economic growth in 2004” (Liu 2008: 143). On the other hand, however, the rapid economic growth also triggered the problem of social inequality. According to Liu, “China in the 1980s and 1990s became one of the most unequal countries in its region and among developing countries generally. ...The Gini coefficient <sup>7</sup> of inequality in household income rose by 7 percentage points between 1988 and 1995”. Inequality of rural household per capita rose an estimated 23 percent over the same seven years” and “urban inequality increased even faster - by 42 percent” (Liu 2008: 145).

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<sup>7</sup> A measure of inequality of distribution

The development of the market economy and the privatization of state economy also had a great impact on the social welfare system. The “iron rice bowl” system is now considered “an impediment of market reform” and faced its final bankruptcy (Li 1999:93). The new Labor Law announced by the CCP in 1995 presented a brand new pension system that delegates the responsibility of elderly care from the state to individual families. The pension system consists of three pillars. The first pillar includes two tiers. The first tier is on a “pay-as you-go” basis. Current enterprise employers contribute 20% of their profits to the retirement pension pool and the retirees receive a monthly wage that equals 35% average province wages. The second tier is composed of a voluntary account that is founded with 8% enterprise contribution and 3% individual savings. The second pillar is financed either by employers or a mix of employers and employees. This part of contribution normally reaches up to 1/12 of the retiree’s annual salaries. The third pillar is a voluntary private savings account for people who want to ensure a higher retirement income. In 1995, the retirement age also rises to age 60 for men and 50 for women. There is no benefit for retirees’ offspring whatsoever in this new pension system (Salditt al et 2008: 54-56).

The reformed CCP government compensates the diminishing state care for the elderly with private family care. In 1996, the CCP enacted the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly. *Article 17* states: “supporters [mostly sons and daughters of the elderly] may conclude an agreement between themselves on their duty to provide for the elderly, subject to approval by the latter. Neighborhood committees, villagers’ committees or the organizations of the supporters may supervise the fulfillment of the agreement”. *Article 45* states: “When the elderly have disputes with their family

members over their support, or over housing or property, they may ask the organizations where their family are employed, the neighborhood committees or the villagers' committees to mediate. They also may bring a lawsuit directly to the People's court. If the family members are found to be in wrong through mediation of the disputes mentioned in the preceding paragraph, they shall be educated through criticism and ordered to correct their mistakes" (Leung 2001: 179). Caring for the elderly, thus, became a legal obligation of the offspring. To smooth this rather radical transition and to increase the willingness of families to take care of the elderly, the CCP reinvests in the value of filial piety [obedience and respect of the elderly] that is cherished by traditional Chinese classics.

#### Filial Piety is the Priority of Everything: the Revival of Confucian Values:

As China's modernization progressed since the 1980s, the CCP leaders started to realize and acknowledge the positive sides of Confucian traditions. Many scholars suspect that neo-Confucianism might be used by Party members to fill the ideological void created by the fast developing capitalist economy (Guo and Guo 2008: 1). From 1978, discussions about the revival of Confucianism began within the upper level CCP reform leaders. The old civilization is regarded as "not much of an obstruction to modernization" (Rozman 1991: 188). In 1982, PRC articles identified at least two positive sides of the traditional Confucian values. First, it is "a solid foundation for modern needs such as patriotism, self-cultivation, renovation of one's family and striving to manage the country well." Second, it is "an alternative to Western self-centeredness in a humanistic tradition of mutual respect and affinity with the family and the state" (Rozman 1991: 188). Confucian ideas have been further stretched by the CCP's new

party leader, Hu, Jintao. In his speech in February 2005, Hu quoted Confucius saying that: “harmony is something to be cherished” and a few months later he “instructed China’s party cadres to build a ‘harmonious society’ “where harmonious relationships between people and people as well as relationships between people and the government needed be cultivated (Bell 2006).

With the application of the new social security system and curtailed benefits for the elderly, the CCP leaders started to readdress traditional filial piety as a positive moral value. In the social security chapter in the nation’s Seventh Five-Year Plan (1986-1990), it states: “[we shall] emphasize the traditional Chinese ideals of respecting the elderly” (Chow 1991: 220-221). This state policy no doubt has considerable influence on the Chinese public. Newspaper journalists and foreign observers began to report the revival of filial piety since the announcement of the policy. One article from the Los Angeles Times titled *China gets tough on kids who neglect parents* comments: “in the battle to safeguard the tradition of filial piety, China’s social watchdogs are employing many weapons: shame fines, bribery, guilt and flattery.” The news goes on to tell the story of Wang Xinjun, a 47-year-old resident of central Shanxi who cheerfully accepted the glorious title of “model filial daughter-in-law of the year.” She was selected by her community as one of the eight models who dedicatedly performed their filial duty to the elderly (Magnier 2007). The virtue of filial piety is even considered as a prerequisite for military promotion in a northern Chinese county. The local government recently announced that: “promotion will not favor officials who neglect their filial piety, not even if they neglect such duties out of overwork.” “The cadres will be” as the rule continues, “eliminated from the candidates short-listed for promotion.” In a farming community in

Wei County with 900,000 residents, according to this report, “at least 11 officials were barred from promotion due to their poor filial piety records” (Deng 2011).

### **Chapter Three: Two family models in contemporary urban China**

In the following two chapters, I argue that two family value systems coexist in the contemporary urban Chinese family: the Confucian collectivist family value system and the one-child individualist family value system. The historical review of Confucian culture in Mainland China indicates that traditional Confucian culture still prevails in modern China throughout social changes. Furthermore, in order to compensate the diminishing retirement welfare system and to minimize state expenses, the Chinese Communist Party promoted Confucian family ethics to smooth the transfer of elderly care responsibilities from the state to the individual families (Chapter Two). The state's active propaganda of the Confucian family values has revived the Confucian collectivist family model in contemporary China. In Confucian collectivist families, family relationships are organized hierarchically based on seniority. The parents' goal of child socialization in a collectivist family system is to transition a child into maintaining mature social relationships. In the family domain where the parent-child relationship is defined hierarchically, the task of parental socialization is to foster children's recognition and acknowledgement of parental authority.

On the other hand, the implementation of the One-Child Policy in the 1980s introduced a one-child, individualist family pattern where the family environment is more equalitarian and children are the main focus of parental attention and investment. The socialization goal in this family system is to raise the child from a state of dependence to a state of independence and autonomy. Therefore, the socialization goal of the one-child, individualist family is the exact opposite of the socialization goal of the Confucian, collectivist family. While Confucian collectivist parents view the purpose of socialization

as children's integration into the social networking through cultivation of interdependence and cooperation, the one-child, individualist parents view the purpose of socialization as the children's growth out of dependence from social relationships into an autonomous, independent being of the society<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, in the family sphere, parents who embrace the one-child, individualist models endorse equal family status between children and parents and encourage children's independent self-development.

In this chapter, I will briefly analyze the two family value systems by literature review. In the next chapter, I will further examine the one-child families I have observed in urban Beijing and how the two family systems, the traditional Confucian system and the nuclear, one-child system sometimes intermingle in contemporary Chinese urban society. For instance, in some one-child families, the parents' generation assimilate the values from the Confucian system while children from the one-child system, or vice versa.

#### The Confucian Collectivist model of family relationship:

Confucius depicts a society as a social web of interpersonal relationships. An ideal society, according to Confucian ideology, is a "complicated role system with corresponding duties and responsibilities" and "an individual is never conceived of as an isolated, separate entity, he/she is always regarded as part of a social network with a specific role in relation to others, or as a social interactive, or relational being, who is required to fit into and conform with the existing orderly world." Moreover, the interpersonal relationships are confined within hierarchical structures. "An individual must master a set of vertical and horizontal relationships in order to follow the basic

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<sup>8</sup> See Joan E. Grusec's work *Parental Socialization and Children's Acquisition of Values* for the cultural differences on child socialization between the East and the West.

social order and his/her surrounding world, and to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships in a relatively stable and permanent social fabric” (Ching 1997: 99-100).

The hierarchical pattern that governs a family is a vertical power structure with parents or the elderly sitting on the top and offspring at the bottom. Based on the Confucian ethics, parent-child relationship must follow the cardinal value of “filial piety.” Composed of a radical representing the elders residing on the top and a radical representing the younger at the bottom, the Chinese character *xiao*[孝] , or filial piety, clearly communicates the value system of age-based superiority. For parents, “filial piety” means the exercise of absolute parental authority; for children, filial piety means “obedience, submission, deference and loyalty” to their parents (Hwang 1999: 169).

Confucian culture grants parents with absolute authority to discipline their children. In imperial China, parental discipline was regarded as a cultural norm and was protected by laws. In the popular publication *Family Instructions of Yen*, it states: “if beating and anger are abandoned in the family and the faults of children will immediately appear; when punishments are not properly administered, the people do not know how to move hand or foot.” A filial son, as the instruction continues, “will accept punishment willingly even if it causes him to bleed. He is not to be angry and resentful, but will be more reverential and more filial” (quoted in Chu 1965: 20-21). Moreover, government authority should not question parents’ accusations of their offspring’s un-filial behaviors. If they did, as Chu reasoned in his book *Law and Society in Traditional China*, “it would have meant that the parents might be wrong. It would also have meant that the father’s absolute authority was not recognized” (Chu 1965 21-29).

The traditional Confucian parental discipline is performed through the practice of *guan* [管], which could be literally translated as “to discipline” or “to govern.”

According to Confucian beliefs, “young children are incapable of understanding and making decisions that are in their best interests.” Therefore, it is the parents’ responsibility to “regulate children’s behavior and academic performance” (Wu 2002: 483). In the family domains, therefore, *guan* means parents’ close control and strict discipline of their children.

It’s worth noting, however, the practice of *guan* is not always interpreted negatively in traditional Chinese beliefs. In his study of preschools in three cultures, Tobin keenly notices the “positive connotation” of *guan* in Chinese culture. *Guan*, in the context of a parent-child relationship, means not only “to govern”, but also “to love and to care” Therefore, *guan* is a way for parents to display their affections toward their children. When Chinese mothers tell their disobedient children “wo bu guan ni le [I won’t discipline you anymore]”, it implies that the mothers would withdraw their authority as well as their love and caring for their children (1989: 93). Chao also supports such a statement and concludes in her study that the word training [or *guan*] doesn’t evoke association such as “militaristic”, “regimented or “strict”. Rather, it is interpreted to mean a “stricter or more rigorous ‘teaching,’ ‘educating’ or ‘inculcating’ that was regarded as being very positive” (1994: 1117).

While parents enjoy absolute authority, children play a more submissive role in traditional Confucian family model. Furthermore, the submissive position of children is enduring regardless of age (Ching 2007: 64). Confucius views maturation as a continuous process of self-cultivation, and there is no particular stage for an abrupt growing up.

Confucian scholar Tu concludes in his study of adulthood in Confucianism that “from childhood to old age the learning to be human never ceases”, and “Adulthood conceived in this way is not so much a state of attainment as a process of becoming” (1976: 109). In *Analects*, Confucius used the metaphor of the river to explain the lifelong process of maturity as he stood on a riverbank and commented, “Could one but go on and on like this, never ceasing day or night!” Tu explains that, “the continuous flow of water here symbolizes a ceaseless process of self-cultivation and is therefore an apt description of the Confucian understanding of the authentic way of being human” (1976: 109-110). The notion of an independent adulthood, hence, is absent in Confucian culture and the idea of adulthood separation from one’s primary family is alien to Chinese parents who follow the Confucian model. In her study of Chinese adolescents from immigrants in Canada, Ching Man Lam notices Chinese parents’ reluctance to accept the facts that “their children are no longer kids, and they are capable of taking care of themselves”. As one Chinese mother said during the interview, “If you have a child who is a hundred years old, you have been worrying for at least 99 years. This is Chinese parent. Even in their very old age, they worry for their children, because the parents love their children, out of love and concern, they treat them as if they were still kids” (2007: 55). In Confucian culture, therefore, parents’ superior family status sustains regardless of age. An “ideal child” must follow the law of filial piety and his or her parental obedience should be never-ending.

#### The one-Child, individualist model of family relationship

As a result of the One-Child Policy, a nuclear family, child-centered family pattern started to emerge in contemporary urban China.

First of all, nuclear households have become a predominant household pattern in urban China. For instance, Tzu conducted a five-year family survey in 1989, which shows that traditional extended families become rare in urban setting. Nearly 50% of the interviewed households are nuclear family households with only parents and unmarried children as household members (1989: 738-739). Chen reasons that the One-Child Policy greatly trims the family size by weakening the links between extended family members. The loss of siblings leads to potential loss of in-laws, aunts and uncles (1985: 195-197). Therefore, extended family members are removed from Chinese family scenes, and Chinese urban families are beginning to develop a resemblance to the Western nuclear family model<sup>9</sup>.

Further, the powers in one-child families started to shift from the parents to the singleton children. The singleton children become the center of the single-child family's. Chow compared parental attitudes and their behaviors toward children from only-child households to those in households with multiple children and concludes, "both fathers and mothers of one-child families displayed a greater degree of child-centeredness, both attitudinally and behaviorally than their counterparts from multiple-child families did. The one-child parents tended to see their child as the sole bearer of meaning and hope in their lives, and their lives thus revolve around this child more than was the case for parents of more children" (Chow 1996). A study of the impact of the One-Child Policy on the patriarchal family in the People's Republic of China yields similar results, "Both mothers and fathers from one-child families tended to subscribe to the child-centeredness ideology, namely, 'attitudes toward the child as the focal point of the family, the child as

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<sup>9</sup> See William Goode's *World Revolution and Family Pattern* for the precise definition and analysis on the nuclear family

embodying the parents' highest hope in life, the meaning of having children, the importance of having children, and the children compared with other meaning life pursuits', to a greater degree than did those from multi-child families" (Chow and Chen 1994: 76). A language pattern study on the singletons' parents further articulates the reality of the child-centered family. The article says: "parents in one-child families tend to focus excessively on their child, often without clear boundaries between the parent and child, with some ambiguity in the parent-child role" For example, rather than saying "go and play with your brothers and sisters", the primary caregiver, mostly mothers, would always say "mommy will play with you honey", demonstrating the mothers' intention to "get close to the child, without a clear parent role division" (Chen 2007). As the studies above illustrate, children are regarded as the center of the family in only-child families.

Moreover, today's parents believe they have adapted a more democratic parenting style as the result of the One-Child Policy. In her longitudinal study of conflict management in Only-Child families, Zhong found that one-child families always identified with a "democratic style in their family relationship between parents and children". "Families reported much more direct communications than the older generations. Several of them mentioned they regularly use 'family meetings' to discuss issues at home" and "there seem to be an overall feeling that communication is more open in the only-child family" (Zhong 2002: 95).

The Chinese singletons growing up as the "little suns" or "little emperors" of the families also tend to develop personality traits centered on the concept of self. Compared to their parents' generations, they are more individualistic and they are constantly and actively exploring their own identities. Zhong's analysis of published stories by China's

only children reflects this egocentric trait explicitly. In their self-narratives, one girl complains the difficulties she encountered when interacting with her peers, she writes: “I started analyzing myself and I discovered that I really am a person who is very self-centered. This self-centeredness has strong consequences in my self-evaluation and attitude about the self. I always think about myself first, and believe all the good things are mine. I cannot stand if anything should be different. It really is because I love myself too much.” Others also report feelings such as “I want to be the anchor point for all the people”; “I only live for my own future”; “I only see things from my own point of view” and “I think we are all too self-centered” (Zhong 2005: 18). The individualist traits of the singletons become more prominent as they reach their early adulthood. In the comparison with their Hong Kong, Singapore and US peers, college students from Mainland China showed “especially prominent individualistic orientation...Chinese are also found to desire freedom and autonomy, and they do not particularly like succumbing to the control of authority” (Lau 1992:365). Liu’s study on constructing the autonomous middle-class self in today’s China: the case of young-adult only-children university students further confirmed the development of the egocentric and individualistic personalities among Chinese singletons. The singletons, as his research suggests, deeply believe they are in control of their own fates. According to Liu, “a strong belief in self-efficacy and individual efforts has become the predominant strategy in the young adults’ life planning.” Liu summarizes at the end of his research, “following right out of their [the singletons’] narratives is the self-enterprising, free-choosing, rational and autonomous subject who is confident in shaping his/her own fate through calculative choice and self-efficacy” (Liu 2008: 199). Today’s Chinese singletons, just as the studies suggest, have a

very clear identity of the self and they behave in a relatively individualistic and egocentric way compared to their parents.

## Chapter Four: Case Studies

The 24 interviews I collected from only children in Beijing fall into either the collectivist Confucian family value structure or the individualist one-child family structure. In approximately half of the cases, the parents' generation and the children's generation agree on the family value systems of their families. Both the parents and the children agree upon the Confucian family values or both of the groups agree upon the individualist values. In the other half, however, parents and children assimilate conflicting family value systems. That is, while parents behave in the traditional Confucian manner, children have developed to be more individualist, or vice versa.

Because all the interviews are collected from the single-child's perspectives, the personalities of the single children are clearly illustrated. Therefore, I am able to categorize the singletons based on my impression of their personality from our interactions and the interview transcripts. However, the personalities of the single children's parents appear to be somewhat muddy and unclear. I'm forced to classify parents' prototypes based on their behaviors reported by the children. Single children who align with the collectivist, Confucian values tend to exhibit an obedient, submissive personality, while children who assimilate the individualistic, one-child family values show more independent and autonomous personality traits. Likewise, parents who assimilate the collectivist family values tend to behave in an authoritarian and controlling way, while parents who associate with the one-child, individualist family values exhibit more liberal, or democratic, behaviors.

The singleton children I have interviewed referred to the authoritarian parents as *chuantong jiazhang* [传统家长], or traditional parents, and the liberal parents as *minzhu*

*jiazhan* [民主家长], or democratic parents. Contrasted to traditional or *chuantong*, the word *minzhu* has the connotation of “modern,” “Western” and “liberal.” The Chinese word for “democracy” contains the character *min*, which can be literally translated as “the people,” or “the commoners,” and the character *zhu*, which means “a person who has the ultimate power.” The word *min zhu* means that the commoners, or the people who are in the bottom of the power hierarchy, will obtain the ultimate power. In the family domain, children are traditionally considered the ones who hold lesser power. The term “democratic parents”, therefore, conveys an interesting shift of power: in democratic families, the vertical relationship between parents and children is transformed into a horizontal one: parents are no longer at the top of the family hierarchy; they have been moved to a more peripheral position. Children, on the other hand, attain more power in the family domain as they have moved from the bottom of family hierarchy to the center.

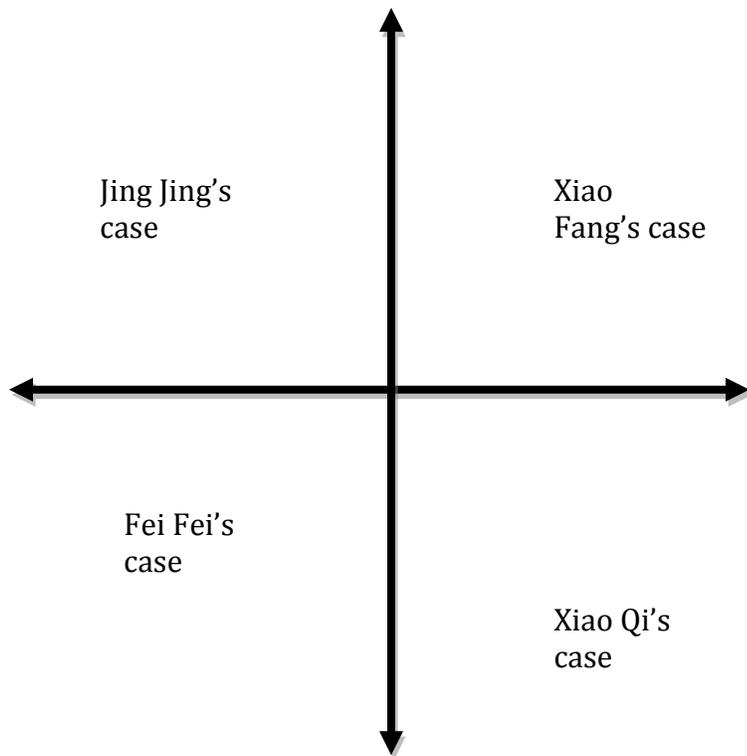
The interaction between parental behaviors and the characters of the single children created four interesting combinations, namely:

- The authoritarian parents and the obedient children
- The authoritarian parents and the independent children
- The democratic parents and the obedient children
- The democratic parents and the independent children

As argued in the previous chapter, the authoritarian parenting style and the obedient traits of children derive from the Confucian, collectivist family tradition, while the democratic parenting style and the independent character of children result from the One-child family policy. In the following section, I will analyze four case studies that I selected as the best **representatives** of the four urban Chinese family prototypes.

However, readers should consider both the parenting style and the children's personality as a continuum rather than complete separate characteristics. That is to say, both the parents' behaviors and the singleton children's personality types vary only by degree on the "authoritarian-democratic" continuum and the "obedient-independent" continuum. They are not four independent, completely distinct categories. The graph below illustrates this reality. The horizontal axis presents the children's personality; and the vertical axis represents the parents' parenting style. From the four types of parent-child relationships, we see clearly that two sets of values, the Confucian, collectivist values and the one-child, individualist values, co-exist in contemporary urban families. Furthermore, we can also learn how cultural agents with different agendas deal with the conflicts and contradictions introduced by these values.

Democratic parents



Jing Jing's  
case

Xiao  
Fang's case

Independent  
personality

Obedient personality

Fei Fei's  
case

Xiao Qi's  
case

Authoritarian/traditional  
parents

### Research Method:

This ethnographic study is based on 24 in-person, open-ended interviews conducted from May to August of 2011, in Beijing, the capital city of China. The 24 interviewees were collected using the sampling technique: “snowball sampling.” They are friends or acquaintances of the people who personally know me, the researcher. The 24 interviewees are college students who are currently enrolled in a Beijing college. 5 out of the 24 interviewees were born and raised in other provinces. The rest have held Beijing residences since their birth. 10 of the interviewees are male and 14 are female. The average age of the interviewees is 21 and they are all juniors or seniors, except for one male interviewee who is a first-year Master student. All the interviewees were born under the One-Child Policy, and all of them live with only their parents. When asked to describe their family structures, the interviewees often refer to the nuclear family structure as the “小家庭 [small family ]” and the extended family as the “大家庭 [big family]”.

Prior to the interview, a cover letter, together with a list of tentative questions was sent to the interviewees. The participation was on a voluntary basis. The participants were given the rights to choose potential meeting places, and all of them chose to meet in public places instead of their home. Most of the interviews took place in local coffee stores close to the participants’ home or school. Occasionally, the interviews were conducted in the school’s playground or public library as the interviewee requested. Upon arrival, the interviewer explained to the participants the purpose of the study and asked if they had any questions regarding it. The interviews usually started with a brief

self-introduction by the participants, preceded by a brief introduction of the participants' family history. The following interview questions were mostly based on the information provided previously. All the questions were asked based on the theme: parent-child relationships in contemporary urban China.

All the interviews were audio taped with the permission of the interviewees. The audio material was later transcribed into interview transcripts first into Chinese, then into English. The English transcripts were coded for data analysis. Pseudo names were used during coding to ensure confidentiality.

### 1. Xiao Qi's story: obedient child, authoritarian parents:

Xiao Qi contacted me one day prior to our interview, requesting me to wait for him in front of his middle school gate. The middle school Xiao Qi attended six years ago is one of the top-ranked middle schools in the city of Beijing. By Chinese standard, Xiao Qi's middle school is on the first-tier of the whole middle school system. Such schools are often referred to as the "key point" schools. Students in Xiao Qi's middle school are almost always guaranteed a spot in a privileged, "key-point" high school. Xiao Qi's middle school is mid-way between his home and his university. He set up our meeting in this place so that he could return home right after the interview. As I arrived at Xiao Qi's middle school in the late afternoon, the school gate was already filled with middle school students in their blue and white school uniforms. Parents were waiting to pick up their children. Some parents sat idly on the cement benches with fans in their hands. As their children appeared in the school gate, they quickly moved forward, picked up their children's backpacks and put them on their own shoulders, and waved their fans at their children's faces. Xiao Qi appeared in the crowds of parents and middle school students and waved his hands at me. He wore a blue and green plaid shirt and a pair of Khaki trousers. He has a round face and a pair of large, round glasses rested on his face. Right after we met and greeted each other, I asked Xiao Qi if we could conduct the interview in a coffee shop right across the street so that we could have some privacy. Xiao Qi immediately agreed and we walked together through the street flyover. While we walked toward the coffee shop, we exchanged information about our current situations. We also mentioned our mutual friend who introduced us in the first place.

As we sat in the coffee shop, Xiao Qi appeared to be a bit uncomfortable. He sat at the edge of his seat and interlocked his hands tightly on the table. I speculated that he probably does not dine in this type of coffee shop regularly. In an attempt to ease Xiao Qi's nerves, I ordered my beverage, a cup of iced coffee. He followed me and ordered the same type of beverage. To further assuage Xiao Qi's anxiety, I started our conversation by telling him about the project. As he seemed a little bit more settled after my introduction, I started the interview by asking him to introduce himself.

Xiao Qi told me that he is a third-year college student who studies food and food production in a Beijing university. This university has China's best agriculture related programs. Xiao Qi also mentioned that he is a rather introverted person. Later, when I thanked him for participating in the interview, he replied by saying that no thanks were needed. He said that all he did every day was either study or sit in front of a computer screen. He was delighted to be able to talk with a real human being. Throughout the interview, Xiao Qi did strike me as a very introverted person. For instance, he constantly avoided making direct eye contact with me. Also, he tended to talk in a relatively low voice. A few times during the interview, I had to check my tape recorder to make sure his voice was appropriately recorded.

Xiao Qi's grandparents from his father's side live in Changchun, a city in northeast China. His grandparents from his mother's side have immigrated to Korea. Xiao Qi had only lived with his parents since he was born. When I asked Xiao Qi to describe his father in five adjectives, he quoted a traditional Chinese paradigm: "strict father and kind mother." This Chinese idiom states the designated family roles of the mother and the father in an ordinary Chinese family: fathers are supposed to make and

enforce the rules while the mother behaves in a loving and kind manner. However, Xiao Qi said to me that in his family, the situation is the exact opposite. Xiao Qi said that he instead has a “strict mother and kind father.” Therefore, it is his mother’s responsibility to discipline Xiao Qi.

*The authoritarian parents:*

“My mother was excellent when she was younger, so she has higher expectations on me. She has been always very strict... she has really pushed me. She puts all her hopes on me. When I was not as excellent as she was, she was very anxious. I think this is ‘wishing your son to be the dragon’ ...she wants to regain what she has lost from my success,” Xiao Qi told me during our interview. His mother’s high expectations for him were mainly expressed through her strict disciplinary acts regarding his schoolwork. Many Chinese parents, as well as Xiao Qi’s, believe that academic achievement serves as the only means for their children to move upward in the social hierarchy. Therefore, they exerted substantial efforts to ensure that their children would be on the “top of their games” in the academic competition with peers. For instance, Xiao Qi told me that ever since middle school, his mother would enter his room and check on him to ensure that he was spending his time on academic work. Furthermore, his mother would bring him refreshing beverages such as warm milk or coffee during his study breaks. Sometimes, his mother would even help him with his English lessons by reciting the English vocabulary words to him and asking him to spell the English words on paper.

When Xiao Qi did not perform well on his academic work during his middle school years, his mother was very disappointed. She started to exercise an even more rigorous parenting method. When she learned that Xiao Qi was ranked in the bottom 1/3

in his class, she took away his television privileges usually reserved for after their family dinner. She also had Xiao Qi's father sign Xiao Qi up for more high school preparation classes. Moreover, she would analyze all the mistakes Xiao Qi made in every exam with him. "Don't think you are just being careless," she had said to him. "If you make the same mistakes again and again, it means you were not only careless, it means you don't understand the problem sets at all."

Furthermore, Xiao Qi's mother would ask Xiao Qi to wash her feet from time to time to educate him on the filial duties he is designated to perform in the future. I suggest that such duties are used to strengthen the family hierarchy that Xiao Qi's mother believes in. Performing demeaning jobs such as washing his mother's feet reinforces the idea that Xiao Qi is at the bottom of the family structure, and he should perform the tasks of his low-ranking role without grudges. Xiao Qi reported to me that he feels guilty sometimes because he did not wash his mother's feet wholeheartedly. "I played cell phone games while I washed my mother's feet sometimes. I think I'm too self-centered," Xiao Qi said critically. He lowered his head and sighed heavily.

Xiao Qi's mother did not only attend to Xiao Qi's daily academic life, but she was also the one who was in charge of the academic decisions that would be important to Xiao Qi's future. When Xiao Qi was in the fourth grade, his parents arranged for him to transfer to a higher-ranked elementary school that they believed offered a better education. However, they arranged this school transfer without any prior discussion with or even early notification to Xiao Qi, which later led to adjustment problems in the new school. Xiao Qi's college choice followed the same path. His parents chose his current major for him without any family discussions. Xiao Qi, as the obedient son, accepted

their decisions without any complaints. I suggest that Xiao Qi's family follows the traditional Confucian hierarchical relationship where parents arrange daily activities for their children. Moreover, this Confucian, hierarchical family model requires complete conformity and obedience of the child. Therefore, in the next section, I will analyze Xiao Qi's personality, and I argue that Xiao Qi fits very well into this Confucian family model precisely because of his obedient personality.

*The Obedient son:*

The interview with Xiao Qi left me with the impression that Xiao Qi was very satisfied, even grateful toward his mother's authoritarian parenting. For instance, even though Xiao Qi had adjustment problems after his elementary school transfer, he believed that he benefited from his mother's strict discipline in the long-term. "It was just not necessary for my parents to tell me about this school transfer in advance," Xiao Qi said to me. "I was too young to understand it anyway. All I have to do is listen to them." Furthermore, Xiao Qi attributed his academic success directly to his mother's hard work, and he deeply believes that his parents have always made the correct decisions for him. Similarly, even though Xiao Qi occasionally felt depressed because of his mother's strict parenting style, he stated that the pressure was necessary for his development and growth. Xiao Qi told me, "I was so depressed in elementary school, also middle school... also, I was not interested in studying at all... I had a very bad attitude. If my mother had not given me any pressures, I would have accomplished nothing." When I asked Xiao Qi what are the qualities he considered important for an ideal parent, he listed "strict" as the first on the list. As Xiao Qi reasoned, "If a child does not listen to you, you should beat him. If he cries and screams because he does not want to study hard, you should be strict

so that he would finish his school work.” Xiao Qi also supported the idea that “a filial son comes from sticks.” That is to say, he believes that strict parenting, and even physical punishment is necessary for a child’s success. “I think beating is necessary,” he said. “When I was a child, I did not listen to my parents when they talked to me nicely. I rolled on the floor and cried. Beating is necessary because through beating the child will realize that he has to study hard... you have to force the child sometimes... I feel comfortable after a nap, but later I will regret that I’ve wasted these 10 minutes in my life for napping. Parents beat you for your own good.” Therefore, Xiao Qi deeply associates himself with the Confucian family structure and he agrees with parents’ authoritarian role.

Furthermore, Xiao Qi believes that the most important trait of an ideal child is obedience, or “listening to parents’ words”. As Xiao Qi said, “Listening to parents’ words means obedience; it also means that you should not let your parents worry for you... you have to study well.” Therefore, Xiao Qi is deeply committed to the Cultural role of an obedient child. However, while Xiao Qi appeared to be very compliant, he also left me with the impression that he lacks independence, and relies very heavily on his parents for his life decisions. For instance, when I asked Xiao Qi about his college choice, he told me that he did not put too much thought into it. “The college entrance exam was all I could think about,” he said. “It occupied all my heart and mind. I felt that I did not have enough energy left to pick out schools. All I knew at that time was that I needed to do well in the entrance exam.” Furthermore, when I asked Xiao Qi whether he likes the school and major his parents picked for him, he appeared to be very indifferent. “What should I say? I think I’m okay with it,” he said. “I don’t like [my school or my major] particularly, but I don’t hate it either. I think I’m kind of interested in some of the classes.”

Xiao Qi explicitly mentioned that he is not a very independent person. “I think I’m not particularly independent. I have no intention to make decisions myself, so I’m grateful to my parents,” he said. “[But] [my parents] think my life is too comfortable. They think I’m not very independent and motivated... they told me that I will need to depend more on myself later, and they won’t be able to help me forever... my mother comes from the countryside. Since she was little, she had to cook for her family, feed pigs in the farm and cut grains. She also had to walk a long way to school... but my parents raised me to be lazy and dependent. I’m not as independent and motivated as them.”

Xiao Qi has appeared to have adopted the Confucian hierarchical relationship and he uses this relationship model to define his role and his parents’ role in the family. He assumed that his parents should act as the decision makers in the family. To him, obedience is a cardinal value for a child, and he did his best to perform this virtue. Precisely because of the Confucian ideal child model Xiao Qi adopted, he also lacks the autonomous and independent quality some Chinese singleton children have developed. However, Xiao Qi’s family stands up as an atypical family type. There is only one more family from the 24 interviews that fits into this family type.

## 2. Fei Fei's story: independent child, authoritarian parents:

Fei Fei set up our interview for an early Friday morning. Fei Fei is a third-year college student who studies management and software engineering in a second-tier Beijing University. He showed up 20 minutes early for the interview. Later, Fei Fei explained to me that he had a job interview later on the same day. He applied for a summer internship position at one of the largest media companies in China as an online administration assistant. To prepare for this job interview, Fei Fei had done extensive research on the government and China's media business. He wanted to use our interview as a practice for his job interview in the afternoon. Even after I explained to him that this interview would be very different from a job interview because this interview will be mostly focused on his family and his relationship with his parents, Fei Fei still asked me nervously about his interview performance after the interview was completed. Fei Fei dressed in a purple shirt and a pair of black cotton pants, which is considered relatively formal in Chinese dress code culture. He had a clean, short hair cut that made him look very dashing and neat. On his right wrist, he wore a bracelet made of precious black stones. I have seen many Chinese businessmen wear the same kind of bracelet as an amulet for good fortune.

Fei Fei appeared to be relatively mature and confident compared to his peers and he managed to compose himself in a very relaxed manner. For example, during our whole interview, he laid casually on the back of his chair, and communicated with a great amount of open hand and body gestures. When Fei Fei had to take a phone call related to his afternoon interview in the middle of our interview, he stepped away from our table, quietly talked on the phone, and when he returned he apologized to me immediately. Fei

Fei also claimed multiple times during our interviews that he is a very independent person and he does not like to rely on his parents too much. When I asked for the reasons, he explained to me that his father has recently passed away because of a heart attack and he lives only with his mother now. Because his mother is a professor at Beijing Normal University, Fei Fei said that she is rather inexperienced with society, and he has to take on his father's role sometimes. Moreover, Fei Fei is one year older than most of my interviewees. As all the rest of my interviewees were born in the early 1990s, Fei Fei was born in 1989. He took a year off during the first year of high school because of a family problem, which I will analyze later in this section. This age difference may also explain the maturity Fei Fei exhibited.

It also appeared to me that Fei Fei had experienced many struggles with his family and I speculate that this is one of the primary reasons Fei Fei agreed to participate in this study. He wanted to learn more about himself and his personal history. After our interview, when I asked Fei Fei whether he has any questions about this project, he particularly asked for my sample population. I replied that most of my interviewees are about 20-21 years old. Fei Fei said to me that he is already 22, and he suspected that the generation I'm investigating is too young. He suggested that the generation I'm studying is a "generation of well-behaved babies." As Fei Fei said to me, "We (people from my generation) had a more chaotic childhood. We experienced a lot of domestic turmoil that the next generation has not experienced". When I asked why Fei Fei had this particular view, he said that his parents were the first generation of parents who gave birth under the One-Child Policy, and they were immature as parents. "Maybe because we are the first generation of the One-Child policy," he said. "Also, because of the Economic

Reform... I think parents (of my generation) are very confused themselves. They did not know how to bring up a child. They were also exploring and that was why there were so many conflicts within the families.” Fei Fei’s case is a very interesting study to me so our interview ran a bit longer compared to other interviews. Even after our interview, some of the quotes Fei Fei elicited haunted me. I found it hard to stop myself to ponder on the stories he had presented to me.

*Authoritarian parents:*

“The reason my father disciplined me so strictly was because he had very high expectations of me,” Fei Fei said. “I feel that he loved me very much... but he was kind of ridiculous. He said (since I was little) that I should go to Qing Hua University for college education, and then Harvard for graduate education.” Fei Fei had a bitter smile on his face. “But in fact, I’m just an ordinary human being. I’m not as excellent as he expected, so he became disappointed, but then he demanded even more from me. I think eventually (his expectations) became my burden; they became a pair of shackles for me... I did not want to become the son he wanted me to become. I wanted to walk my own path and do things I love. So we had a very troublesome relationship.” Just like Xiao Qi’s parents, Fei Fei’s father also disciplined him very strictly because of his high expectations for his only child.

However, Fei Fei’s father closely monitored not only his academic life, but also almost all aspects of Fei Fei’s life, from his romantic relationships to his after-school hobbies. During our interview, Fei Fei complained to me about his parents’ constant violation of his private life. According to Fei Fei, his parents regularly searched his pockets in order to inspect his life. Once, his parents discovered a letter in the pocket of

his jacket written by a girl, and this incident led to a series of family conflicts. As Fei Fei recalled, he had developed romantic feelings for one of the girls in his class during middle school and they started to exchange letters as a way to express their affections toward each other. However, after his parents found out about the letters, they became very angry. They accused Fei Fei for not concentrating wholeheartedly on his academic work. As Fei Fei reflected on this matter, he still felt very strongly that he was wronged by his parents: “I was very unhappy. First I thought they have insulted the girl I like. Also, I don’t think I made any mistakes. Love is not a crime!” Fei Fei cried out. Moreover, Fei Fei’s parents’ supervision of his romantic relationship did not stop after he became an adult. At the time of our interview, Fei Fei was dating a Chinese girl in college. However, when he told his father this news, his father immediately started to investigate the girl’s family history and personal background information. Fei Fei said, “My father is really picky, he thought his baby boy is so precious that no girl is good enough to deserve him.”

The control over Fei Fei did not only affect his romantic relationships, but also more trivial aspects of his personal life. Fei Fei reported that his parents prohibited him from engaging in any non-school related activities. For instance, Fei Fei loved street dance when he was in high school. However, his parents did not allow him to join the street dance practice sessions with his friend because they believed that Fei Fei should be spending more time on his academic work. Similarly, Fei Fei was not allowed to watch TV or play computer games at home because his parents wanted him to devote all his time to schoolwork. To prevent Fei Fei from going outside and playing computer games in the “Internet Bars,” public stores that provide pay-by-the-hour Internet service, Fei

Fei's parents did not give Fei Fei any monthly allowance. This situation only changed after a university admitted Fei Fei one year ago.

Moreover, to further discipline Fei Fei, his father sometimes used physical punishment with an intention to "teach Fei Fei a lesson." Fei Fei told me that in the past, his parents would scold him, ask him to stand against the corner of a wall for a long period of time, or even beat him. When Fei Fei's parents found out that he took the family's money to buy himself a Tamagotchi, a Japanese mini computer game device that was very popular among Chinese children during the 1980s-1990s, they beat him severely. As Fei Fei recalled:

*"My father beat me. My mother watched at the side. He beat me very badly. He used a belt! He used belt to whip me! They were angry even after the beating. They did not show me any good faces in the next month, neither of them. When we talked about this again at the dinner table, my father used his chopsticks to knock me (on my head)."*

Only a small portion of my interviewees has experiences similar to Fei Fei's. Physical punishment is only used as parents' last resort to reaffirm their authority. However, such parental behaviors almost guarantee negative emotional reactions of the children, and almost half of my interviewees disapproved of physical punishments. As Fei Fei commented on his father's behaviors, he said, even though he was just a little boy at the time, "they made me live in fear every day. It affected me a lot... I was very scared. [My parents] were so tall and strong. I think I was like a small animal... I was scared. It was an animal instinct." Similar to Xiao Qi's parents, Fei Fei's parents also believed in the

Confucian model of family relationship. That is to say, they believed that parents hold higher power over their children and they are responsible for their children's misbehaviors. As a result, Fei Fei's parents also engage in strict, authoritarian parenting like Xiao Qi's mother. However, Fei Fei has a very different personality than Xiao Qi. He considers himself as more independent and autonomous, and he reacts in rebellious manners that derive greatly from the Confucian envision of an obedient child. Therefore, his parents are forced to select more extreme forms of parenting, such as physical coercion, to force Fei Fei to conform to their orders.

### *The independent child*

Fei Fei's independent personality left a very deep impression on me. As mentioned above, he explicitly presented himself as an "independent or autonomous" person and he took great pride from it. Moreover, he stressed the fact that he did not want to walk the path that his father designed for him. Instead, he wants to follow his own dreams and do things he enjoys doing. Fei Fei deliberately hid the job interview opportunity from his mother because he believes this is "his own business." He said, "Maybe I will tell after I truly get the job. I have been like this; I usually do things myself and tell my parents later." Also, Fei Fei likes to think critically about social issues he has encountered and he has no reservations of his own opinions. Fei Fei said that he went to a high school that was very "militarized." All the students were asked to cut their hair short. Fei Fei had a very strong opinion of this rule and he expressed his dissatisfaction to me: "Why they had to cut my hair? It was my hair, and I should be making decisions on what to do with it... I have a lot of conflicts with my teachers because of the rule."

Fei Fei's independent personality fits poorly into the Confucian hierarchical family relationship model. Instead of performing his role as an obedient son, Fei Fei often rebelled against his parents' authoritarian commands, which caused serious family conflicts. When Fei Fei's parents criticized him because of his dropping grades in high school, Fei Fei acted in an extreme manner and ran away from home. As a result, he had to repeat his first year of high school because of the long period of absence from school. As Fei Fei sat in front of me, sipping his coffee and recollecting this incident, he commented: "I felt there was no place for me in my own family, so I ran out, I stayed on the streets for a month, without any money in my pocket." He laughed as if he was mocking himself. During his time on the street he once sent a text message to his father, telling him not to worry. His father replied: "I don't have a son like you." "I was so mad at that time," Fei Fei said, "I told myself I would rather die on the street than return home." This situation was finally resolved when his friend told his parents where he was staying and his parents begged him to come home. Fei Fei told me that only at that moment he realized his parents' love for him was very deep, and they did not want to destroy him, as he previously believed.

Fei Fei's independent, even rebellious personality, therefore, deviates greatly from the Confucian model of an ideal child. Moreover, Fei Fei's parents, who still have the Confucian family ideology deeply carved in their heads, often misinterpreted Fei Fei's independence as a defiance of their authority. Unlike Xiao Qi's family, where parents and the child appeared to reach a common agreement of their family roles dictated by the Confucian model, Fei Fei's family members are still in the process of negotiating their differences regarding cultural norms and values. While Fei Fei's parents

align closely with the Confucian family ethics, Fei Fei, who has grown up in a child-centered family, has developed egocentric personality traits that echo with the self-oriented concept. The negotiation of the two incompatible value systems therefore leads to irreconcilable family disputes between Fei Fei and his parents.

The dissonance caused by two drastically different family value systems also led to communication problems between Fei Fei and his parents. As previously discussed, Fei Fei was unwilling to discuss his personal matters with his parents openly. For instance, he was reluctant to tell his mother about his upcoming internship opportunity. Likewise, Fei Fei also keeps his romantic relationships a secret. He said, “Sometimes I don’t like to share or to communicate with my parents...when one of my ex-girlfriends broke up with me, I was in great pain. I felt like I could not live without her. I wanted to kill myself. But I have never brought this up to my parents... if I could talk to my parents, if they were willing to try to understand me, I think I would have felt much better... because I kept too many things to myself, I have sleeping problems now. I have insomnia.” Later, Fei Fei also told me that he did not reveal his current romantic relationship to his parents until recently, despite the fact that he had been dating the girl for more than three years.

Although Fei Fei avoided direct communication with his parents, he greatly cherished family communication. When I asked Fei Fei what quality he considers as the most important for an ideal parent, the quality he first mentioned was the ability to communicate with children. “I think parents should be able to understand their children,” he said. “For example, if I told my father I wanted to talk with him... if I told him I think smoking is cool, he would probably slap me on my face. Then I would not want to say

anything more. I understand that parents are worried about their child. But I think the child will grow up soon and the mistakes are only short-term problems.”

Not only does Fei Fei value family communication, but he has also made countless attempts in the past to converse with his parents. However, as these attempts failed to achieve the results Fei Fei expected, he gave up trying. “I was only around 16 [when I wrote the love letter to that girl]” he said, “I tried to tell my parents about my feelings. But I was still just a kid. They would not listen to me... I was so angry sometimes, they did not think from my view of point... It’s useless to tell them about my romantic life. They won’t understand it anyway.”

After hearing Fei Fei’s stories from his perspective, it appeared that Fei Fei is not particularly rebellious or insubordinate. His defiant acts are simply his desperate way to express himself and to communicate his cultural values to his parents. However, Fei Fei’s parents interpret Fei Fei’s behaviors based on the cultural model that they are most comfortable with, the Confucian model, and mislabel his behaviors as challenges to their authority. Through Fei Fei’s case, we see how individual agents exchange cultural ideas in a fast-changing society where cultural norms and values are evolving rapidly, and how sometimes different parties are unable to communicate with each other because of the two incompatible value systems they have adopted. Fei Fei pictures himself as an independent, autonomous individual who is self-striving and self-efficient. In his parents’ eyes, however, he is the rebellious son who confronts the Confucian standard of an obedient son and thus deserves strict parental punishments. The cultural discrepancy between Fei Fei and his parents causes Fei Fei to interpret his parents’ love as the heaviest shackles of freedom. Similarly, because Fei Fei’s parents are unable to

understand Fei Fei's behaviors from his viewpoint, their son becomes the outlaw in the family.

### 3. Xiao Fang's story: democratic parents, obedient child

Xiao Fang is a third-year college student who studies diplomacy and administration affairs in one of the most prestige universities in Beijing. Xiao Fang and I shared a common friend who also studies the same major in the same university. Xiao Fang learned of this project from this friend of ours, and she agreed to participate as a favor to our mutual friend. Xiao Fang originally set up our interview location in her university. However, two hours prior to our interview, I received a text message from her, requesting to change the location of our interview. Xiao Fang explained in the text message that she had a school presentation assignment due the day after and she had to spend time preparing in the National library, which is 30 minutes away from her school. Because of this unanticipated change, our interview took place in an outdoor dining area inside of the National Library. Right after we met in person, Xiao Fang apologized again for the sudden change of the interview plan. She explained to me that a foreign professor from Germany taught this class of hers, and some of his class assignments, such as this class presentation, were particularly difficult to her since she was not accustomed to public speaking. Xiao Fang said that she had stayed up all night the day before in order to prepare for this presentation.

Xiao Fang's boyfriend stayed in the library to keep her company and he showed up with Xiao Fang to the interview site. He left before the interview began. Later in the interview, Xiao Fang informed me that she had been dating her boyfriend for a very long period of time. Both of them had met each other's parents and gained their consents on this relationship. Xiao Fang told me that she and her boyfriend have already started to discuss marriage with their parents. However, Xiao Fang was planning on studying

abroad in the United State after she graduates from college, but her boyfriend preferred to stay in China and find a job after graduation. Xiao Fang told me that she was not fully confident about long distance relationships, and she was a bit concerned about their future. The parents of Xiao Fang's boyfriend wanted them to get married right after college in order to avoid the potential instability caused by the long distance, but Xiao Fang was not particularly in favor of this plan. "I have not thought about getting married right after college... I don't know what I will do about this situation," Xiao Fang said.

When I asked Xiao Fang to introduce her family, she especially stressed on the close bond she had with her grandparents. When Xiao Fang was little, she lived in a three-generation household. That is, she lived with both her parents and her grandparents. Xiao Fang explained to me that because her parents were very busy at work, she spent most of her childhood time with her grandparents, and she has established a very deep relationship with them. Therefore, in Xiao Fang's early childhood, it was her grandparents, instead of her parents, who shaped the development of her personality. While Xiao Fang stated that her grandparents loved her very much, she also emphasized on the fact that both her grandparents were very strict on her, and she had to follow certain family rules. For instance, her grandparents taught her very detailed table manners that imply Confucian family hierarchy. In her grandparents' family, members from the younger generations are not allowed to touch the chopsticks until the elder generations reach the dinner table. Also, the younger generations are not allowed to reach for dishes that are placed across the dinner table. I suggest that such Confucian family rules facilitate the establishment of family hierarchy in Xiao Fang's family, and Xiao Fang learned her role as a submissive, obedient granddaughter at a very young age. Moreover,

I suggest that this obedient aspect of her personality still remained rooted in her even after she moved out of her grandparents' household and lived solely with her parents, who are more liberal and democratic than her grandparents.

*The democratic parents:*

“My parents did not *guan* [discipline] me too much... they said that I have never made them worried,” Xiao Fang told me during our interview. “My classmates’ parents are very strict, but my dad is like a big brother to me. He played and had fun with me.” Unlike Xiao Qi and Fei Fei’s parents, Xiao Fang’s parents gave Xiao Fang more respect and freedom to make her own decisions. For instance, Xiao Fang’s parents rarely intervene in her relationship with her boyfriend. Instead, they allowed Xiao Fang to judge this romantic relationship on her own terms. Xiao Fang joked about a conversation she had with her grandmother about her boyfriend. “After my grandmother met my boyfriend, she told me that this (marriage) is a big deal and I should listen to my mother,” she said. “But I told my grandma that my mother listens to me.” She laughed. “My mother has never told me that I have to date this boy or that boy. She said she is happy as long as I’m happy and content. She said that the future is ours and we are responsible for our own decisions.” As is evident from this conversation, Xiao Fang’s grandmother and mother hold two drastically different attitudes toward Xiao Fang’s romantic relationship. While Xiao Fang’s grandmother’s still conforms to the Confucian notion that children ought to obey parents’ marriage arrangements for them, Xiao Fang and her mother arrived at an agreement that marriage is Xiao Fang’s personal business; her own decisions regarding this matter should be weighted more than her parents’.

Xiao Fang's parents' democratic attitude also extends to her academic decisions. After Xiao Fang failed to get into her dream university but was admitted by her second choice, she was confronted with the decision to either attend her second choice university or repeat her high school for one year. Many Chinese high schools offer "college preparation" classes to students who fail the college entrance exam to provide them with another opportunity. Such classes were originally designed for the "bad" students who can't get into any Chinese universities. However, some higher-achieving students also take advantage of this opportunity if they fail to give their "best performance" in the college entrance exam. They consider the "college preparation" class as another chance to get into the school of their dreams.

"I was so lost at that time," Xiao Fang said to me, "so I went to talk to my dad, and he said to me 'if you like the university you are admitted to, you can study in there. But if you don't like that university, I don't want to force you studying in there for four years... I don't mind at all if you decide to repeat your high school and take the college entrance exam again.'" Unlike Fei Fei's father, who designed his son's academic path for him and expected his son to follow the path meticulously, Xiao Fang's father did not impose his own expectations on his daughter. Instead, he gave her the freedom to make her own choice. After a period of struggling, Xiao Fang decided to repeat her high school year in order to retake the college entrance exam the following year, and her parents supported her wholeheartedly.

Xiao Fang's parents exhibited the same attitude when Xiao Fang showed an interest in studying abroad after her participating in a high school study abroad exchange program in Hong Kong. "I think the education in Hong Kong is so different from

Mainland education. I think my life is not complete if I only study in Mainland China. [After I told my parents that I want to study abroad] they said to me: ‘do whatever you want so you won’t have any regrets later. Even though you are just a girl, you still should go outside and pursue higher goals.’” In the end of our interview, Xiao Fang said to me that she thinks she was blessed for having such supportive and understanding parents, and expressed her gratitude with a warm smile on her face. She said, “I feel so content and satisfied with my parents.”

As a result of the One-Child Policy, some Chinese parents have started to adopt a more liberal and democratic attitude. That is, they give their children greater freedom with their life choices. Such parenting style contrasts dramatically from the authoritarian parenting style where parents are in charge of children’s life decisions, and arrange the children’s lives based on their expectations and preferences.

### *The obedient child*

As discussed above, Xiao Fang’s family embraces a more democratic and equalitarian family environment where Xiao Fang’s autonomy and individuality are highly valued. However, Xiao Fang’s parents’ family was not the primary family Xiao Fang grew up in. Xiao Fang grew up with her grandparents who emphasize the Confucian value of obedience and parental authority. As a consequence, Xiao Fang’s grandparents’ perspectives on traditional family values have heavily shaped her personality. I suggest that Xiao Fang’s personality is weighed more heavily on the obedience end of the personality continuum. When I asked Xiao Fang whom does she think is in charge of important family decisions, she was reluctant to suggest one particular family member. Instead, she said: “I think my family makes important

decisions together. I won't make decisions completely by myself. I will ask my parents' opinions. They will tell me what they think about it from an adults' point of view. I think we make decisions together." Therefore, even though Xiao Fang's parents allowed the development of her independence and individuality, Xiao Fang treated this granted freedom with reservation. During critical life moments, Xiao Fang still relies heavily on her parents' experience and opinions.

The Chinese university system requires students to select their intended major before they enter colleges. When Xiao Fang had to choose her college major the second time she applied to college, she wanted to study biology and to apply for biology programs. However, her mother suggested that she was not particularly comfortable with Xiao Fang's interests. "My mother won't directly disagree with my choices. Instead, she said I made her very uncomfortable with the fact that I got excited every time when I saw a bug... also (my mother thinks) it's too tiresome for a girl to study biology. She wants my life to be easy and relaxed. So when I applied for schools the second time I applied to social science programs." As we can see, even though Xiao Fang's self interest was on biology and natural science, she listened to her mother and applied for a diplomacy and administration affairs programs because her mother believed that such majors are more suitable for girls.

Through Xiao Fang's story, we see a family model where parents are democratic and liberal, while the child was immersed in a more hierarchical family environment during her early childhood. As a result, Xiao Fang exhibited more obedient and submissive personality traits. However, although there seems to be a value discrepancy between Xiao Fang and her parents, Xiao Fang's family relationship is not as

troublesome as Fei Fei's family relationship. By comparing Xiao Fang's case with Fei Fei's case, we can see the interactions between two different family value systems and the different family dynamics the interactions

#### 4. Jing Jing's story: democratic parents, independent child

I met Jing Jing in a Coastal Coffee shop located in a newly built shopping mall near the central transportation station in Beijing. When I arrived at the shopping mall on an early Saturday morning, the street in front of the shopping mall was already filled with crowds of pedestrians and bustling traffic. Jing Jing set up this interview location because she lived in the resident community right across the street from the shopping mall.

However, Jing Jing told me during our interview that her parents have just purchased another apartment in the newly developed suburban area one hour from Beijing. Jing Jing said that the newly purchased apartment is a small dwelling-size apartment. However, since she planned to move out of her parents' place after she gets married, she did not think the relatively small size of the new apartment will be a big problem.

Jing Jing studies administrative management in a highly ranked university in Beijing. Even though Jing Jing's major is considered a "social science" by Chinese standards,<sup>10</sup> she applied for a university that specializes in "natural science" disciplines. Jing Jing said this is a strategic move since "social science" majors in universities that focus on "natural science" disciplines require lower college entrance exam scores. Jing Jing told me she is not particularly happy with her current major. However, when she applied to college, neither herself or her parents knew much about her major. Jing Jing only started to learn more about her major after she entered college and began to take college classes.

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<sup>10</sup> Based on the interviews and my personal experience, Chinese society often considers disciplines such as biology, chemistry, and mathematics as "natural science" and literature, business, and other humanity disciplines as "social science". In the second year of high school, students are usually required to choose whether they want to study "social" or "natural" science. Students who choose to study social science will be transferred from their original class to a new class with only "social science" students.

Like Xiao Fang, Jing Jing was also dating a boy at the time of our interview. Jing Jing met her current boyfriend in her elementary school, and they had been elementary school classmates throughout all her elementary school years. Jing Jing has already met her boyfriend's parents and she told me that she regularly attended his family's activities, such as family Karaoke night and family meals. Moreover, Jing Jing has already started to plan her wedding now. "I met my boyfriend in 1996, so I think we should get married in 2016," she said. "My boyfriend has his own apartment, so we will move in together after we are married." Jing Jing's face lit up when she talked about her marriage plans. Jing Jing also has a meticulous plan about her life after marriage. "My boyfriend thinks we will have a baby two years after we get married. Now we are only planning on having one child... I won't consider having a second child unless we both have accomplished careers... In order to support our child, we need to have a monthly salary above 15,000 [yuan] (2,000USD). I think our child's future will be affected negatively if we could not earn at least that amount of money."

*Democratic parents:*

"My family relationship is pretty good," Jing Jing said. "I think my parents are like my friends. We are equals. My parents never said to me that they are my parents. They don't use commanding tones. We discuss everything together. Our family environment is very harmonious." Jing Jing told me that early in her childhood, her parents read a lot books on child education. "All the books they read say that parents have to respect and support the children," she said. "So they think that's what they should do. They think the traditional, commanding way of education is not good." Like Xiao Fang's family, Jing Jing's family relationship also appears to be relatively equalitarian.

Jing Jing's parents respect her life choices. For instance, Jing Jing told me that her parents asked her to choose her high school and college on her own. "My parents did not really offer many opinions on my school choices. They looked at my school applications, and said, 'oh, okay,' and that was it. They respect my decisions," she said with a proud smile on her face.

Also, In Jing Jing's family, decisions are often made based on open family discussion. When Jing Jing's parents decided to purchase a new home in the suburban area in Beijing, they took Jing Jing to several potential real estate sites and asked her opinion on their purchase. Originally, Jing Jing's mother preferred one apartment site in the south of Beijing more because it has larger living space. However, Jing Jing noted that another site, located in the north of Beijing, was closer to her school and her future work office, and that it would be more convenient for her to commute between school, work and home. When Jing Jing laid her opinions on the table during a family discussion, her parents took her suggestion into serious consideration and eventually purchased the one Jing Jing suggested. Therefore, Jing Jing's parents created a family environment where open communication between children and parents are encouraged. To Jing Jing, her parents are not authoritarian figures whose powers in the family are not negotiable. Rather, she and her parents are "friends" who share similar family status.

Moreover, even when disagreements between Jing Jing and her parents arise, Jing Jing's parents still avoid resolving conflicts by reinforcing their parental authority. As Jing Jing revealed to me later in our interview, her mother was not particularly satisfied with her boyfriend. Like many Chinese parents, Jing Jing's mother believes the husband should attain a higher education degree. However, Jing Jing's boyfriend does not have a

college degree, which deeply concerns Jing Jing's mother. Additionally, her mother thinks Jing Jing and her boyfriend aren't equal in attractiveness; Jing Jing is a very pretty girl, with long, silk-like black hair, big almond-shaped eyes and an oval face with healthy, rosy pink cheeks. Her boyfriend has very long, narrow eyes. However, even though Jing Jing's mother has reservations on her potential son-in law, she has not openly intervened in her daughter's romantic relationship. Jing Jing said, "Even though my mother is not especially happy about my boyfriend, she is gradually changing her mind." "When 2016 comes, I will be 26 already. I will be independent financially. I will be more assertive about this marriage at that time... my parents may still tell me that they are not very satisfied about this marriage, but they can't tell me not to marry him." Jing Jing wore a sneaky smile on her face.

### *The independent child*

Jing Jing left me with the impression that she is a very out-going and active young girl. She was able to answer my questions quickly, and eagerly expressed her own thoughts in fast-paced speech. Jing Jing has a well-thought plan not only for romantic life, but also for her academic and professional life. As Jing Jing recalled her college application process, she said that she knew she had to be very cautious about which schools to apply for, since she had to complete her college applications before taking the college entrance exam. "I was admitted into my first choice school," she said. "I knew I could get into my first-choice school. I'm very confident about that." As Jing Jing told me, she has always been an excellent student in schools, and she is confident about her ability to succeed academically. "I scored 116 out of 120 on both my Chinese and

English high school entrance exam... even though my middle school was not a top-ranked school.”

Furthermore, Jing Jing did not like to rely on her parents to achieve high scores in schools. Jing Jing’s mother works in the field of communication and media. Sometimes, her mother would tutor her on writing assignments. However, Jing Jing does not particularly like to follow her mother’s suggestions on her writing. Instead, she has a strong will to express her own thoughts in her own words. “I think my mother’s writing is too adult-like. So I disagreed with her on my writing sometimes,” Jing Jing told me. Moreover, Jing Jing also has a clear plan on her career development. Jing Jing planned to work for one or two years after she graduates from college. However, she understands the importance of higher education on her career development. Therefore, she told me that she would eventually go back to school and attain a masters degree. Jing Jing, like Fei Fei, strikes me as an independent and autonomous individual. However, instead of suppressing their child’s independence and autonomy as Fei Fei’s parents did, Jing Jing’s parents highly valued and actively embraced such personality qualities. Because Jing Jing and her parents share similarly family values, Jing Jing does not seem to experience the same struggles and conflicts Fei Fei has experienced.

## **Conclusion**

Since the early 1980s, Deng has launched a series of economic and social policies in order to establish China as a competitive force in the global economy. Among Deng's socioeconomic reform policies, two are closely related to Chinese family. First, Deng and top leaders in the Chinese Communist Party recognized the economical inefficiency of Mao's "cradle-to grave" social welfare system, and they started to privatize China's social welfare system under the guiding principle-socialization of social welfare system. The word socialization refers to the decentralization of public welfare responsibilities from the nation-states to lower level social units (Yip 2006: 72). In terms of the elderly care system, socialization means the delegation of the elderly care liability from the state to the individual families. To smooth this radical shift of social responsibilities, the Chinese Communist Party re-instituted the value of Confucian tradition and the concept of "filial piety." The re-promotion of the Confucian family values strengthened individuals' connections with the families and legitimized the transformation of elderly-care responsibilities to individuals. Moreover, Deng's reform policies aim not only to reform the Chinese system of economy, but also to recreate a new economy model that will aid China to dominate the core power of world capitalist economy. Initially, China's economic development was mainly supported by exportation of cheap labor to the developed nations. However, Deng and CCP leaders realized that in order for the nation to become the center of world economic development, China needs to produce a generation of "high quality people," or global elites, who possess the social and cultural capital to compete in a global environment. Therefore, the Chinese government implemented the One-Child Policy to artificially reduce the fertility rate and hence

increase the overall quality of the next generation (Fong 2004: 17). Further, in order to effectively execute this nation-coerced population control policy, the CCP portrayed China's population growth in the 1980s as a major obstacle to China's march toward modernization and the One-Child Policy as the sole solution to this national crisis (Greenhalgh 2003).

While the two economic reform policies discussed above aid China to become a competent player in the world economy game, they also produced profound effects on Chinese culture at a local level. That is, these policies forever changed Chinese family culture: they have created two fundamentally incompatible family value systems. The revival of Confucian tradition reinforced the hierarchical family structure where collectivist family values are highly valued. On the other hand, the One-Child Policy constructed a child-centered family structure where individualism and family democracy are celebrated. How do social agents, such as the singleton children and parents, deal with the side effects of China's economic involvement in the global community? In other words, how do they deal with the contradictions created by China's globalization process?

In his essay, Samuel Huntington predicts that globalization will inevitably lead to "the clash of civilization," or conflicts between cultural values. He reasons that because cultural characteristics are "less mutable and hence less easily compromised and resolved," the increasing interactions between cultural civilizations will eventually cause major conflicts on both a global scale and a local scale (1996: 3-5). Following Huntington's line of reasoning, family conflicts are unavoidable because of the co-existence of Eastern Confucian values and Western individualist values. However,

another group of scholars disagree with Huntington's theory of civilization clash and argue that cultural globalization will produce cultural hybridization instead of conflicts. While they agree that contradictions will occur as a result of modern-tradition culture interaction, they argue that human minds have the capacity for the co-existence of contradictions. Furthermore, they suggest that through human agents' active reconstruction and reinterpretation of cultural values, the two opposite sets of values will ultimately become complementary to each other (Shrestha and Conway 2006; Hopper 2007; Kraidy 2005).

When China as a nation becomes more and more engaged in the global world, Chinese urban families also encountered the cultural effects produced by globalization. The ethnographic studies of parent-child relationships of Chinese singletons provide us with some insights into the clash vs. hybridization debate. Will cultural contradictions inevitably lead to family conflicts or will they resolve in a blending of contradictory family values? I would like to suggest that both the "civilization clash" theory and the "hybridization" theory have their merits. Value contradictions created by cultural globalization can lead to either conflicts or hybridization. The final outcomes, however, depend on the specific circumstances of every individual family. First of all, contradictions created by the differences in cultural values may not necessarily occur in the case of every individual agent. Some individual or family will not have to deal with cultural contradictions simply because no such contradictions are presented to them. Among the four case studies, neither Xiao Qi nor Jing Jing had to deal with family value contradictions because none of the contradictions existed in their families. In Xiao Qi's family, both Xiao Qi and his parents assimilate the same family values: the traditional

Confucian value. While Xiao Qi's parents consider themselves as the authority figures of the house, Xiao Qi is happy to perform the role of a Confucian, obedient child. Similarly, both Jing Jing and her parents have adjusted to the One-Child Family structure. While Jing Jing appeared to be an individualist child who appreciates democratic values, her parents also adopted their roles as democratic parents who appreciate their child's salient individuality.

Moreover, even when cultural contradictions are presented to individuals; it is possible that they will respond to such contradictions in radically different ways. As a number of scholars have argued, humans are not passive receivers of cultural ideologies. Rather, they have the potential to reconstruct the conflicting cultural information based on a variety of individual factors such as personal agendas and the socio-cultural environment individuals are residing in (Weedon 1987; Trask 2010). Among the four case studies, both Fei Fei's family and Xiao Fang's family have to deal with the contradictions created by the co-existence of traditional and modern family values. However, they handled the contradictions in radically different ways. In Fei Fei's case, his parents align with the Confucian traditional family value system, but Fei Fei himself agrees more with the individualist, Western values. As Huntington predicted, the value contradictions in Fei Fei's family created a substantial amount of family conflicts and turmoil. However, in Xiao Fang's family, where her parents are considered as more "modern" or "democratic" and Xiao Fang as more "traditional" or "obedient", Xiao Fang reported almost no family conflicts. Although hybridized family values reside in Xiao Fang's family, they leave no indication of the "clash of values" or value conflicts. While

the values Xiao Fang and her parents believed in are fundamentally different, neither party seemed to notice the contradictory nature of their family relationships.

By looking into individual families in Beijing, I suggest that: first, social situations are different even within the same larger-scale socio-cultural environment. Both Xiao Qi and Jing Jing are singleton children who grow up in the rapidly changing Chinese society where diverse values are co-existing. However, their family stories are not only radically different from each other, but also radically different from Fei Fei and Xiao Fang's. Furthermore, human agents are inherently different, and they will employ different strategies when dealing with the same social problem. When Xiao Fang and Fei Fei's families are confronted with similar cultural conflicts created by China's economic reform policies, they respond to the contradictions in distinctive manners. Therefore, a homogeneous conclusion on how cultural globalization affects families will unavoidably omit one situation or the other or one group of individuals or the other. Individual analysis of specific cases is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the family situations under the age of rapid globalization.

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Appendix:

Sample Questions

1. FAMILY HISTORY:

- a. Who did respondent (R) live with before coming to college/ Who are the family members?
- b. Specific relationships between R and her/his family members?

2. FAMILY DAY

- a. What a normal family day is like during weekdays?
- b. What family members do during weekends?

3. FAMILY CONFLICTS

- a. How frequent are the family conflicts?
- b. What are the major conflicts about?
- c. What methods did R and her/his family employ to resolve the conflicts?
- d. How does R evaluate the method?
- f. Describe one most recent conflict R has with her/his family (when did it happen? Why did it happen? How long did it last? How did you resolve it? Are you satisfied with the solution? What affects this incident have on you?)
- g. Describe the conflict R remembers the most in life
- h. What affects these conflicts incidents have on R and her/his relationship with the family?

