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谨以此博士文献给所有生活在暴力漩涡中的单身女性

*Dedicated to all those who are suffering from cultural, structural, direct and
symbolic violence as single women, wherever you are.*

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research background

Since China's reform and opening up in 1978, Chinese people's living standards have continued to improve steadily over time. Meanwhile, with rapid economic development the status of Chinese women has also been undergoing tremendous change, with women's economic independence and independent self-consciousness increasing alongside their economic participation. As a consequence, Chinese women, who historically depended on their husbands for support in the *old society*¹, are gradually shedding the restraints of traditional marriage and family culture. In recent years, encouraged by the spread of western ideas and the rise in women's economic and social status, an increasing number of Chinese women delay marriage until they have found a suitable partner, or simply choose to remain single as their chosen lifestyle.² According to data from the last three censuses in China there were 2.58 million unmarried women (1.8 percent)³ aged between 25 and 40 years old in 1990.⁴ This number increased to 5.64 million (3.3 percent) in 2000, and rose to 13.58 million (8.5 percent) in 2010. In the past 20 years therefore, the population of unmarried Chinese women of marriageable age has increased more than four times.⁵

China is the superpower of the world's population. According to recent data released by the China National Bureau of Statistics, as of the end of 2018, China's total population was approximately 1.395 billion, an increase of 5.3 million over the previous year.⁶ Of these, the

¹ *Old society* is a modern Chinese term referring to the period of before the founding of "New China" in 1949.

² Many women in China, over the age of "late marriage", according to the marriage law of the State (marriage at age 23 or older for women, at 25 or older for men) are choosing to unmarried; *Marriage Law of People's Republic of China*. (2018). China Legal Publishing House, Beijing.

³ Unmarried women accounted for 1.8% of China's total female population aged 25 to 40 in 1990.

⁴ The Chinese census is conducted every 10 years, with the next census being carried out in 2020.

⁵ *2010 Population Census of the People's Republic of China*. (2011). China Statistics Press, Beijing. Available at: www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm (accessed 20 May 2016).

⁶ Wang, Xiaodong., Zhang, Wenfang., & Ma, Chi. (21 January 2019). "China's population growth hits 57-year low". Society of China Daily from the website of www.chinadaily.com.cn, Global Edition. Available at: <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201901/21/WS5c453c33a3106c65c34e598e.html> (accessed 30 March 2019).

Chinese male population comprises 713 million (52 percent) and the female population is around 682 million (48 percent); thus there are 31.64 million more males than females,⁷ for a total population sex ratio of 105/100.⁸ This country's sex ratio imbalance is caused by many factors, including: the China one-child policy from 1979 to 2015; traditional patriarchal ideology; the use of science and technology to know fetal sex in advance; and selective abortion where the fetus is female.⁹ According to the latest data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, there are 30.49 million more men of marriageable than women in 2020.¹⁰ In addition, according to the Chinese *sixth census data*¹¹ released in 2010, the proportion of unmarried to married persons for men and women born in the 1970s is 206/100, and those born in the 1980s is 136/100. Thus, there is a serious problem of an unbalanced sex ratio for those women and men born in the 1970s and 1980s of national marriageable age.¹² Furthermore, there are 12 million unmarried men aged between 30 and 39 years old, with only 5.8 million unmarried women of the same age.¹³ The Chinese National Health and Family Planning Commission recently released "*the Chinese Family Development Report 2018*"¹⁴ which showed that the majority of unmarried men live in rural areas, whereas unmarried women reside mainly in the cities. This pattern is even more apparent within the larger cities. Single gender imbalance is a particularly serious social issue in Beijing where, according to 2014 statistics, the numbers of unmarried women are four times higher than the number of

⁷ China Internet Watch. (2019). *China's population growth and birth rate reached a shocking low in 2018*. January 23 2019. Available at: <https://www.chinainternetwatch.com/28107/population-2018/> (accessed 30 March 2019).

⁸ 2010 Population Census of the People's Republic of China, 2011.

⁹ Fincher, Leta hong. (2014). *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender inequality in China*. Zed Books. London.

¹⁰ Liu, Jing. (2017). "30 million Chinese men to be wifeless over the next 30 years." Society of *China Daily*, 2017-02-13. Available at: https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-02/13/content_28183839.htm (accessed 20 September 2018); "30.49 million more men than women in China!" Available at: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1656069515810359045&wfr=spider&for=pc> (accessed 20 February 2020).

¹¹ National Bureau of Statistics of China. (2011). *2010 Population Census*. Available at: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/statisticaldata/censusdata/> (accessed 30 March 2019).

¹² China is currently the country with the largest legal age for marriage in the world. Men must be older than 22 years old, and women must be older than 20 years old.

¹³ 2010 Population Census of the People's Republic of China, 2011.

¹⁴ National Health and Family Planning Commission of the People's Republic of China. (2019). *The Family Development Report 2018*. Available at: <http://www.nhfpc.gov.cn/yzygj/> (accessed 1 February 2019).

unmarried men.¹⁵ In short, the socio-demographic order in China is currently in a state of imbalance, resulting in social and demographic problems.

Consequently, single women in China as a social class have become more prominent, and then become a target of criticism from the general public. At present, Chinese single women aged over 30 are still regarded in society as “*special*” or “*abnormal*”.¹⁶ Moreover, in 2007, the discriminative term “*leftover women*” against single women was created and promoted by the Chinese Ministry of Education.¹⁷ Most narratives in Chinese media continue to argue that the identity of a “single women” is regarded as an incomplete life, because the primary value of a woman should be based on marriage and giving birth.¹⁸ As a consequence, Chinese single women have to face pervasive discrimination, and are stigmatized by the general public in contemporary China.¹⁹

According to the principle of *Marriage Economics* in a social structure, marriage is a combination of economic optimization.²⁰ Accordingly, the core purpose of marriage is that couples maximize revenue and can take care of each other, by creating access to economies of scale through marriage. Thus, marriage could help a family to obtain personal and economic benefits.²¹ Moreover, marriage has a significant impact on the market economy, as the

¹⁵ National Health and Family Planning Commission Legal Department. (2019). *Chinese Family Development Report 2018*. Available at: www.moh.gov.cn/fzs/ (accessed 1 February 2019).

¹⁶ Gaetano, Arianne. (2010). “Single women in urban China and the ‘Unmarried crisis’: gender resilience and gender transformation”. *Working Papers in Contemporary Asian Studies*. 31. Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University, Sweden.

¹⁷ National Language Resources Monitoring and Research Center. (2007). Report on the State of Chinese Language Life (2006) (1st edition). The Commercial Press, Beijing. p. 252.

¹⁸ Feldshuh, Hannah. (2016). *Gender, Sexism, and Marriage practice in contemporary China: A study of “ShengNü” (Leftover Women) in popular media*. Master thesis. Yenching Academy, Peking University. Beijing.

¹⁹ Lü, Cheng. (2011). *On the “left women” image in Chinese mainland media*. Master’s thesis, East China Normal University, Shanghai, China; Luo & Sun, (2015). “Are You the One? China’s TV Dating Shows and the Sheng Nü’s Predicament”. *Feminist Media Studies*, 15: 2.

²⁰ Grossbard, Shoshana. (1993). *On the Economics of Marriage - A Theory of Marriage, Labor and Divorce*. Second Edition. Munich Personal RePEc Archive. MPRA Paper No. 81832. Springer Publishing, New York.

²¹ Becker, G. S. (1987). *Family Economics Analysis*. Huaxia Publishing House, Beijing.

matchmaking and wedding market in China in particular is huge.²² According to research data from the research company, iResearch Consulting Group²³, in 2014 the Chinese online dating industry had revenues of 2.3 billion Chinese Yuan (*295 million Euro*)²⁴, an increase of 13 percent from 2 billion Chinese Yuan (*256 million Euro*) in 2013.²⁵ In 2015, the market size of China's online dating industry had in turn reached 2.7 billion Yuan (*roughly 346 million Euro*), which was an increase of 5.2 percent on the previous year, and the market continues to maintain rapid growth. In 2018, the market size for Chinese dating platforms reached 3.91 billion Yuan (*501 million Euro*), which was 49 percent more than 5 years earlier in 2013.²⁶ As a consequence, Chinese dating networks have attracted a large number of venture capital institutions.

Lily Network is one of the most famous Chinese dating sites, and in the first year of its establishment received 76.44 million Yuan (*9.8 million Euro*) from two rounds of capital financing. China's best known dating site (www.jiayuan.com) receives 20,000 new membership registrations every day, and currently has 17.13 million members. It has received an even higher amount of venture capital investment, about 78 million Yuan (*10 million Euro*) in 2006.²⁷ In addition, since the early 1990s the opening up of China's housing system has caused the real estate market to rapidly increase in value, and real estate has become an important part of the wedding industry and the largest purchase for ordinary families.²⁸ Overall then, wedding behavior and pressures support a series of related service industries,

²² *China Wedding Industry Analysis Report, Market Research and Investment Forecast: 2015-2020*. Available at: <http://www.chyxx.com/industry/201704/512643.html> (accessed 1 February 2016).

²³ Data from iResearch Consulting Group/ 艾瑞咨询集团. *China's new economic information portal/Internet data aggregation platform*. Available at: www.iresearch.com.cn/ (accessed 10 June 2016).

²⁴ In this study, the exchange rate between Euro and Chinese Yuan is based on 1: 7.8 in 2017 and 2018.

²⁵ *2016 China online dating industry report*. Available at: www.report.iresearch.cn/report/201602/2534.shtml (accessed 5 June 2016).

²⁶ Intelligent Research Consulting Group. (July 2015). *China Wedding Industry Analysis Report, Market Research and Investment Forecast: 2015-2020*. Intelligent Research Consulting Publishing, Beijing.

²⁷ *2012-16 Chinese marriage service industry forecast & investment strategic planning analysis report*. Available at: www.askci.com/reports/201302/28172910192647.shtml (accessed 10 June 2016).

²⁸ Fincher, 2014.

which further increase the economic, societal and familial pressures driving single women to marriage in China.

In the face of negative evaluations and unfavorable policies against single women in China, and to accede to the values of mainstream society, some women rush to get married, which may lead to an unhappy marriage or divorce. Based on the statistical data, the divorce rate in China has increased significantly in recent years. On 16 August 2018, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China issued the *2017 Social Services Development Statistics Bulletin*,²⁹ which observed that the national divorce rate continued to rise (see Table 1 below). In particular, the number of divorces has increased steadily in large urban areas, such as in Beijing and Shanghai, with the city of Beijing having the highest divorce rate in China (around 39 percent), and followed by 38 percent in the city of Shanghai.³⁰ In 2017, 4.37 million couples divorced in China, which was an increase of 5.2 percent over the previous year. The “crude divorce rate”³¹ in China was 3.67 percent in 2017, which was an increase of 0.65 percent over the previous year.³²

Table 1: Divorce rate in China from 2007 to 2017

Rate (‰)	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Crude marriage rate	7,5	8,27	9,1	9,3	9,67	9,8	9,92	9,58	9	8,3	7,7
Crude divorce rate	1,59	1,71	1,85	2	2,13	2,29	2,58	2,67	2,79	3,02	3,67

Note: Date retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/279449/divorce-rate-in-china/> (20 October 2018).

²⁹ *2017 Social Services Development Statistics Bulletin*. (2018). Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Available at: <http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/sj/tjgb/> (accessed 10 November 2018).

³⁰ National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2017.

³¹ The crude divorce rate measures the number of marriage separations for every 1,000 people in the population.

³² *Divorce Rate: 2017 Social Services Development Statistics Bulletin*. Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/279449/divorce-rate-in-china/> (accessed 11 November 2018).

Despite a rise in divorces, Chinese single women are still pushed into the marriage market, especially in recent years. Being a single woman is still regarded as being against China's traditional understanding of family and heteronormative marriage culture.³³ This has been fueled by various media outlets in China, who have repeatedly put more pressure towards those women who remain unmarried.³⁴ Over the past 30 years, China has witnessed the increasing status of single women, paralleling the economic transformations resulting from promotion of a market economy and privatization. However, a patriarchal system of male domination is deeply rooted in Chinese culture, in which Chinese single women are disrespected, marginalized or even subjected to gendered violence.

Under gender equality policies, the Chinese government has issued a series of laws against gender violence, including family violence. Unfortunately, multidimensional violence suffered by single women as a result of patriarchal prejudice is ignored, which could be seen as a new form of gender inequality. Violence against Chinese single women is thus situated in particular economic and cultural contexts, which cannot be separated from larger systems of gender power. The underlying reasons of these forms of violence are therefore explored in this study.

To gain a better understanding of how and why Chinese single women face myriad forms of violence in society, the concepts of *cultural, structural and direct violence* by Johan Galtung (1990) and *symbolic violence* by Pierre Bourdieu (1977) are explored as the theoretical basis to analyze the current situation of Chinese single women. To further understand violence against single women in contemporary China, concepts of “*gender power*”, “*social control*”, “*cultural factors*” and “*economic factors*” are also addressed to explain the reasoning and power dynamics that impact on the cultural, structural, direct and symbolic violence against

³³ Fincher, 2014.

³⁴ Lü, 2011.

Chinese single women in contemporary China.

This study contributes to expanding the concept of gender-based violence from private violence to public violence, from personal violence to collective violence, and from direct and structural violence to cultural and symbolic violence. The results and findings of this research contribute to filling in the gaps of the previous studies on Chinese single women, and expand awareness on how cultural, structural, direct and symbolic violence is hurting single women so that violence could be reduced and this group could live better and find their own position within Chinese society.

1.2 The object and sample of this research

The object of this research is urban single women aged 30 years and older in contemporary China. For many, being single has become an unavoidable way of life in modern society. However, the definition of the concept of who and what is a “*single woman*” in China is still relatively vague theoretically. For this reason, this research will exclude those Chinese women who have regular partners, cohabit when unmarried (de-facto partners), or are engaged in any committed long-term relationship. In addition, this research excludes the social categories of single mothers, divorcees, and widows in China. Single women in this study include therefore, urban Chinese women, who are not yet married (or never married), do not have children, and are over marriageable age (30 years old and above - see below).

In this study, I undertook oral interviews with never-married single women aged 30 years and older living in urban Chinese areas. This demographic sample was chosen, as in traditional Chinese culture the age of 30 is seen as an important threshold for marriage, particularly for women. Currently, the average age of men and women at first marriage is 29 and 27 years

respectively in China, and urban couples are married 2 years later than the national average.³⁵ Thus, the age of 30 becomes a social watershed for a Chinese woman to get married, or otherwise risk being labeled “*leftover women*”.³⁶ Unmarried women aged over 30 in China are considered to have missed the best marriage age, and to have failed to fulfill gender responsibilities of becoming a wife and mother.³⁷ Therefore, 30 years of age has the special significance in relation to marriage and life cycles for Chinese women. Of course, the age factor is also important to Chinese men. However, in contrast to single men, well-educated Chinese single women are more inclined to challenge traditional gender norms and the patriarchal system, given their role outside of traditional relationship structures.³⁸ Consequently, older single women in China have become more prominent targets for criticism in the community and in public discourse, which increases the cultural pressures to get married.³⁹

My study focused on urban single women as a research group, and did not include the experiences of rural women. Based on the analysis of the Chinese Sixth Census data⁴⁰, it is established that single “*leftover men*” live mainly in the countryside, whereas “*leftover women*” mainly live in towns and cities.⁴¹ In rural areas dominated by strong patriarchal culture, early marriage and childbirth, weak economic opportunity, and limited education, rural women

³⁵ Lily Network. (2012). “2011 Chinese Marital Status Survey Report”. *Population and Family Planning*. 4. Available at: <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/e789c48ed0d233d4b14e6926.html> (accessed 18 November 2018).

³⁶ Fincher, 2014; Wang, Zhong. (January 2010). “Study on the restrictive conditions of marriage age - Why the average age of first marriage has been postponed”. *Northwest Population Journal*. 37-41.

³⁷ Deng, Xiquan. (April 2017). “International Comparative Study of Youth Marriage Age”. *Beijing Youth Research*. 4: 19-27.

³⁸ Fan, Qian. (2012). “Leftover women Phenomenon in Gender Perspective”. *Journal of Anhui Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*. Wuhu City, China.

³⁹ Feldshuh, 2016; Gaetano, 2010.

⁴⁰ The Sixth National Population Census of the People’s Republic of China, also referred to as the 2010 Chinese Census, was conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics of the People’s Republic of China on November 1, 2010.

⁴¹ Zhang Yi. (2013). “Single unmarried: Analysis report on “leftover women” and “leftover men” - based on the analysis of the sixth census data”. *Gansu Social Science*. 4: 50-53; Liu, Lige., Jin, Xiaoyi., Brown, Melissa., & Feldman, Marcus. (2014). “Involuntary Bachelorhood in Rural China: A Social Network Perspective”. *Journal of Population*, 69 (1): 103-125.

continue to have limited life options outside of marriage.⁴² Moreover, due to China's one-child policy from 1979 to 2015, the unbalanced gender population problem remains extremely serious in the country, especially in rural areas.⁴³ In China, one of the main consequences of the one-child policy has been a huge reduction of the female population.⁴⁴ The sex ratio deviates from these norms because of the tradition of son preference, and the pursuit of other measures – particularly gender-selective abortion - to select baby gender.⁴⁵

In urban areas therefore, single child girls can have better access to education and opportunities, which could be one factor accounting for the higher number of unmarried women mostly residing in cities.⁴⁶ However, this also means that a large number of men experience difficulties in forming families and become involuntary bachelors, due to the demographic problem of surplus males.⁴⁷ In most rural areas, most marriages are still strictly handled by families and parents.⁴⁸ Therefore, Chinese rural women continue to have limited decision-making power over whether they can choose to remain single. For rural women therefore, marriage is still the only way to survive. For these reasons, this study only focused on Chinese single women living in urban areas.

This research aims to carry out in-depth research and analysis of the current situation of Chinese single women suffering from cultural, structural, direct and symbolic violence in

⁴² Zhou, Xudong., & Hesketh, Therese. (19 September 2017). "High sex ratios in rural China: Declining well-being with age in never-married men". *Philosophical Transactions of The Royal Society B Biological*, 372: 1729.

⁴³ Tan, Liangying. (2008). "Changing Mindsets: How China's Abnormal Sex Ratio Is Turning Its Government into a Champion of Gender Equality". *Asian Journal of Comparative Law*, 3: 1-31.

⁴⁴ Sudbeck, Kristine. (2012). "The Effects of China's One Child Policy: The Significance for Chinese Women". *Nebraska Anthropologist*, 179: 43-60.

⁴⁵ Hesketh, Therese., & Zhu, Weixing. (2006). "Abnormal sex ratios in human populations: Causes and consequences". *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 103 (36): 13271-13275.

⁴⁶ Tsui, Ming., & Rich, Lynne. (February 2002). "The Only Child and Educational Opportunity for Girls in Urban China". *Journal of Gender and Society*, 16 (1): 74-92.

⁴⁷ Liu, Lige., Jin, Xiaoyi., Brown, Melissa., & Feldman, Marcus. (2014). 103-125.

⁴⁸ Zhang, Jin. (May 2014). "Power Narrative of Rural Unmarried Women". *Journal of Legal System and Society*, 5: 181-182.

contemporary China, in the period of rapid social transformation. This is done through a series of research methods, including in-depth interviews and documentary research.

1.3 Research question

The situation of single women in contemporary China is considered with respect to their vulnerability from various forms of violence, which is a specific focus and consideration of this study to the research field. In pursuit of the objectives set out earlier, this study attempts to find the answers to the research questions of: *what factors influence cultural, structural, direct and symbolic violence against Chinese single women in contemporary China*; and: *how does violence against Chinese single women operate on a cultural, structural, direct and symbolic level*.

1.4 Structure of this research

This PhD thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 presents an introduction to this study, including research background, the research objective and question, and structure of this research. The aim of this chapter is to provide contextual background, while introducing the specific focus of this study.

Chapter 2 reviews the available literature concerning the phenomenon of Chinese single women, and a research gap for this research is explored. The aim of this chapter is to provide an in-depth understanding of existing research in the field and to identify research gaps in this area of research.

Chapter 3 engages with existing literature on theories of violence, and examines the issues of gender power, social control, cultural factors and economic factors, Galtung and Bourdieu's theories of violence (1990, 1998) are presented and drawn upon as the key theoretical paradigms for this analysis, followed by a theoretical summary for the empirical study. In addition, this chapter presents the research methods and the methodology implemented for

this study, and explains the causes and motivations for violence against Chinese single women as my unique consideration for further analysis.

Chapter 4 reviews the four historical waves of social understanding and treatment of single women in China, since the foundation of the New China in 1949. The aim of this chapter is to familiarize the reader with the phenomena of single women in Chinese history, which serves to explain and account for the precarious status and situation of Chinese single women today.

Chapter 5 analyzes the underlying motivations for violence against Chinese single women, including societal and cultural aspects of gender power, social control, and economic factors.

Gender power traces the relations between gender inequality and violence against Chinese single women. *Social control* explores the themes of collective discipline and punishment affecting multidimensional violence against single women, and discusses the purpose of social control in encouraging violence against Chinese single women. *Economic factors* examine the importance of economic factors in the Chinese marriage market economy and family formation, and relations between economic factors and violence against single women.

Chapter 6 examines the current situation of Chinese single women suffering from cultural, structural, direct and symbolic violence, based on the findings of in-depth interviews in China and extensive documentary research.

Chapter 7 concludes the findings of the empirical analysis and discusses the future status of Chinese single women. Finally, the contribution of this research is presented, with discussion of research limitations and possible avenues for further research.

Chapter 2 State of the Art

Sociological research into single women as a specific social group actually began much later in China than in western countries. In the early 1950s, Smith (1951) had undertaken the first research into the general demographic characteristics of single women living in the U.K.⁴⁹ In addition, Dubermann (1975) in the U.S.A analyzed the social conflicts affecting single women, by means of family measurement techniques.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Yvonne Stolk and Patricia Brotherton (1981) researched attitudes towards single women through the use of a questionnaire survey in Australia.⁵¹ In contrast however, the Chinese single women phenomenon only becomes visible and of academic interest in the 21st century, in response to a substantial increase in the number of single women living in China. Especially in recent years, this phenomenon has been conceived by policymakers and researchers as a serious social problem, thereby increasing its recognition and analysis by scholars. This chapter conducts a literature review to summarize the relevant studies undertaken to date into the circumstances and social experiences of Chinese single women.

2.1 Literature review on single women in China

In this section, existing research concerning Chinese single women is reviewed with a focus on summarizing the research gap to be analyzed in this research. It is worth mentioning that almost all of available Chinese language articles use the term “*leftover women*” as a synonym for unmarried women. Existing research further consists of three major aspects of analysis, which include:

(1) identifying underlying reasons for Chinese women remaining single, the current social situation and the effect on Chinese society;

⁴⁹ Smith, Marie Blanche. (1951). *The Single Woman today: Her Problems and Adjustment*. Watts, London.

⁵⁰ Duberman, Lucile. (1975). *The Reconstituted Family*. Nelson-Hall, Chicago.

⁵¹ Stolk, Yvonne., & Brotherton, Patricia. (1981). “Attitudes towards Single Women”. *Sex Roles*, 7 (1): 73-78.

- (2) understanding Chinese social attitudes towards single women, and the impact of negative media portrayals and discrimination against single women; and
- (3) analysis of why single women as individuals and as a social class are discriminated against in China.

(1) *The reasons for being single, current social situation and the effect on society*

In a sociological perspective, academic Qu and Liu (2009) from the department of Philosophy and Public Administration of Heilongjiang University explored the causes of the “*leftover women*” phenomenon in China and its negative impact on social balance. Single women are the new social concept arising out of China’s social transformation, the acceleration of social change and social mobility, which result in a combination of factors such as female educational attainment and occupational stress. With improvements in the economic and social status of China’s women and the enhanced independence, Chinese society should be more inclusive and less discriminating against women who choose to remain single women phenomenon.⁵² However, that has not been the case in contemporary China.

Wu and Lu (2010), professors of Guizhou University School of Law, published the article “*On the Phenomenon of Chinese leftover women*”, which attempted to explore the reasons driving the rise of unmarried women in China. On the basis of “*marriage squeeze theory*”⁵³, the authors sought to find the reasons of increasing number of single women, as well as exploring the drawbacks of an increasing number of single women in China. To resolve these tensions, the authors proposed social measures such as improvement of women’s economic status as an important factor to improve the social status of women, and to change traditional

⁵² Qu, Wenyong., & Liu, Ping. (March 2009). “Social Causes of Leftover Women Phenomenon”. *Social Sciences Review*, 24 (3): 46-48.

⁵³ “*The marriage squeeze*” refers to the demographic imbalance in which the number of potential unmarried men does not approximately equal the number of potential unmarried women in the marriage market, thus some of them have to be squeezed out of the marriage market, no opportunity to get married. Available at: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/reference/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/marriage-squeeze> (accessed 8 April 2019).

concepts that men are stronger than women and supports and advocates blind date matches as a suitable solution.⁵⁴

Chinese Sociologist Chen Yaya (2011) submitted a conference paper at the “Forum of Social Development and Gender Influence”, which examined the living conditions of single Chinese women as researched through an online participation method on social media. Chen found that single women are often in bad moods with limited living spaces, under awful social and family pressure. In contemporary China, as a disadvantaged group, single women are mostly isolated from society. Finally, she argued that the lifestyle of single women makes an important contribution to new family modes.⁵⁵

Yang (2011), a graduate student of Beijing Technology and Business University, published a paper in the Journal of Cangzhou Teacher’s College titled “*Thoughts on the status quo of the leftover women in our society*”. In this paper, he found that the increased number of unmarried women would exacerbate existing gender imbalances in China and accelerate the rate of an aging society.⁵⁶

Fan (2012), in her paper “*Leftover women Phenomenon in Gender Perspective*”, explored how the status and living conditions of women have continually been a focus of attention in society. With the emergence of a large number of economically independent single women, she concluded that such women begin to show an independent attitude in the community, which in turn challenges traditional social norms and subverts traditional “patriarchal” ethics. Contemporary social ridicule and disparagement of single women is therefore asocial attempt

⁵⁴ Wu, Hongjiao., & Lu, Weiqun. (October 2010). “On the Phenomenon of Chinese leftover women”. *Legal System and Society*, 28: 199.

⁵⁵ Chen, Yaya. (2011). *Lonely, but Still Have Fun: A Research on Urban Single Women’s Living Conditions*. Conference Paper at the “China Forum on Harmonious Family in Chinese Society and the Ninth National Symposium on Family Problems” held by Guangdong Women’s Federation in Guangdong, China.

⁵⁶ Yang, Yantao. (September 2011). “Thoughts on the status quo of the leftover women in our society”. *Journal of Cangzhou Teacher’s College*, 27 (3): 69-71.

to uphold Chinese cultural traditions that “*man is superior to woman*”.⁵⁷

Chen (2012), from Political Nantong University, published an article about “*Understanding the phenomenon of leftover women*”. From social, familial and psychological aspects, Chen considered the reasons why such women remain single, particularly because they spend a lot of time and energy pursuing a successful career instead of looking for a husband. She puts forward a feasible suggestion to solve this problem in order to decrease the number of single women in China, including: encouraging single women to expand their own social circle, and organizing blind date for singles.⁵⁸

Summary of research results

Research results show that since China’s economic reform period and opening up, women have had greater access to higher education and employment opportunities, and as a consequence Chinese women have become more independent and self-reliant than ever before. Chinese single women are demographically characterized as 30 years old or above, highly educated, independent, and living in urban areas. In order to pursue better career development, such women face various competitive pressures in the labor market, which leads them less free time to consider and pursue partners and marriage. In recent years, public opinion consistently forces single women to marry as soon as possible, with single women being pressured and strongly criticized by both their family and wider society.

(2) Negative social attitudes and media discrimination against single women

Liu (2010), a Sociology lecturer at Chengdu University of Technology, published the article “*Reflections on the phenomenon of single women*”. She discussed the definition of single

⁵⁷ Fan, 2012.

⁵⁸ Chen, Si. (2012). “Understanding the phenomenon of leftover women”. *Journal of Yunnan Institute of Socialism*, 6: 286-287.

women in China, the demographic characteristics for being a single woman, and present social situation. In particular, she analyzed Chinese social attitudes towards single women. At present, social attitudes are still largely negative, because China has always been a country that has attached particular importance to marriage and family heirs. Being single therefore, is considered contrary to traditional Chinese concepts of marriage and family duty. Liu also mentioned that to date there is no serious research so far on Chinese single women which use in-depth qualitative and quantitative methods.⁵⁹

Lü (2011) addressed the portrayal of the “leftover women” image in the Chinese mainland media, including how the tendencies and intentions of communicators influenced how the media constructs the “*leftover women*” image. Lü’s thesis selected 105 articles from the China Academic Journal database and a pool of 53 major newspapers between 2000 and 2009 and, using “*leftover women*” as the keyword to limit the target sample, analyzed through qualitative and quantitative research methods how the Chinese mainstream media constructs the “*leftover women*” image. The author argued that single women in China are repeatedly portrayed as negative, very picky, and lacking the charm to attract men as partners - so they become “leftover women”. Thus, as a stereotype, Chinese single women are badly distorted and vilified by the mainstream media.⁶⁰

In analyzing TV dating shows as the politics of matchmaking in China, Wei Luo and Zhen Sun (2015) revealed the predicaments of single women, and the role of the Chinese media in upholding post-socialist femininity, empowering male status, and communicating new gender values. Since at least 2007, various media streams, including newspapers, magazines, and websites, have aggressively advocated the idea that unmarried females over 30 are regarded

⁵⁹ Liu, Moxian. (February 2010). “Female Single phenomenon Retrospect and Prospect”. *Journal of China Women University*, 1: 44-49.

⁶⁰ Lü, Cheng. (2011). *On the “leftover women” image in Chinese mainland media*. Master’s thesis, East China Normal University, Shanghai, China.

as “leftover women”, and thus as single women a failure in life. Through such unfortunate discourse, Luo and Sun argued that “leftover” has become a dominant discourse that has been widely accepted by the public, and affected the treatment and social status of single women.⁶¹

Summary of research results

The research results show that at present the whole of Chinese society holds a negative and unfavorable attitude towards unmarried women. Single women are considered abnormal and a failure in life, and are regularly labeled as “leftover women”. Being a single woman therefore repeatedly comes under strong criticism because it is contrary to conventional culture, and is perceived as a violation of social ethics. In daily life, Chinese single women suffer from verbal abuse, while in recent years various media have further preached the disadvantages of single life for women. This has shaped the beliefs and attitudes of being single females as a disgrace, and a social shame that should be corrected.

(3) Why are single women discriminated against in China?

Yu (2013), from the Changchun Industrial College, presented a master thesis titled “*Sociological Analysis of the ‘Leftover Women’ Phenomenon*”. In this paper, the author applied a combination of interview and documentary research methods from a sociological perspective to explain the root cause of single women being discriminated in contemporary China. The author concluded that pervasive aspects of gender inequality and patriarchal influence lead to societal discrimination against Chinese single women. For most Chinese people marriage is seen as a “must”; therefore the life of an unmarried woman is incomplete and seen as socially undesirable.⁶²

⁶¹ Luo & Sun, 2015, 239-256.

⁶² Yu, Jie. (2013). *Sociological Analysis of the “leftover Women” Phenomenon*, Master’s thesis, Changchun Industrial College, Changchun City, China.

Based on statistical analysis, sociological surveys and first-hand-interviews, from a feminist point of view, Fincher (2014) argued that due to China's one child policy and a traditional preference for sons based on China's patriarchal culture, sex-selective abortions have caused a serious gender ratio imbalance in China. This is seen to lead to social instability to a great extent, due to the existence of a larger marriageable male population than marriageable females. Thus, through demographic reasons alone, the increasing number of single women plays a negative role in maintaining traditional gender hierarchy and social stability in China. As a consequence, the economically independent single women in urban China have become a target of social critique. Fincher argued therefore that gender inequality is the main reason for discrimination against single women in contemporary China.⁶³

Summary of research results

In short, single women are discriminated against in China because gender inequality still plays a crucial role in Chinese society. In order to maintain a patriarchal society, Chinese single women are still not accepted as equal citizens. In addition, the campaign launched by the media to suppress "leftover women" further conceals and scapegoats the problem of gender imbalance (too many men) onto single women, by encouraging well-educated women to marry early for fertility so that population levels can be maintained.

2.2 Research gap

In recent years, the increasing number of single women in China has attracted serious attention and reflection from scholars. However, while most previous research focused on the reasons why women remained single, the primary emphasis rested on what kind of person was likely to remain single, or (especially among Chinese scholars) treated such women as deficient, and advised what single woman should do to find a partner. To date, there is limited

⁶³ Fincher, 2014.

research concerned with the social status of Chinese single women, and the discrimination they experience in society. Social discrimination against single women is not a key area of academic study, and few researchers have explored aspects of discrimination occurring toward single women as a form of structural violence. Available research further ignores the perspectives of single women themselves, and how such women respond to societal pressures to remaining single beyond a culturally-defined marriageable age (30 years old and above) in a traditional patriarchal society.

To explore this research gap, in 2017 I conducted field research through in-depth interviews with single Chinese women living across diverse urban regions of China. The primary aim of this research is to present and analyze the personal lived experiences of single women in contemporary China, and how their choices are affected and shaped by structural violence and discrimination experienced from surrounding society. A secondary aim was to help Chinese society to better understand, respect and accept single women's lifestyle choices and decisions for delaying marriage, remaining single, or living in other forms of unmarried relationships.

Chapter 3 Theoretical framework and research methodology

3.1 Theory of violence

The term “discrimination” is generally regarded as: “*the prejudicial treatment of an individual or a group, such as: racial discrimination, gender discrimination and age discrimination in employment*”⁶⁴. According to Smith and Mackie: “*discrimination refers to the negative behavior towards a social group and its members*”.⁶⁵ The term of “violence” is defined by the World Health Organization as “*the deliberate use of the power to threaten or injure itself, others, groups, or society, which causes or is most likely to cause physical injury, stunting, mental injury, death, or rights deprivation*”.⁶⁶ Traditional concepts of violence typically associate direct violence with material characteristics, such as “force” and “physical harm”. Violence is broadly defined as the utilization of power to attack or destroy, including ‘*to injure, to kill, to harm, to suppress*’, so that third parties can, through use of force, prevent the realization of someone or something’s potential.⁶⁷ Thus, it could be explained that discrimination stems from prejudice which may, to a certain extent, evolve into acts of violence by force or coercion to achieve a certain purpose.

In addition: “*violence can be either physical violence (hard violence) or psychological violence (compulsory or soft violence), and psychological violence should first include open insults, mocking, sarcasm, that make others feel embarrassed act*”.⁶⁸ Violence is therefore “*a social phenomenon*”.⁶⁹ Violence is not only a problem but also often a solution to conflicts⁷⁰,

⁶⁴ Bartlett, Katharine T. (December 2009). “Making Good on Good Intentions: The Critical Role of Motivation in Reducing Implicit Workplace Discrimination”. *Virginia Law Review*, 95 (8): 1893-1972.

⁶⁵ Smith, Eliot R., & Mackie, Diane M. (2000). *Social Psychology*. Psychology Press, London.

⁶⁶ Violence Prevention Alliance of the World Health Organization (WHO). *Definition and typology of violence*. Available at: www.who.int/violenceprevention/approach/definition/en/ (accessed 10 June 2016).

⁶⁷ Hervás, Carolina García. (19 November 2015). “Direct, Structural, and Cultural Violence”. *The Heart of Europe: Ideas on Europe*. Available at:

<https://theheartofeurope.ideasononeurope.eu/2015/11/19/direct-structural-cultural-violence/> (accessed 10 May 2016).

⁶⁸ Xu, Jiusheng. (2004). *School violence research*. China Fang Zheng Press, Beijing. 5-6.

⁶⁹ Blume, Thomas W. (1996). “Social Perspectives on Violence”. *Michigan Family Review*. Available at: www.quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mfr/4919087.0002.102/--social-perspectives-on-violence?rgn=main;view=fulltext

as violence is a common means of dealing with the tensions between people and the social environment.⁷¹ Violence could require the use of force, but at the same time can also be conceptualized as “violation” behaviors, for example violations, infringement or excessive punishments for exceeding certain restrictions or norms.⁷² Thus, violence can have multiple meanings, including “to force”, “to injure”, “to dishonor”, and “to violate”.⁷³

3.2 Galtung’s Theory of direct, structural and cultural violence

The Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung (1969) clarified the phenomenon of violence in several different types. The two fundamental types of violence are direct violence and structural violence. Later, the concept of cultural violence was developed further by Galtung (1990) and can be seen as a follow-up of his two concepts of violence. These three types of violence form a triangulated structure that impact not only the human body, but also the mind and spirit.⁷⁴ The direct, structural, and cultural violence are also distinguished based upon the actor initiating violence, as direct violence has an acting subject (person) as an initiator, whereas structural violence is as a process that derives not from people but social structures, and cultural violence as a cultural phenomenon.⁷⁵

3.2.1 Direct violence

Direct violence refers to the actions of one or more actors committing personal or direct violence to individuals through killing, mutilation, hitting or other acts of force. Direct violence is a kind of physical violence, consisting of everything from threats to family

(accessed 3 October 2016).

⁷⁰ Bufacchi, Vittorio. (2005). “Two Concepts of Violence”. *Political Studies Review*, 3: 193-204.

⁷¹ Wood, John Carter. (2007). “Conceptualizing cultures of violence and cultural change”. In: Carroll, Stuart (ed.) *Cultures of Violence: Interpersonal Violence in Historical Perspective*. Palgrave Macmillan: London.18.

⁷² Bufacchi, 2005.

⁷³ Steger, Manfred. (2003). *Judging Nonviolence: The Dispute Between Realists and Idealists*. Routledge, London. 12.

⁷⁴ Galtung, Johan. (1969). “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research”. *Journal of Peace Research*, 63: 167-191.

⁷⁵ Babovic, Marija., & Suboticki, Ivana. (2013). *Addressing violence from the HS perspective*. Orientation paper. Available at: <http://cn4hs.org/wp-content/uploads/Addressing-violence-from-the-HS-perspective.pdf> (accessed 23 June 2019).

violence, verbal attacks, murder, and war. The main feature of direct violence is that most of the violence effects are visible.⁷⁶ Galtung also argues that direct violence can occur physically or verbally, thus it is visible. Additionally, both victim and the perpetrator can be clearly identified.⁷⁷ Direct violence can be the physical form or verbal form to be experienced and observed; its results are often immediately seen or felt, and have a direct effect of destroying someone or something, or preventing its potential.⁷⁸

Verbal violence as a form of direct violence

Direct violence does not always mean physical harm to a person's body, but can have various manifestations. As direct conflict has been less commonplace, physical violence is being gradually replaced by different and more subtle forms of hostility, such as verbal violence.⁷⁹ Galtung notes that verbal violence is a form of direct violence, which targets a specific group or person as a means to abuse, humiliate, ridicule, mock or belittle others.⁸⁰

Verbal violence can be expressed as the use of language to injure another person's emotions and dignity.⁸¹ The victims of verbal violence are mentally and psychologically violated and harmed by any use of language.⁸² The American sociologist Judy S. Friedman referred to bullying, verbal abuse, sarcastic sarcasm, and ridicule from others as "*linguistic violence*".⁸³ Paressa Evans, an American psychologist, further defined language attack from men to women as verbal abuse.⁸⁴ Professor Tomoda Uchida, of Kumamoto University in Japan,

⁷⁶ Galtung, 1969, 171.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Hervás, 2015.

⁷⁹ Novak-Marcincin, Jozef., Gifu, Daniela., & Teodorescu, Mirela. (2014). "Violence and communication". *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 38: 22-33.

⁸⁰ Fan, Ruolan. (2014). "The Triangle of Violence from the Perspective of Gender: Interpretation and Reconstruction". *Thought Front*, 40 (1): 98-103.

⁸¹ Eslit, Nila. (28 September 2016). "Practical tips to stop verbal abuse. A form of bullying that strips off a victim's dignity". *Economy & Politics. Wall Street International*. Available at: <https://wsimag.com/economy-and-politics/21336-practical-tips-to-stop-verbal-abuse> (accessed 7 January 2018).

⁸² Dang, Yonggang. (August 2011). "Research on the types of language violence". *Journal of Qiongzhou University*, 18 (4): 110-112.

⁸³ Friedman, Judy S. (2013). *Bullying & Harassment*. Vermont Family Network, Williston USA.

⁸⁴ Evans, Paressa. (2010). *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*. Adams Media, Avon, Massachusetts, USA.

similarly described parental verbal abuse, such as jealousy, accusation, and swearing at children, as verbal violence.⁸⁵ Hong Kong scholar Liu Zaifu defined language violence as: “*the brutal phenomenon of using personal language as a weapon to carry out personal attacks and destroying human lives*”, which can also be defined as manifestations of violence in language.⁸⁶

The impact of verbal violence on the victims is enormous, because people’s sense of value, personality traits, as well as psychological harm is often formed under the subtle and pernicious influence of language, which creates suffering.⁸⁷ In modern times, many sociologists adopt the postmodern school of linguistic thought that “*language is soft violence*”, and that insults, curses, and speech attacks that harm self-esteem are *verbal violence*. Consequently, verbal violence is the most common form of direct violence, and usually produces more lasting and long-term results than physical violence.⁸⁸

Verbal violence and hegemonic power

Verbal forms of violence are an external manifestation of desire for control and dominance.⁸⁹ From a sociological perspective, the use of insults, slander, ridicules, and other verbal attacks is both an attempt to inflict mental and personal harm and also exert dominance through the use of violence.⁹⁰ The sociologist Bourdieu pointed out more clearly that language is “*mild violence*” or “*the gentle invisible form of violence*”.⁹¹ Those who are seen as unreasonable

⁸⁵ Tomoda, Akemi. (17 May 2010). “Exposure to parental verbal abuse is associated with increased gray matter volume in superior temporal gyrus”. *Journal of Neuroimaging*, 54: 280-286.

⁸⁶ Liu, Zaifu. (2001). “Language Violence: An Outline of the Criticism of ‘Language Violence’”. *Journal of Ming Report*, 4: 7-8.

⁸⁷ Derdar, Mohammed. (2017). “Gender and Verbal Violence: A Form of Psychological Abuse in Moroccan Popular Culture”. *Langage et Communication*, 1 (3) : 1-10.

⁸⁸ Buss, Arnold H. (1971). “Aggression pays”. In Jerome.L. Singer (ed.), *The control of aggression and violence: Cognitive and physiological factors*. Academic Press, New York.7-18.

⁸⁹ Wang, Dongyan. (2018). “Research Report on Language Violence in Network and Family Environment”. *Contemporary Foreign Language Research*, 4: 64-72.

⁹⁰ Sun, Caixia. (2008). “*A Study on Language Violence of Primary and Secondary School Teachers*”. Master’s thesis of the University of Henan, Zhengzhou City, China.

⁹¹ Bourdieu, Pierre. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Translated to English by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

and rebelling from social norms are seen as “different” and marginalized; with different lifestyles often being unsustainable without continued social support. The power of interpreting rules in the public domain thus belongs to socially dominant groups, with the means of verbal violence being a key instrument used to ensure individuals’ compliance and adherence to the status quo.⁹²

Foucault analyzed the direct relationship between discourse and power, concluding that: “*language innocence is only a superficial phenomenon that is actually a means of acting as power.*”⁹³ Foucault asserted that the practice of discourse implies the use of rights, with such rights enforced through a control relationship and behavior, based on a specific social background and situation. Hannah Arendt, from a humanist position, also described the “power” of concerted action based on equality, freedom, and common values, and identified the force that does not require the consent of others as “violence”.⁹⁴ The philosophical sense of verbal violence thus refers to the hegemony of discourse or cultural hegemony, and the associated use of language to create and enforce power constructs. In this respect hegemony is a close combination of violence and power in order to manipulate, control, and rule over others.⁹⁵ Discourse hegemony generally manifests itself in the arbitrary enforcement of discourse rights, acknowledging only one type of discourse and denying the validity and legitimacy of other views.⁹⁶ Thus, it refers to the absolute authority and hegemonic status conferred by the dominant system, which deprives vulnerable groups of their right to speak freely.⁹⁷

⁹² Overseas Development Institute of UK. (2015). “*Social norms, gender norms and adolescent girls: a brief guide.*” 9: 6-8. Available at: www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9818.pdf (accessed 8 October 2019).

⁹³ Foucault, Michel. (1998). *Archaeology of Knowledge*. Translated to Chinese by Xie Qiang and Ma Yue. Xinzhi Sanlian Bookstore, Beijing. 53.

⁹⁴ Arendt, Hannah. (1970). *On Violence*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston.

⁹⁵ McCoy, Thomas S. (1988). “Hegemony, Power, Media: Foucault and Cultural Studies”. *Communications*, 14 (3): 71-90.

⁹⁶ Condit, Celeste Michelle. (1994) “Hegemony in a Mass-Mediated Society: Concordance About Reproductive Technologies”. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 11 (3): 205-230.

⁹⁷ Hu, Yuanyuan. (2018). “Discourse hegemony and its solution to the ‘universal value’ trend of thought”.

3.2.2 Structural violence

In 1969, Galtung first proposed the concept of structural violence to refer to: “*any forms of inequalities in social, economic and political structures, which lead to inequitable distribution of resources and distribution of power*”.⁹⁸ Structural violence refers to the institutionalized form of discrimination and exclusion inherent in social systems, and is manifested in the uneven distribution of power.⁹⁹ Through various systems, policies and institutions, structural violence can be felt and experienced, which can strengthen and perpetuate the forces of injustice, discrimination and oppression.¹⁰⁰ Structural violence can also refer to a systematic approach in which the prevailing social structure damages or undermines the life potential of those without access to power.

Unlike direct physical violence, *structural violence* is established into a social system through sustained patterns of injustice and exploitation that generate inequality for a specific population, in many cases as a result of capitalist means of production or capitalist economic policy.¹⁰¹ Critically, there is no direct actor to perform structural violence. Structural violence serves for institutionalizing unequal opportunities in education, unfair wealth and resources distribution, as well as social stratification and expression of respect and treatment of others.¹⁰² Through unequal power, the basis of capitalism and patriarchy, consequent unequal life opportunities are formed.¹⁰³ Such inequalities are further hidden and reinforced in the structure of social, political, and economic organizations and units. For example: “*when one husband beats his wife there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million*

Journal of Exploration, 2: 82-86.

⁹⁸ Galtung, 1969.

⁹⁹ Sullivan, Christopher Barrett. (2013). *Ethnic Inequality in China: Structural Violence, Educational Stratification, and the Rural Household Income Gap*. Doctoral thesis of the University of California, Berkeley.

¹⁰⁰ Hervás, 2015.

¹⁰¹ Ho, Kathleen. (September 2007). “Structural Violence as a Human Rights Violation”. *Essex Human Rights Review*, 4 (2): 1-17.

¹⁰² Galtung, 1969.

¹⁰³ Confortini, Catia C. (July 2006). “Galtung, Violence, and Gender: The Case for a Peace Studies/Feminism Alliance”. *Peace & Change*, 31(3): 333-367.

husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence".¹⁰⁴ Therefore, social stratification leads to structural violence, which is caused by the existing power structure.

The existence of structural violence operates in a way that replicates state systems; consequently, *"the perpetrator is a specific social structure or social system, rather than any particular individual or organization"*.¹⁰⁵ In modern society, direct violence characterized by direct physical attacks is gradually replaced by structural violence, which however is largely concealed and easily overlooked.¹⁰⁶ The subtle nature of structural violence also means that it is unable to find a specific person who can (or will) be held accountable for redress.¹⁰⁷

Such systems tacitly support and benefit established power structures and institutions and means that: *"When the structure is threatened, those who benefit from structural violence, above all those who are at the top, will try to preserve the status quo so well geared to protect their interests."*¹⁰⁸

In addition to such self-reinforcing processes, Farmer (2004) observes that:

Structural violence is one way of describing social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harm's way. The arrangements are structural because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world; they are violent because they cause injury to people, neither culture nor pure individual will is at fault; rather, historically given (and often

¹⁰⁴ Galtung, 1990, 291.

¹⁰⁵ Ho, 2007.

¹⁰⁶ Winter, Deborah Du Nann., & Leighton, Dana C. (2001). "Structural Violence: Introduction." In Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace Psychology for the 21st Century. Daniel J. Christie, Richard V. Wagner, and Deborah Du Nann Winter (eds.). Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ. 99-101.

¹⁰⁷ Burtle, Adam. (2013). "Structural Violence." Available at: <http://www.structuralviolence.org/structural-violence/> (accessed 6 May 2019.)

¹⁰⁸ Galtung, 1969, 179.

*economically driven) processes and forces conspire to constrain individual agency.*¹⁰⁹

Structural violence affects people differently in various social settings.¹¹⁰ Structural violence is a kind of violence in the nature of the forms of inequity and injustice, that is: “*embedded in ubiquitous social structures and normalized by stable institutions and regular experience*”¹¹¹. The understanding of “structural violence” proposed by Farmer further forces us to pay attention towards less overt forms of injustice that are deeply “*embedded in the ordinary, taken-for-granted patterns of the way the world is*”¹¹².

The concept of structural violence also applies to discrimination and inequality against women.¹¹³ John Hoffman (2001) analyzed the effects of structural violence from a gender perspective:

*In experience, the majority of countries are man-made, and men defend and enhance the rights and interests of men. Logically, state sovereignty is gendered, all of which have masculine features due to the concept of centralization, leading to the minority domination by violence, all derived from the concept of dominance in a patriarchal society.*¹¹⁴

Structural violence also refers to all forms of exclusion or inequality, including income

¹⁰⁹ Farmer, Paul. (June 2004) “An Anthropology of Structural Violence”. *Current Anthropology*, 45 (3): 305-325.

¹¹⁰ Ho, 2007.

¹¹¹ Winter & Leighton, 2001.

¹¹² Taylor, Janelle S. (2018). *Explaining Difference: “Culture,” “Structural Violence,” and Medical Anthropology*. The University of Washington, in Seattle, Washington, USA. Available at: www.washington.edu/omad/ctcenter/projects-common-book/mountains-beyond-mountains/explaining-difference/ (accessed 20 May 2018).

¹¹³ Sinha, Parul., Gupta, Uma., Singh, Jyotsna., & Srivastava, Anand. (July-September 2017). “Structural Violence on Women: An Impediment to Women Empowerment”. *Indian Journal of Community Medicine*, 42 (3): 134-137.

¹¹⁴ Hoffman, John. (2001). *Gender and Sovereignty: Feminism, the State and International Relations*. Palgrave, London. 9.

distribution, educational opportunities, participation in social or cultural life, and even health status.¹¹⁵ Certain groups, genders or classes are assumed to have more chances to access resources and goods, priority opportunities, and consequently women as a vulnerable group have often suffered from unequal opportunities. For women, structural violence, starting from the social order dominated by male rights and privileges, prevents women from attaining self-consciousness or contesting the repressive power structure.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, in the operation of men's rights, female groups are often divided and goaded in women-against-women struggles, at the expense of pushing for systemic change.¹¹⁷

3.2.3 Cultural violence

The human world is also a cultural world. Culture at its broadest level refers to the overarching way of life of a society, comprising its values, customs, symbols, institutions, social relationships, and other matters.¹¹⁸ Culture constitutes the internal mechanisms of society, and underpins the economic, political and social development of society through a set of shared beliefs or standards guiding individual decisions.¹¹⁹ Barnouw further defines culture as structures of, “*stereotyped patterns of learned behavior that are handed down from one generation to the next*”¹²⁰. Nevertheless, so-called culture and values have also been adopted as tools of violence to coerce people to subjective moral ways of behavior, particularly weaker groups of the society including children, women, the poor, socially disadvantaged and lower socioeconomic classes.¹²¹ Thus, cultural values can also be the source of suffering, and cannot in themselves be considered value neutral.

¹¹⁵ Montesanti, Stephanie Rose. (2015). “The role of structural and interpersonal violence in the lives of women: A conceptual shift in prevention of gender-based violence”. *BMC Women's Health*, 15 (1): 93.

¹¹⁶ Christie, D. J., Wagner, R. V., & Winter, D. A. (eds.) (2001). *Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace Psychology for the 21st Century*. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

¹¹⁷ Montesanti, 2015.

¹¹⁸ White, Leslie A. (April 1959). “The Concept of Culture”. *American Anthropologist, New Series*, 61 (2): 227-251.

¹¹⁹ Goodenough, Ward H. (1971). *Culture Language and Society*. Addison-Wesley Modular Publications, Reading, Massachusetts.

¹²⁰ Barnouw, Victor. (1979). *Culture and Personality*. (Dorsey, Illinois, Dorsey Press).

¹²¹ World Health Organization. (2009). *Changing cultural and social norms that support violence*. World Health Organization, Geneva. 4-5.

According to the social theorist Galtung: “*cultural violence is defined here as any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form*”¹²². Johan Galtung also proposed the concept of *cultural violence* as a set of values embedded in the cultural system that justifies, and consequently directs, violence (structural and direct violence) within the cultural sphere.¹²³ Cultural violence is a form of violence that impacts on individuals since childhood and impresses a series of normative values and beliefs on a daily basis, through education, media, literature, work traditions and customs.¹²⁴

Galtung further observed that: “*neither direct nor structural violence can continue for long without at least some support from the culture, both types need to be justified or legitimized in one form or another*”. Thus: “*Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right or at least not wrong*”.¹²⁵ In other words, cultural violence is based on the legitimating influence culture to make violence less overt.¹²⁶ Prevailing attitudes and beliefs about power and necessity of violence are also used to legitimize violence, so that individuals become convinced that the violent act seems to be natural. In any particular culture, legitimization or justification of violence can come from all aspects of life, including beliefs, symbols and attitudes derived from cultural and religious values. Therefore, violence in any form, whether it is cultural, structural or direct, is actually a human phenomenon.

For the three types of violence in human life, Galtung summarized that: “*direct violence is an event; structural violence is a process with ups and downs; cultural violence is an invariant, a permanence, remaining essentially the same for long periods, given the slow transformations of basic culture*”¹²⁷. He further noted that: “*Cultural violence highlights the way in which the*

¹²² Galtung, Johan. (August 1990). “Cultural Violence”. *Journal of Peace Research*, 27 (3): 291-305.

¹²³ Fan, 2014, 98-103.

¹²⁴ Hervás, 2015.

¹²⁵ Galtung, 1990, 291.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 291-292.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 294.

act of direct violence and the fact of structural violence are legitimized and thus rendered acceptable in society".¹²⁸ Accordingly, both visible direct violence and invisible structural violence embedded in various social power structures are motivated by patterns of cultural violence.

3.2.4 Feminist Arguments on Galtung's violence theory

Galtung's theory of violence has been widely accepted and referenced by scholars. Caprioli argued that, both structural violence (Galtung, 1975) and cultural violence (Galtung, 1990) are key to understanding types of social violence (physical, verbal, psychological), because they create the underlying justification for violence at the individual level.¹²⁹ Kathleen Ho argued that Galtung's triangular theory of violence provides a helpful framework for understanding structural human rights violations, through an examination of how structural violence limits the agency of individuals, insofar as basic human needs are not achievable. In addition, the theory of structural violence may help to clarify how such suffering disrupts and limits self-actualization and response to discrimination and oppression. Thus, while Galtung's structural violence theory may not directly imply violent actors, it creates a framework for explaining the logic behind the systematic nature of social patterns of violence.¹³⁰

At the same time however, Galtung's theory is strongly criticized by other feminists, chiefly through its failure to acknowledge and integrate gender issues.

In her article "*Galtung, Violence, and Gender: The Case for a Peace Studies/Feminism Alliance*", Confortini argued that Galtung's violence triangle may well illustrate the different levels of violence, but downplays the significance of gender power structures. Confortini

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 292.

¹²⁹ Caprioli, Mary. (2005). "Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in Predicting Internal Conflict". *International Studies Quarterly*, 49:163-164.

¹³⁰ Ho, 2007.

notes that while the theory provides a framework for theorists and practitioners to present violence against women in the context of broader social violence, Galtung nevertheless fails even to mention gender as a power construct. The existence of a power/gender relationship makes violence possible while also relying on violence to reproduce it; therefore Galtung's theory needs to incorporate gender's understandings of social structure and power relations.¹³¹ Confortini contended that the introduction of a feminist perspective into future analyses of structural violence would allow for a deeper understanding of structural violence, and its effect on female conditioning and social oppression.

Mirroring this, Ronni Alexander argued that while Galtung's approach enriched understanding of peace and has become a central concept in peace research, it overlooks the central construct of gendered social structures which support violence. As a result, analyses using structural violence often lack a gender perspective.¹³² The addition of gender violence might therefore enable a more dynamic analysis of cultural violence.

Even so, without a gender perspective, the utility of the violence triangle is limited. Galtung does not interrogate how masculinity and/or femininity contribute to social understandings of violence, particularly the ways certain understandings of masculinity normalize male violence. His research does not touch upon a gender perspective, and lacks an understanding of gender as a power relationship and the gendered approach of social institutions. In short, without a gender perspective, the application of Galtung's violence triangle to social power structures is extremely limited.

Christine Sylvester identified that Galtung's analyses did not consider the ways citizenship,

¹³¹ Confortini, 2006.

¹³² Alexander, Ronni. (2018). "*Gender, Structural Violence and Peace*". In: Routledge Handbook on Gender and Security. Available at: http://www2.kobe-u.ac.jp/~alexroni/TR2017%20Readings/TR_2017_3/2017_Alexander_Gender_Peace_SV_Routledge.pdf. (accessed 6 May 2019).

social institutions and states themselves are masculinized, nor do they address the ways that violence affects men and women differently.¹³³

Joan Scott argued that while Galtung did occasionally mention men and women, his understanding was only based on male and female bodies, rather than norms of masculinity/femininity and gender hierarchies which dominate most cultural and social structures.¹³⁴

Thus, gender needs to be considered as a key variable in the structure and outcome of cultural violence. Reflected in cultural violence, the dualistic gender concept works in many cultural systems to regulate, control, and harm women's autonomy.¹³⁵ Hannah Arendt (1969) argued that the domination of one gender over another is done in two ways: either through the enforcement of forced violence, or through the coercive consent of various social forces.¹³⁶ Kate Millet (1970) contended that patriarchy is the governing method that is reflected in cultural violence, and which enforces a binary gender system that polices and undermines women's freedom.¹³⁷

For this reason, in this study I attempt to combine gender issues with Galtung's violence theory to explore the situation of single women in contemporary China.

¹³³ Sylvester, Christine. (1994). *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

¹³⁴ Scott, Joan. (1988). *Gender and the Politics of History*. Columbia University Press, New York. 7.

¹³⁵ Fan, 2014.

¹³⁶ Arendt, Hannah. (17 February 1969). "Reflections of Violence." *Journal of International Affairs*. Reprinted in the *New York Review of Books*.

¹³⁷ Millet, Kate. (1970). *Sexual Politics* Doubleday, New York.

3.3 Theory of symbolic violence by Pierre Bourdieu

3.3.1 Symbolic violence

In academic research, there is continued confusion and debate about the distinctions between notions of cultural and symbolic violence. To address this ambiguity, Bourdieu's terminology of symbolic violence is adopted in this study.

According to the Bourdieu, symbolic violence refers to "*the subordinated groups constructed by the dominant class through imposing values*".¹³⁸ Violence is always symbolic and can be expressed in countless forms, such as religion, politics, language, art, science, media and education. The promotion of violence through such social forms can also suppress the victim's reaction.¹³⁹ As an imposition of a symbolic system and value of group or classes, symbolic violence is closely linked to social and cultural domination in various ways, because it is tacitly accepted in public as legitimate behavior.

Furthermore, as a "soft" (non-physical) violence, symbolic violence may occur repeatedly through education, formal schooling or informal learning.¹⁴⁰ "There is a culture of violence within schools and other sites where culture is transmitted; and *it is usual to suppress conflicts by unquestioned parental authority, or authority of the male over the female.*"¹⁴¹ Symbolic violence is thus practiced by people in different ways in their daily lives.¹⁴² Accordingly, symbolic violence is a means to maintain dominant social position in society, as well as trying to increase it through various cultural symbols. Bourdieu also suggests that symbolic violence

¹³⁸ Bourdieu, Pierre., & Wacquant, Loic J. D. (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.167.

¹³⁹ Bourdieu, Pierre. (2001). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Polity Press, Cambridge. 264.

¹⁴⁰ Bourdieu, Pierre. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

¹⁴¹ Bourdieu, 2001,170.

¹⁴² Bourdieu, Pierre. (1998). *Masculine Domination*. Translated from the French by Jürgen Bolder. Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin.

also involves “*soft power*”, including discriminatory or harmful behavior designed to further power hierarchies.¹⁴³

Moreover, Bourdieu viewed violence from a different perspective than Galtung, in that he established “*a relationship between gender power and violence*”.¹⁴⁴ Symbolic violence related to gender was considered by Bourdieu as an extension of the concept of violence defined by Galtung.¹⁴⁵ In Bourdieu’s analysis of social relations, women are considered by men to be subordinate, while men are considered to have hegemony in many aspects of life. As a result, women are more likely to become a target of symbolic violence, which is determined by the ideology and cultural values of the ruling social class in order to maintain the power relations. Symbolic violence, therefore, helps to reinforce a male dominated culture.¹⁴⁶

Bourdieu explores the relationship between violence and gender in his article of “*Gender and Symbolic Violence*”, where he argued that symbolic violence under hegemonic power, and domination on its victims such as women through symbols used in daily life, helped to strengthen male domination over females. Such symbolic violence constructs misrepresents power dynamics through dominant discourses, so that women may not recognize or accept their own second class status, or seek to challenge their subordination.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Bourdieu, Pierre. (2002). *Male Domination*. Translated by Richard Nice. Stanford University Press, Redwood City. 38.

¹⁴⁴ McRobbie, Angela. (2004). “Post - feminism and popular culture”. *Feminist Media Studies*, 4 (3): 255-264.

¹⁴⁵ Bourdieu, 1998.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Lin, Angel M. Y. (2001). Language and Gender In: Paul Levine & Louise Aylward (Eds.). *Language and Society in HongKong (Unit 7)*. Hong Kong: Open University of Hong Kong Press. 1-32.; Thapar-Björker, Suruchi., & Morgan, Karen J. (2010). “But Sometimes I Think . . . They Put Themselves in the Situation”: Exploring Blame and Responsibility in Interpersonal Violence. *Journal of Violence against Women*, 16 (1): 32-59.

3.3.2 Feminist critiques of Bourdieu's symbolic violence theory

In contrast to Galtung's omission of gender power constructs, Bourdieu's approach to the intersection of gender and structural violence has been received more favorably by feminist researchers. The main focus of Bourdieu's social theory is to reveal and stress the social relationship between power and hegemony to maintain the established social hierarchy, which is especially applicable to gender relations across cultures. Thus, Bourdieu's work has aroused great interest and introduced powerful concepts into social theory, even though his style and obscure theoretical expression have been criticized "*for his writing is both jargon-ridden and and convoluted*".¹⁴⁸

McRobbie noted that Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence paved the way for critical analysis of social power constructs, including intersectional power relations occurring between popular culture and gender.¹⁴⁹

Alparslan Nas argued that at the forefront of Bourdieu's approach to symbolic violence is the ruling class imposing symbolic violence on the dominated, so that the dominated cannot be aware of their subordinate conditions and reproduce power relations accordingly. Alparslan Nas observed that Bourdieu focused on the ways male hegemony reproduces gender power relations without exploring how women resist these relationships. Thus, although it is questionable to assume women as a homogeneous group are submissive and powerless, Bourdieu's point of view is useful for pointing out societal means for making women subordinate, which have been regulated and normalized through various strategies in cultural dynamics.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Shirley, Dennis. (1986). A critical review and appropriation of Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of social and culture reproduction. *The Journal of Education*. Vol. 168, No. 2, Education In the 80's: social and political implications. (1986), pp. 96-112. Boston University; Nash, Roy. (1990). Bourdieu on Education and Social and Cultural Reproduction. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 11 (4): 431-447.

¹⁴⁹ McRobbie, Angela. (2004). "Post - feminism and popular culture". *Feminist Media Studies*, 4 (3): 255-264.

¹⁵⁰ Nas, Alparslan. (2015). *Women Chewing Gum: Feminist Critical Analysis of Advertising as Symbolic*

Moi further argued that Bourdieu's theory allows us to reconsider gender as a social category that assumes that men and women form two such social groups, and then proceeds to analyze their social relationship as a dominant and a dominated group. This theory makes it particularly useful to conceptualize gendered power structures. Another great advantage of Bourdieu's theoretical approach to feminist discourse is that it allows analysis of even the most mundane details of everyday life, and how these fit into gendered sociological power constructs. Even so, Kraus and Williams (2000) acknowledged that Bourdieu's contribution however has seldom been recognized by feminists, just as his sociology plays practically no role in gender studies.¹⁵¹ Despite this, the overall treatment of gender relations in Bourdieu's theory is somewhat undertheorized, but provides a useful framework to better understand the subordinate status of women in society.¹⁵²

In this study, I apply Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence and attempt to find out the status of single women in contemporary China, through the symbolic violence embodied in gender relations and the structural violence applied to women who diverge from expected gender norms relating to families and marriage.

3.4 Theory of gender-based violence against women

Gender-based violence

When considering violence, it is clear that gender-based violence is the most prevalent form affecting women worldwide.¹⁵³ Violence against women is pervasive and prevalent throughout different countries, cultures and eras.¹⁵⁴ *"Violence against women is the most*

Violence, 2 (2): 35-54.

¹⁵¹ Kraus, Beate., & Williams, Jennifer Marston. (2000). *The Gender Relationship in Bourdieu's Sociology*, 29.3 (93): 53-67.

¹⁵² Moi, Toril. (Autumn 1991). "Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture". *New Literary History: Papers from the Commonwealth Center for Literary and Cultural Change*, 22 (4): 1017-1049.

¹⁵³ United Nations. International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women 25 November. Available at: www.un.org/en/events/endviolenceday/ (accessed 29 October 2017).

¹⁵⁴ United Nations. (2017). "Leave no one behind: End violence against women and girls". *International Day for*

extreme form of discrimination".¹⁵⁵ In 1993, the UN released the "*Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*", which detailed and condemned various forms of violence against women, including those occurring in the family and society, as well as physical or mental violence carried out or condoned by the State.¹⁵⁶

Both males and females may suffer from gender-based violence, nonetheless "*the vast majority of victims are women and girls*".¹⁵⁷ Sexual and physical violence, particularly within the family, is a lived reality that in most cases, where women are victims and men the perpetrators: "*The perpetration of men's violence against women is understood to be a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women.*"¹⁵⁸ For women, experiences of gender-based violence are the most common experience of personal harm.¹⁵⁹

Gender roles are widely used to identify, model and proscribe the behavior of men and women in society.¹⁶⁰ Gender roles regulate men and women to adhere to identified gender differences based on biological sex, which encourage men and women to behave in a different manner with different attitudes and skills within society.¹⁶¹ Gender conflicts between women

the Elimination of Violence against Women 25 November. Available at: www.un.org/en/events/endviolenceday (accessed 19 May 2018).

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁶ United Nations. *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*. 48/104. 85th Plenary meeting. (20 December 1993). Available at: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm> (accessed 21 December 2017).

¹⁵⁷ European Institute for Gender Equality. *What is gender-based violence?* Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/what-is-gender-based-violence> (accessed 12 November 2017); Oladepo, O., Yusuf, O.B., & Arulogun, O.S. (2011). Factors Influencing Gender Based Violence among Men and Women in Selected States in Nigeria. *African Journal of Reproductive Health* December 2011, 15 (4): 78-86.

¹⁵⁸ World Health Organization. (2005). *WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women: Summary report of initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses*. WHO, Geneva; Wall, Liz. (June 2014). "Gender equality and violence against women: What's the connection?" *Australian Institute of Family Studies. Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault*. 1-14.

¹⁵⁹ The United Nations, 1993.

¹⁶⁰ Blackstone, Amy M. (2003). *Gender Roles and Society*. In Julia R. Miller, Richard M. Lerner, and Lawrence B. Schiamberg (eds.). *Human Ecology: An Encyclopedia of Children, Families, Communities, and Environments*. ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, CA. 335-338.

¹⁶¹ Eagly, Alice H. (1987). *Sex Differences in Social Behavior: A Social-role interpretation*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, London.

and men can therefore be explained not as biologically determined outcomes of innate gender roles, but rather as constructs influenced through social realities.¹⁶² Men and women are exposed to traditional gender roles since childhood and through repeated contact, begin to internalize them.¹⁶³ Traditionally, women are expected to perform domestic duties in the private sphere, and men oriented to the paid workforce. Social norms on gender roles and male superiority further exacerbate gender differences, and legitimize the enactment of power against women.¹⁶⁴ At the same time gender roles can and do differ between different cultures and communities, and men and women are capable of encompassing both stereotypical masculine and feminine traits.¹⁶⁵ However, culturally-defined gender differences both cause and support the maintenance of gender inequalities.¹⁶⁶

Gender inequality also increases the risk of violence between men and women.¹⁶⁷ These inequalities strengthen the patriarchal worldview in which women's obedience is normal, natural and anticipated, while women who are capable or powerful are insulted or stigmatized.¹⁶⁸ Gender roles (and in particular, acting in ways which contravene expected gender norms) can therefore contribute to gender-based violence.¹⁶⁹ Especially in a society strongly influenced by traditional patriarchal norms and attitudes, women are much more likely than men to become victims of the underlying societal prejudice and injustice.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶² Mead, Margaret. (1971). *Sex and temperament in three primitive societies*. Quill Publications, New York.

¹⁶³ Foss, Karen A., & Littlejohn, Stephen W. (2009). *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*. SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

¹⁶⁴ Jewkes, R.K. (20 April 2002). "Intimate partner violence: causes and prevention". *The Lancet*, 359: 14231-14429.

¹⁶⁵ Mead, 1971.

¹⁶⁶ Okin, Susan Moller. (February 1994). "Gender Inequality and Cultural Differences". *Journal of Political Theory*, 22 (1): 5-24.

¹⁶⁷ Heise, Lori L. (1998). "Violence against women, an integrated, ecological framework". *Violence against Women*, 4 (4): 2622-2690.

¹⁶⁸ Russo, Nancy Felipe., & Pirlott, Angela. (2006). "Gender-Based Violence: Concepts, Methods, and Findings". In F. Denmark., H. Krauss., E. Halpern., & J. Sechzer. (eds.) *Violence and exploitation against women and girls*. Blackwell, Boston. 178-205.

¹⁶⁹ Jewkes, 2002.

¹⁷⁰ Hunnicutt, Gwen. (2009). "Varieties of Patriarchy and Violence against Women: Resurrecting "Patriarchy" as a Theoretical Tool". *Violence Against Women*, 15 (5): 553-573; Sultana, Abeda. (July 2010-June 2011). "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis". *The Arts Faculty Journal*, 4: 1-18.

According to the latest data released by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2017: “about 1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime”.¹⁷¹ Gender-based violence is usually demonstrated “through direct physical, sexual and psychological violence against women and girls by men”.¹⁷² “Gender-based’ aspect is important as it highlights the fact that many forms of violence against women are rooted in power inequalities between women and men.”¹⁷³ Thus, violence against women is predicated on entrenched gender inequality as one of its key determinant factors.¹⁷⁴

The use of “gender-based violence” has been influenced by the widely recognized gender roles and status in society, and refers to:

*Any physical or psychological violence shaped by gender roles and status in society, for perpetrating against women’s will based on gender norms and unequal power relationships.*¹⁷⁵

Gender inequities in social roles also enable and exacerbate the risk of sexual and physical violence against women.¹⁷⁶ At the 1995 United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing¹⁷⁷, gender-based violence against women was further defined as:

¹⁷¹ World Health Organization (WHO). (29 November 2017). *Violence against Women*. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women> (accessed 20 March 2019).

¹⁷² The United Nations. (1993). *Sexual and gender based violence*. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/sexual-and-gender-based-violence.html?query=handbook> (accessed 21 September 2017); Saltzman, Linda E., Green, Yvonne T., Marks, James S., & Thacker, Stephen B. (November 2000). “Violence against women as a public health issue”. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 19 (4): 325-329; Mann, Jonathan., & Gruskin, Sofia. (1995). “Women’s health and human rights: Genesis of the health and human rights movement.” In: Gruskin S. (ed.) *Health and Human rights - An International Quarterly Journal*. Cambridge: Harvard School of Public Health, Cambridge MA, 1: 309-312; Murthy, Padmini., & Smith, Clyde Lanford. (1995). *Women’s Global Health and Human Rights*. Jones and Bartlett Publishers, New York. 11.

¹⁷³ Russo, Felipe & Pirlott, 2006; Krug, E.G., Mercy, J.A., Dahlberg, L.L., & Zwi, AB. (2002). *World report on violence and health*. World Health Organization, Geneva.

¹⁷⁴ Wall, 2014.

¹⁷⁵ The United Nations, 1993.

¹⁷⁶ Jewkes, R.K. (2012). *Rape perpetration: A review*. Sexual Violence Research Initiative, Pretoria.

¹⁷⁷ It is the Fourth World Conference on Women: “Action to Promote Equality, Development and Peace” is the name of a conference held by the United Nations in Beijing, China, September 4-15, 1995.

*Any act that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.*¹⁷⁸

Gender-based ‘women-to-women’ violence

However, compared with traditional gender-based ‘men-to-women’ violence, gendered violence committed by women against other women - whether physical, sexual, verbal or psychological - has largely been overlooked.¹⁷⁹ Instead, “*women have internalized sexist values, they do not always respect, trust, or even like other women*”.¹⁸⁰ Further, as a result of gendered power dynamics women have been encouraged to believe that “*female-female competition is subtle, deep, tension-producing, wracking*”.¹⁸¹ Women, in many cases, as supporters of a violent conflict culture, may also contribute to the escalation of conflicts just as much as men do.¹⁸² In fact, men’s entitlement, sexual objectification, and differences in power and status between two sexes are prioritized as the key factors for perpetuating violence against women, which renders invisible women-on-women violence.¹⁸³ Despite this reality, ‘women-to-women’ violence has not received sufficient attention or focus in existing gender research.¹⁸⁴

When considering existing research accounts of female-to-female violence, most studies have focused on situations of intimate partner violence occurring in female same-sex

¹⁷⁸ The United Nations. (1995). *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. Available at: www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa_e_final_web.pdf (accessed 12 September 2017).

¹⁷⁹ Li, Pengcheng. (2016). “Violence among Women: A neglected gender-based violence”. *China Academic Journal Electronic Publishing House*, 1: 13-20.

¹⁸⁰ Chesler, Phyllis. (2009). *Woman’s Inhumanity to Woman*. Chicago Review Press, Chicago. 14.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 174.

¹⁸² Harders, Cilja. (2011). “Gender Relations, Violence and Conflict Transformation”. In B. Austin, M. Fischer, H.J. Giessmann (eds.) *Advancing Conflict Transformation. The Berghof Handbook II*: Barbara Budrich Publishers, Opladen/Farmington Hills, Germany. 144.

¹⁸³ Russo, Felipe & Pirlott, 2006.

¹⁸⁴ Li, Chengpeng. (2016). “Violence among Women: A Neglected Gender-based Violence”. *China Academic Journal Electronic Publishing House*, 1: 13-20.

relationships.¹⁸⁵ At the same time however, violence between non-partnered, heterosexual women is not uncommon. For example, in the domestic sphere, in various cultures wife and mother in-law conflicts and violence across occur frequently, with such relationships often characterized by hurtful exchanges.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, within many countries, school campus violence between girls is increasing.¹⁸⁷

In 2015, the US Department of Education and the Justice Project Office conducted a nationwide survey which found that among students aged between 12 and 18, 23 percent of girls experienced on-campus bullying. This rate was higher than that experienced by boys, with most of these perpetrators being other girls.¹⁸⁸ At a more extreme level, 30 percent of convicted human traffickers worldwide between 2010 and 2012 were women.¹⁸⁹ In addition, hostile interactions amongst women are common, in part due to entrenched gender power imbalance which encourages in-group competition.¹⁹⁰ Even where some women suffer sexual aggression by men, female victims do not always obtain support, but are instead blamed by other women.¹⁹¹

Thus, it can be acknowledged that violence between women (especially physical, verbal and

¹⁸⁵ Sorenson, Susan B., & Thomas, Kristie A. (2009). Views of Intimate Partner Violence in Same - and Opposite-Sex Relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71 (2): 337-352; Luca Rollè, Giulia Giardina, Angela M. Caldarera, Eva Gerino, and Piera Brustia. (2018). "When Intimate Partner Violence Meets Same Sex Couples: A Review of Same Sex Intimate Partner Violence". *Journal of Frontiers in Psychology*, (9): 1506. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01506 (accessed 21 August 2018).

¹⁸⁶ Allendorf, Keera. (December 2006). "Like Her Own: Ideals and Experiences of the Mother-in-law/Daughter-in-law Relationship". *Journal of Family Issues*, 55 (5): 588-600.

¹⁸⁷ Eisenbraun, Kristin D. (2007). Violence in schools: Prevalence, prediction, and prevention. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 12: 459-469.

¹⁸⁸ Bureau of Justice Statistics (2015). *Census of Jails: Population Changes, 1999-2013*. U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.

¹⁸⁹ Agbulos, Marianelli. V. (2017). *Female Perpetrators of Human Trafficking: Overlooked in the United Nations' Anti-Trafficking Framework*. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324979631_Female_Perpetrators_of_Human_Trafficking_Overlooked_in_the_United_Nations'_Anti-Trafficking_Framework (accessed 18 June 2018).

¹⁹⁰ Woolsey, Lorette K., & Laura-LynneMcBain. (1987). "Issues of power and powerlessness in all-woman groups". *Journal of Women's Studies International Forum*, 10 (6): 579-588.

¹⁹¹ Bevins, Casey L., Brown, Amy L., & Loughnan, Steve. (2018). "The role of self-objectification and women's blame, sympathy, and support for a rape victim". *PLoS ONE*. 13: 6. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6023147/> (accessed 15 January 2019).

psychological) is commonplace and can happen in various situations, depending on the aims or objectives of female perpetrators. However, available research has failed to sufficiently explore or give recognition to the significance of ‘women-to-women’ gender-based violence, despite its prevalence in various societies. Violence between women has always been commonplace in history; however for various reasons; it has rarely been given sufficient attention and concern as a factor in gendered acts of violence.

3.5 Social and cultural factors influencing gendered violence

In the previous section, theories of violence affecting women are discussed. However, understanding the socio-cultural factors that influence violence against women in the community is also very important to better understand this study’s focus on the study of violence affecting single women.

3.5.1 Gender Power

According to Bourdieu, hegemony and the power of dominators over victims can be considered violence, while male-dominated societies can strengthen power constructs through the repeated use of ideas, languages, and symbols used in everyday life. Through such cultural habits, men’s dominance over women can be enhanced through constructing “*misrecognition*”.¹⁹² In this way, mainstream discourse under various social and cultural rules serves to achieve and maintain gender domination.¹⁹³ Once gender power structures are threatened, violence to maintain gender order, namely gender violence, may occur based on the gendered identities of the parties. Such violence is a reflection of gender power disparities, and is related to culturally-bound notions of social relationships, power structures, and

¹⁹² “*Misrecognition*” refers to a process of self-identification in which a subject assumes an identity they mistake for his or her own. Explained by Oxford Reference.

¹⁹³ Bourdieu, Pierre. (1998). *Die männliche Herrschaft*. Translated from French by Jürgen Bolder. Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin.

meanings of gender.¹⁹⁴ Consequently, gender based violence is used for maintaining power, while power inequality (ruling and subordination) is common to all acts of violence.¹⁹⁵ Thus, unjust gender relations under patriarchy are the root of violence.¹⁹⁶ Understanding gender power relations can lead to understanding of the ways that gendered norms contribute to the reproduction of violence.¹⁹⁷

3.5.2 Social control

Violence is an organizational mode of social control, and collective violence is a means of social control.¹⁹⁸ Social control mechanisms are typically based on the family or community, and where each person shares the same values within a social system “*private lives are often made into public issues of morality and social order*”.¹⁹⁹ Heitmeyer and Hagan concluded that collective violence generally functions with a strong political component for the purpose of social control, which is legitimized to achieve collective norms.²⁰⁰ In addition, Foucault argued that social control responses could effectively promote and maintain the power of the state.²⁰¹ Gerbner pointed out that: “*symbolic violence is a show of force and demonstration of power who can get away with what against whom, and its functions as an instrument of social control that tend to maintain the existing social order*”.²⁰² Galtung further explored the ideas that structural violence is understood as systematic exploitation as part of the social order.²⁰³

¹⁹⁴ Merry, Sally Engle. (2009). *Gender Violence. A cultural perspective*. Wiley-Blackwell, CITY. 3.

¹⁹⁵ Caprioli, 2005, 161-178.

¹⁹⁶ Harders, 2011; Tickner, J. Ann. (1992). *Gender in International Relations. Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security*. Columbia University Press, New York. 128.

¹⁹⁷ Alexander, Ronni. (2018). “Gender, Structural Violence and Peace”. In: EDITORS. *Routledge Handbook on Gender and Security*. Available at: http://www2.kobe-u.ac.jp/~alexroni/TR2017%20Readings/TR_2017_3/2017_Alexander_Gender_Peace_SV_Routledge.pdf (accessed 6 May 2019).

¹⁹⁸ De la Roche, Roberta senechal. (March 1996). Collective violence as a means of social control. *Sociological Forum*, 11 (1) : 97-128.

¹⁹⁹ Sun, Wanning., & Guo, Yingjie. (2013). *Unequal China. The political economy and cultural politics of inequality*. Routledge. London and New York. p.155.

²⁰⁰ Heitmeyer, Wilhelm., & Hagan, John. (2003). *International Handbook of Violence Research*. Kluwer Academic Publishers. Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

²⁰¹ Foucault, Michel. (1995/1975). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Vintage Books, New York.

²⁰² Gerbner, George. (1970). *Violence in Television. Drama: Trends and. Symbolic Functions*. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

²⁰³ Galtung, 1975.

Therefore, some forms of violence can and are employed to maintain social control.

3.5.3 Cultural factors

According to Galtung, cultural violence is defined as: “*any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form*”.²⁰⁴ Consequently, specific aspects of traditional culture might lead to cultural violence against a certain group, and as a legalized tool of cultural violence could also be performed through state or media publicity to meet certain political or social goals.²⁰⁵ Cultural violence lays special emphasis on the coercive or symbolism or language to enforce cultural norms.²⁰⁶ From this basis, social and cultural norms that support violence can be seen as acceptable ways to resolve conflicts.²⁰⁷

3.5.4 Economic factors

Violence is the instrumental means to an end serving to achieve some advantages or aims.²⁰⁸ Violence is also often a calculated act motivated by economic factors.²⁰⁹ Typically, to achieve political, economic or social goals people align themselves as a group member to attain advantage or protection, and may use collective violence against another group or set of individuals.²¹⁰ Bourdieu states that symbolic violence is also achieved by generating words and meanings in dialogue, advertising, film, fiction and other cultural products in order to achieve commercial profit.²¹¹ In his book “*On Television*”, Bourdieu considers the medium of television, and how symbolic violence is transmitted through the media. Critically, media

²⁰⁴ Galtung, 1990.

²⁰⁵ Galtung, 1996, 31.

²⁰⁶ Heitmeyer & Hagar, 2003, 25.

²⁰⁷ World Health Organization. (2009). *Violence prevention the violence. Changing cultural and social norms that support violence*. WHO Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data. Available at: https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/norms.pdf (accessed 24 June 2018).

²⁰⁸ Heitmeyer & Hagar, 2003, 115.

²⁰⁹ Baysan, Ceren. (2018). *Economic and Non-Economic Factors in Violence: Evidence from Organized Crime, Suicides and Climate in Mexico*. Working paper 24897, NBER Working Paper Series.

²¹⁰ World Health Organization. (2002). *Chapter 8: Collective Violence*. 215-239. Available at: https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/global_campaign/en/chap8.pdf (accessed 8 May 2019).

²¹¹ Bourdieu, 1998.

ratings are the most important means of obtaining huge commercial profits, and thus the media will pursue highly sensational news stories that generate high ratings, replacing those with cultural taste or as democratic function.²¹² Therefore, the pursuit of economic benefits could generate violence, in other words, violence can be a means to obtain economic profits.

Summary

Considering all these theoretical strands, in Figure 1 I present a conceptual framework guiding the research into this study of Chinese single women. This conceptual framework serves as a basis in shaping the research process, guiding the methodological design, and influencing the selection of data-collection instruments.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework guiding the research

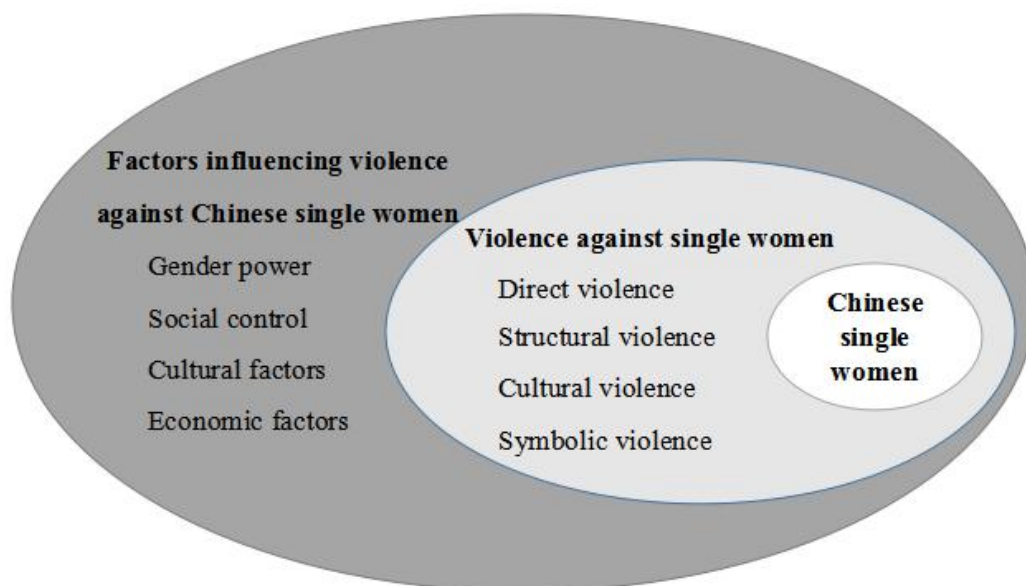


Figure 1 includes three ellipses. The smallest ellipse represents the current situation of Chinese single women in China. The middle ellipse represents the violence committed against Chinese single women that consists of direct, structural, cultural and symbolic violence. The

²¹² Bourdieu, Pierre. (1996). *On Television*. English translation by Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson. The New Press. USA.

exterior ellipse represents the social factors influencing violence against Chinese single women that are based on gender power, social control, cultural and economic factors.

The conceptual framework developed in this chapter explains the data sources collected in this research for determining the factors influencing violence against Chinese single women, and how Chinese single women experience violence in contemporary China.

The findings of this study consist of two parts. Firstly, factors influencing violence are divided into the aspects of gender power, social control, and economic factors; which are presented through official data, available literature, and other related materials. Specific cultural factors relevant to China are also reflected in the section considering ‘cultural violence against Chinese single women’. Secondly, the research applies Johan Galtung and Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of violence to explore the current situation of Chinese single women, and the cultural, structural, direct and symbolic violence affecting such women’s lives in contemporary China.

3.7 Research methodology

Overview

This research is exploratory, and is an attempt to embed the current situation of Chinese single women into the Galtung’s triangular structure theory of violence, and Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic violence. It considers cultural, structural, direct and symbolic aspects of violence affecting Chinese single women in contemporary China, and applies qualitative research to identify how such trends impact the behavior and perceptions of the target group.²¹³ Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words and narrative over the quantitative collection and analysis of raw data.²¹⁴ Qualitative methods help to gather an

²¹³ Bryman, Alan. (2001). *Social Research Methods*. (1st Edition). Oxford University Press, Oxford.

²¹⁴ Creswell, John W. (2003). *Research Design. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*.

in-depth understanding of sociocultural issues, especially relationships between people.²¹⁵

Therefore, I chose to apply the qualitative research method for this study, to obtain a better understanding of the situation of Chinese single women above 30 in contemporary Chinese society. A deductive thematic analysis approach is used to examine the relationship between theory and research, so that the results could be achieved based on the theoretical framework.²¹⁶ This approach serves for investigating how the theories match with the empirical data from interviews. Nonetheless, even though a deductive approach is used I also expect to have an inductive conclusion, where I can offer new theoretical elements within the phenomenon of the increasing number of Chinese single women. For this research, I use both primary and secondary data. The secondary data consists of earlier relevant academic research conducted, which serves as the background, research overview and literature review in the thesis. The primary data consists of 32 in-depth interviews, which comprise the empirical part of the study. In short, research results draw from in-depth interviews and documentary research method.

Research Sample

The research sample is comprised of 32 never-married single women residing in mainland China between the ages of 30 and 48 years old. 23 participants were recruited to participate in the project via social media, with a further six interviewees obtained through referrals from previous participants, as well as three from my own friend circle. All interviewees participated voluntarily in this study. All 32 informants held Chinese urban household registration (*Hukou*)²¹⁷. The participants are located in different cities, namely Beijing (n=6), Shanghai

(Second edition). Sage Publications, London.

²¹⁵ Bryman, Alan. (2008). *Social Research Methods*. (3rd Edition). Oxford University Press, Oxford.

²¹⁶ Bryman, 2001, 264.

²¹⁷ Since 1955, the Chinese social divide between the rural and urban sectors has been institutionalized by the household registration (*Hukou*) system, under which all Chinese households have to be registered in the locale where they reside. Households are categorized as either “agricultural” or “non-agricultural” (synonymously, “rural” or “urban”) households. See: Wu, Xiaogang. (2011). *The Household Registration System and Rural*

(n=10), Guangzhou (n=3), Shenzhen (n=3), Tianjin (n=2), and Suzhou, Wuxi, Zhenjiang, Jinan, Xi'an, Zibo, Zhengzhou, and Lanzhou (n=1 each). 19 participants currently live in the southern provinces of China, 13 of them in the northern regions.²¹⁸ Detailed information about the location of the interviewees is listed in Figure 2. Seven participants originally resided in Beijing (3) or Shanghai (4). 15 of the 32 participants are recent migrants to first-tier cities²¹⁹, while 10 out of these 15 migrants have acquired Hukou registration²²⁰ for either city. 23 participants were aged in their 30's, and nine in their 40's. All participants intended to live in their current city of residence for the rest of their lives. 14 participants currently own an apartment and live alone; five rent a room in a shared apartment; four rent an apartment; eight live with both parents, and one resides with her mother. All participants except one hold a college, Bachelor or higher Degree (Masters or Doctorate). Their income can completely cover their personal living costs, which means that all participants are economically independent. All of them are (or were) under great social pressure to get married from their families and the general society. Detailed information about the demographic characteristics of the interviewees is listed in Table 2.

Urban Educational Inequality in Contemporary China. Population Studies Center Research Paper. 11-735. Available at: www.file:///fs.univie.ac.at/homedirs/a1349171/Desktop/rr11-735.pdf (accessed 11 March 2018).

²¹⁸ *The Yangtze River* is often used as the geographical dividing line between northern and southern China. In view of the regional differences in culture and language, and the strong sense of regional identity of the Chinese people, these two concepts of "the North" and "the South" usually dominate the self-perception of the Chinese nation.

²¹⁹ *First tier cities* are: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, in terms of size and per-capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP). They are four biggest cities nationwide with the highest level of economic prosperity.

²²⁰ *Hukou* is a system of household registration in mainland China. A household registration record officially identifies a person as a resident of an area and includes identifying information such as name, parents, spouse, and date of birth. Available at: www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hukou_system (accessed 29 November 2017).

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of participants (N=32)					
					N=32
Age	30-34				16
	35-39				7
	>40				9
Education	Senior high school				1
	College				4
	Bachelor				14
	Master				12
	Doctorate				1
Income	<5, 000 Yuan (641 Euro)				6
	5-8, 000 Yuan (641-1,026 Euro)				12
	>8, 000 Yuan (1,026 Euro)				14
Living with	Alone				14
	Rent an apartment				4
	Rent a room				5
	Parents				9
Profession	Stateowned company				10
	Entrepreneur				1
	International corporation				13
	Private sector				8
Location	The first tier city	(7 local, 15 migrate)			22
	The second tier city				8
	The small city				2

Note: The income category in Table 2 is net income (after-tax).²²¹

Figure 2: Location map of the Research Interviewees in China



²²¹ The currency rate is according to 1 Euro = 7.8 Chinese Yuan in 2017 and in 2018.

Location Information

In this study, 13 Chinese cities were visited for the purposes of fieldwork and analysis. These included first so-called ‘first tier’ cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen (popularly known as ‘*Bei-Shang-Guang-Shen* (北上广深)’)²²². These four cities are the most economically and culturally developed cities in China. *Beijing* has a population of 22 million and is the capital city of China.²²³ According to the World Population Review (2016), Beijing is the second largest city in China, and has one of the highest GDP levels per capita in the country.²²⁴ Therefore, the city attracts many young talented workers, who expect to advance their education and career there. Moreover, as the capital Beijing is also the most visible city in China for supporting gender equality and has hosted numerous international gender equality platforms, such as the UN World Conference on Women’s Equality in 1995, and the Beijing Platform for Action (UN Women, 2016).

Shanghai, located in the Yangtze Delta Region, is the economic center of China with over 24 million inhabitants, and one of the largest cities in the world. Shanghai is a significant global financial center, and attracts well-educated people from all around the country. It was one of the first Chinese cities to open up internationally under China’s post-1978 economic reforms, and as the most westernized city in mainland China, is considered to be the most egalitarian cities in terms of gender equality and gender roles.

Guangzhou, traditionally known as Canton, is the capital city of the province of Guangdong and the most populous city in southern China. *Shenzhen*, also located in Guangdong, has since the 1980s become one of the largest cities in the Pearl River Delta, and is one of the largest

²²² Bian, Di. (2016). “Who is the fifth city after the ‘Bei-Shang-Guang-Shen’?” *Journal of Global Business Classics*, 9: 124-125.

²²³ 2018 *Blue Book of Beijing Population: Beijing Population Development Research Report*. (2018). Beijing Population and Social Development Research Center, Social Science Literature Publishing House.

²²⁴ “Beijing’s gross domestic product (GDP), 2.57 trillion Yuan in 2016.” Statistics data in 2017 by Statistics Bureau of the People’s Republic of China.

manufacturing base in the world.

The ‘*second tier cities*’²²⁵ I visited in my fieldwork include *Tianjin*, *Jinan*, *Lanzhou*, *Xi’an*, *Zhengzhou*, *Wuxi*, and *Suzhou*. In addition, two smaller cities I visited to undertake in-depth interviews are *Zibo* and *Zhenjiang* (the population of both cities is less than 5 million).

An overview of each of these 13 cities is provided in Table 3, with general information to help the reader better understand the locations and environments where the interviewees reside.

²²⁵ *The second tier cities in China* include regional central cities with a good amount of economic activities and industrial development. All are capital cities of Chinese provinces.

Table 3 Cities and environments of research interviews:

Name of Cities	Class	Population	Area	Political power & economic power
		(Ten thousand)	(Square kilometer)	
<i>Beijing</i>	Capital of China	2173	16410	Political center/capital
<i>Shanghai</i>	Economic center	2420	6340	International metropolis
<i>Guangzhou</i>	Provincial capital of Guangdong province	1449.84	7434	China's transit trade center
<i>Shenzhen</i>	Provincial City of Guangdong Province	1252.83	1996.85	Research and development center
<i>Tianjin</i>	One of the municipalities	1562	11946	Metropolis in northern coastal mainland
<i>Jinan</i>	Provincial capital of Shandong province	723.31	8177.21	Major national administrative, economic, and transportation hub
<i>Lanzhou</i>	Provincial capital of Gansu	324.23	13085.6	Prefecture-level city, a key regional transportation hub
<i>Xi'an</i>	Provincial capital of Shanxi province	883.21	10108	Sub-provincial city located in Northwestern China
<i>Zhengzhou</i>	Provincial capital of Henan province	956.9	7446	Prefecture-level city, the political, economic, technological, and educational center of the province, as well as a major transportation hub for Central China
<i>Wuxi</i>	In Jiangsu province	655.30	4628	One of the birthplaces of China's modern industry and commerce
<i>Suzhou</i>	In Jiangsu province	1068.4	8488.42	Major economic center and focal point of trade and commerce, and the second largest city in the province, after its capital Nanjing
<i>Zibo</i>	In Shandong province	470.8	5965	Important transportation hub
<i>Zhenjiang</i>	In Jiangsu province	317.14	3843	One of the China's busiest ports for domestic commerce

3.8 Research process

The research field trip in mainland China was undertaken between March and October 2017.

A summary of the research methodology is outlined below.

Data Collection

In contemporary China, discussions about single women, or “*leftover women*”, are still relatively sensitive, as Chinese single women experience significant social and personal pressure in the current social environment. Due to issues of personal privacy, and the difficulties of gaining trust from potential participants, the most difficult aspect of research was to identify and gain support from interviewees to participate in this project. To achieve this, a purposive sampling technique²²⁶ was employed that made it easier for me to approach this sensitive topic. A purposive snowballing technique²²⁷ was used in this step. Firstly, I asked for help from my own social circle for single women interested in being interviewed for this project. Three interviewees in this study were obtained in this way. Secondly, I searched for potential participants via certain public forums of popular social media sites in China, including *Weibo*²²⁸, *Douban*²²⁹, *WeChat*²³⁰, and *Zhihu*²³¹. These websites are popular sites for discussion posts on topics of marriage, family, *leftover women*, gender inequality, and other relevant women’s issues. I carefully reviewed reader comments under different discussion topics to identify some commenters who self-identified as single women. I sent private

²²⁶ Tongco, Ma. Dolores C. (2007). “Purposive Sampling as a Tool for Informant Selection”. *Ethnobotany Research & Application*. 147-158.

Available at: <https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/handle/10125/227/11547-3465-05-147.pdf> (accessed 2 June 2016).

²²⁷ Palinkas, L.A. (2015). “Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research”. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services*, 42 (5): 533-544.

Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4012002/> (accessed 30 May 2016).

²²⁸ *Weibo* (微博) is a China-based microblog. It is one of the most popular social media platforms in China.

²²⁹ *Douban* (豆瓣) was launched in March 2005 and is a Chinese social networking service website allowing registered users to record information and create content relating to film, books, music, recent events and activities in Chinese cities. It is one of the most influential web 2.0 websites in China.

²³⁰ *WeChat* (微信) is a Chinese social network app with over 400 million users, and is a multi-purpose messaging, social media and mobile payment app developed by Tencent.

²³¹ *Zhihu* (知乎) is a Chinese question-and-answer website where all kinds of questions are created, answered, edited, and organized by a community of its users.

messages to them, and asked whether they were willing to participate in my research project. This method was very helpful in identifying and contacting potential participants privately and confidentially. The benefit of this approach was that the locations of participants could be greatly expanded, with interviewees recruited from 13 cities in mainland China.

Personally, it was a valuable and unforgettable experience to visit different cities across China to my field research, and to witness the changes that the rapid economic development has brought to the Chinese people. It was also insightful to observe the development gaps between first-tier cities and other Chinese cities, and the differing aspects of culture distinguishing different provinces and between the northern and southern regions of China. All of these economic and geographic considerations are relevant to the social situation of single women in China, and in particular, single women in urban areas.

Most interviews were conducted in public coffee shops, which allowed both interviewee and researcher to feel relaxed in a public place. One interview was conducted in the office of the interviewee with sufficient privacy and relaxation for both parties. To ensure trustworthiness, I conducted the interviews in a calm and unbiased environment, and always arrived to interview locations early so that I could find the most comfortable position. I asked service staff not to interrupt interviews in the middle of conversation. Where possible, I also requested soft background music.

At the beginning of each interview, I showed the participant my personal Identity Card, and signed a written Confidentiality Agreement and Consent Form (see Appendix 2) with each interviewee to establish mutual trust and allow them to be sure that their privacy would not be exposed. This process was useful, as I had the opportunity to introduce myself and describe the research in advance, make respondents aware of the nature of my research, inform them of

their right to be anonymous and confidential in this study, and ask permission to tape-record the interviews. My status as a PhD Candidate studying at a prestigious overseas university, and my sincere attitude and friendly demeanour helped me to gain their trust in a very short time. Moreover, each interview usually began with some casual conversation, so that both parties could better understand each other before conducting formal interviews. The introductory conversation was crucial to creating a more comfortable and relaxed interview environment, as we were talking about the topic of “single women” that is often viewed as a sensitive issue under the patriarchal traditions in China. The interviews varied between one hour and 3.5 hours in duration.

The method of semi-structured interviews was chosen for this study. According to Bryman, the advantage of this interview structure is that it gives the respondent the opportunity to express their opinions more openly, without being limited by specific issues or questions.²³² As a two-way conversation, respondents can also ask questions in return. Moreover, this interview structure can help respondents freely talk about their own personal views and provide respondents with a space to discuss specific topics of interest to herself. Since the responses from each participant varied questions between interviews also varied to some extent, as I made minor adjustments based on interviewee responses.

In addition, the researcher of this study (myself) is also a never-married Chinese single woman, holding subjective opinions on the research subject. That is, the issue the researcher is investigating is also pertinent to her own daily life. To guard against subjective bias, interview questions were constructed carefully, and open-ended questions were proposed during each interview, which sought to avoid any subjective bias influence the interviewee’s answers. This reflects the need for a researcher to remember that: “*The social scientist has to*

²³² Bryman, 2001.

maintain a distance to the phenomena she studies”.²³³

Meanwhile, to achieve this, the first thing to do for the researcher was to step outside herself during each interview, in order to remain objective and unbiased as possible. Despite this, several interviewees presumed the researcher's unmarried state during interview, and sought to clarify this, asking me '*are you a single woman too?*' to confirm their perceptions. To guard against bias, I sought to distance myself from the narratives of interviewees; however given common experiences from time to time it emerged that some narratives resonated with my own experiences, and sometimes my behaviour as interviewer was too sympathetic towards the interviewee's experience. To overcome this, I consistently sought to be a listener and avoid verbally sympathizing with interviewees during the interview process, and to maintain distance as a professional researcher during each interview.

Qualitative interviews provide the advantage of delivering rich and detailed responses, and avoid interviewees being affected by researcher bias to the best extent possible. Nevertheless, in this study the researcher herself has the same life experience allowing her a deeper understanding of this topic, as: "*qualitative research allows researchers for this opportunity to understand the true sense of the world*".²³⁴ As Smith (1992) argued, "*when we began with our experiences as women to inquiry, however, we were always returning to ourselves and to each other as subjects in our bodies*".²³⁵ Denzin (1989) pointed out that "*own worlds of experience are the proper subject matter of inquiry*".²³⁶ Mills (1959) further observed that: "*the most admirable thinkers in academia, they do not separate work from life. In other words, they*

²³³ Schutz, Alfred. (1967). *Phenomenology of the Social World*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston, USA.

²³⁴ Yilmaz, Kaya. (2013). "Comparison of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Traditions: Epistemological, theoretical, and methodological differences". *European Journal of Education*, 48 (2): 311-325.

²³⁵ Smith, Dorothy E. (1992). "Sociology from Women's Experience: A Reaffirmation". *Sociological Theory*, 10 (1): 88-98.

²³⁶ Denzin, Norman. K. (1989). *Interpretive interactionism. Applied Social Research Methods Series*. (Second Edition). 16. Sage Publications, Newbury Park, CA. 46.

learn to use their life experiences in intellectual work”.²³⁷ Accordingly, this study combines the subjective experience of the researcher with the objective interview process to achieve the most complete research objectives on the research topic.

The in-depth interviews were conducted between March and October 2017, and averaged one interview per week. Originally, I undertook 35 interviews. Unfortunately, 3 interviews could not be included in empirical research data due to some unexpected reasons. One interviewee was too young (26 years old); one interviewee decided to withdraw halfway through an interview; and another was excluded from analysis following interview for failing to discuss the topics under discussion. Finally, 32 in-depth interviews were included in the research results for this study.

To organize each interview, I used a pre-designed interview guide (see Appendix 2) in written simplified (Pinyin) Chinese, which was originally designed in English. The written guide included questions regarding the subject’s experience of family; the workplace, and society as a result of being single female. The language of all interviews was conducted in Mandarin Chinese. Most interviews were audio-recorded with permission, transcribed, and finally summarized with an interview narrative of each participant. For some interviews, I sent follow-up emails to interviewees to clarify certain issues. Afterwards, some participants also sent me additional previous negative experience for being single that they did not think of at the interviews, and further discussion was undertaken on this topic via email or WeChat. All interviewees considered the interviews as a good chance to express their own personal experience and feelings, and some spoke of certain benefits they experienced due to being single in their daily lives. Because each interviewee’s story and opinions varied, follow-up questions also varied in turn. During interviews I modified my interview guide according to

²³⁷ Mills, Charles Wright. (1959). *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 195-196.

the different situation, and varied question formats based on interviewee responses.

Data Analysis

The thematic data analysis method chosen for my research was a qualitative approach. A thematic approach is a rigorous method “to identify, analyze, organize, describe and report the topics found in the data set in order to make insightful analysis to solve specific research problems”.²³⁸ This approach captures the key ideas of the data that is most relevant to the research topic and represents a certain degree of common characteristics in the data.²³⁹ In addition, it allows researchers to systematically study the entire collected data, provide sufficient and equal information for each data category, and identify the most interesting aspects of the data items, thus laying the foundation for the entire data set.²⁴⁰ As a consequence, the thematic analysis is useful to examine the opinions given by different respondents to find similarities and differences, and form the final insights that best summarize the views of all parties.²⁴¹ A common approach is to determine themes by using the key interview questions.²⁴² This approach also helps to summary the most critical characteristics of a data set because it requires researchers to take a well-organized approach to the data to produce a clear, and most convincing final report.²⁴³

In addition, the thematic data method can identify themes or patterns in the data by summarizing the “bottom-up” approach or by theoretically deducting the “top-down” approach.²⁴⁴ In this study, my primary research goal was to identify and analyze interviewees’

²³⁸ Braun, Virginia., & Clarke, Victoria. (2006). “Using thematic analysis in psychology”. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3: 97.

²³⁹ Braun, Virginia., & Clarke, Victoria. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3: 77-101.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ King, N. (2004). “Using templates in the thematic analysis of text”. In C. Cassell & G. Symon (eds.) *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research*, London, UK: Sage. 257-270.

²⁴² Clarke, Victoria., & Braun, Virginia. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26 (2): 120-123.

²⁴³ King, 2004.

²⁴⁴ Boyatzis, R. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Sage,

negative experiences due to being a single woman in China. I sought to identify similarities or differences between interviewee answers with existing concepts and theory, and have chosen a predetermined framework to analyse the data. First, I applied a deductive thematic approach to identify key themes²⁴⁵, as this approach uses a flexible and reflective process to achieve the richness and depth of qualitative data.²⁴⁶ The thematic approach is suitable for answering the research questions of this study, as I also used previously presented theories to examine the data. The aim of inductive approach is chiefly to make the research results stand out from the frequent or common topics in the original data, without being bound by the structuring method because the inductive method integrates and refines various collected raw data into a summary format.²⁴⁷ Finally, I used a combination of inductive and deductive thematic analysis as data analysis approach in this study.

Keeping in mind the method of thematic analysis, after each interview, I repeatedly listened to the recorded audio of each interview, took notes and reviewed responses further, to explore and analyze narratives to generate the research results. The thematic analysis was then used to analyze and focus narrative materials of interviewees' life stories. Overall, I found that interviewees repeatedly described their negative experiences with similar expressions. These included references to verbal attacks and insults from other people. Interviewees described continuous pressure to get married or go on dates to find a partner and the stigma received from others if they didn't cooperate. Interviewees also described common emotional and mental trauma from the extreme negative expressions and feelings they suffer from in their daily lives. As a consequence, conceptual understandings of violence are well suited to analyzing the status and social situation of single women in China. Accordingly, I have

Thousand Oaks, CA.

²⁴⁵ Braun & Clarke, 2006, 77-101.

²⁴⁶ Nowell, Lorelli S., Norris, Jill M., White, Deborah E., & Moules, Nancy J. (2017). "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria". *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16: 1-13.

²⁴⁷ Thomas, D. R. (2003). *A general inductive approach for qualitative data analysis*. School of Population Health, University of Auckland, Auckland. 2.

summarized social exclusion, discrimination and hostility experienced by interviewees on account of being single women as key form of violence affecting single women's lives in contemporary China .

In Chapter 6, I summarize research findings based on the interviewee's narratives presented in the fieldwork. To protect interviewee anonymity, all 32 participants have been given pseudonyms in this thesis (see Appendix 1 for background).

Chapter 4 Ebb and Flow: Historical context of single women in China

Introduction

Prior to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, most marriages of Chinese people were arranged by their parents or elder relatives. Young men and women did not have any personal marital decision-making power, and the majority of Chinese traditional marriages occurred with reference only to family heritage and clan preferences.²⁴⁸ Chinese women in particular held limited personal freedom. They had no property or inheritance rights, moved to the husband's family after getting married and relied on her husband for survival. Thus, Chinese women were formerly considered to be a male possession throughout much of Chinese history, and women suffered due to their extremely low social status.²⁴⁹ In the 1950s, former Chinese president Mao Zedong presented the slogan "*women hold up half the sky*" to change the feudal system and seek to enhance the subordinate status of Chinese women.²⁵⁰ In the short term the slogan greatly helped Chinese women in improving their status in a short term, and in the earlier decades of New China,²⁵¹ Chinese women gradually overcame the formal resistance of thousands of years of feudalism. Women's destiny underwent a fundamental change, and their social status continued to increase under the socialist system. From that time on, Chinese women have held an increasingly important role in modern Chinese work, family and life.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ Chen, Yunqian., & Ye, Qing. (1998). *On the Changes of Urban Marriage during the Republic of China*, 6: 196-211.

²⁴⁹ Liu, Weifang. (2010). "The Historical Changes of the Status of Women in New China". *Contemporary China History Studies*, 17 (5): 41-49; Li, Yuhui. (2000). Women's Movement and Change of Women's Status in China. *Journal of International Women's Studies*. Article 3. Bridge water State University, 1 (1): 30-40.

²⁵⁰ Lee, Haiyan. (April-June 2004). "Holding Up Half the Sky: Chinese Women Past, Present, and Future". *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 124 (2): 398.

²⁵¹ The '*old China*' refers to the period from 1840 to 1949, from the beginning of the Opium War to the time when Mao Zedong led the Communist Party of China to establish a communist regime - the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The People's Republic of China is a '*new China*', as opposed to the old China.

²⁵² Xie, Jianping. (2016). "Women can top half the sky". *Journal of World History*. 90-93.

In Chinese modern history²⁵³, the single women phenomena have occurred in four waves since the founding of New China in 1949:

The first wave was in 1950s under the impact of issuing the first ‘Marriage Law’ in Chinese history. At the end of the 1970s, the educated youth initiated the second single wave during the period of returning to the city after the ‘Up to The Mountains and Down to The Countryside’ Movement²⁵⁴. Since the 1990s, the reform and opening up policy initiated by Chinese government had brought about a change in the concept of the traditional family, and the third single wave came. In the 21st century, with the rapid development of the economic level and the improvement of women’s sense of autonomy, the fourth single wave has gradually emerged.²⁵⁵

In this chapter, a complete review of the historical four waves is presented to create an understanding of the single women phenomena in Chinese history, which serves to account for the status and situation of Chinese single women today. This review explores key similarities and differences between four historical waves in changing social attitudes towards women in China. The review analyzes how these changes affected the treatment of single women in Chinese society. Finally, the current ongoing single wave, also known as the fourth single wave in Chinese history, is discussed separately, given its difference from the previous three periods of Chinese history.

²⁵³ Chinese modern history refers to the period of after 1949.

²⁵⁴ The movement of “Up to The Mountains and Down to The Countryside” occurred in 1968-1978, when the Chinese government mobilized over 20 million urban youths and sent them to the countryside. Most of these youth returned to the cities at the end of 1970s.

²⁵⁵ Chen, 2011; Huang, Rongfang., & Yang, Lichao. (9 August 2011). “China will welcome the fourth wave of singles. Active single women outnumber men”. *China Women’s Daily*. B03.

4.1 Historical context of single women in China

4.1.1 The first wave: the 1950s

On May 1, 1950, the first “*Marriage Law of the People’s Republic of China*”²⁵⁶ was promulgated and implemented in China, less than one year after the founding of New China. This first marriage law aimed at liberating Chinese women from constraints of the feudal marriage system, and played a positive role in protecting of women’s rights and interests and improving women’s status in marriage during this historical period.²⁵⁷ The first Marriage Law was the main body of the new Chinese marriage legal system, and focused on ensuring women holding equal rights with men in a marriage; and upholding rights and interests of women and children in the family unit.²⁵⁸

In particular, the first Marriage Law prohibited past feudal practices of arranged marriages and child betrothals.²⁵⁹ Article 1 of the Marriage Law stipulated:

*The abolition of the feudalistic marriage and family system that enlists compulsion, men respect women, and disregard the interests of children. The implementation of the new-democratic marriage system of free marriage of men and women, monogamy, equality of rights between men and women, and protection of the legitimate rights of women and children.*²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ Engel, John W. (1984). “Marriage in the People’s Republic of China: Analysis of a New Law.” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 46 (4): 955-961.

²⁵⁷ Yang, Dawen. (2000). “Expert on Revision of the Marriage Law”. Presentation, China Internet Information Center (CIIC) (23 November 2000). Available at: www.china.org.cn/english/2000/Nov/4419.htm (accessed 6 February 2018).

²⁵⁸ Zhang, Chengjie. (2010). “The “Marriage Law” of 1950 and the social changes it triggered - The 60th anniversary of the promulgation of the Marriage Act of 1950”. *Journal of Jiangsu University (Social Science Edition)*, 5: 34-42.

²⁵⁹ Hare-Mustin, RT. (December 1982). China’s Marriage Law: a model for family responsibilities and relationships. *Journal of Family Process*, 21 (4): 477-481.

²⁶⁰ Article 1 of the “Marriage Law” in Chinese: 《婚姻法》第1条规定: 废除包办强迫、男尊女卑、漠视子女利益的封建主义婚姻家庭制度。实行男女婚姻自由、一夫一妻、男女权利平等、保护妇女和子女合法权益的新民主主义婚姻制度。

The Marriage Law of 1950 was a revolution of ideas and systems, particularly in its emphasis that women held legal equality with men.²⁶¹

After the end of the Chinese Revolution, China's first "single wave" occurred from 1950 to 1953. This first wave precipitated the growth of unmarried or single life as a genuine social option in society. The Chinese people's concept and attitudes towards marriage had undergone a great revolution, where old feudal and bourgeois notions of marriage were replaced by the new socialist, proletarian marriage ideal.²⁶² The promulgation and implementation of the Marriage Law in 1950 was not only a profound revolution in the traditional Chinese marriage and family system, but also a major social reform that challenges individual, social and national institutional arrangements. It is a milestone in the history of human rights development of Chinese women.²⁶³

Due to the influence of the first Marriage Law in China, a great number of Chinese women began to re-examine the meaning and role of marriage. A small number of women chose to either marriage later or not at all, while some married women sought divorce to liberate themselves from unhappy marriages. Between 1951 and 1956, about 6 million couples divorced in China.²⁶⁴ Thus, the 1950 Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China was a landmark law that played an important role in relegating old marriage concepts and marriage customs, thereby establishing a new marriage and family system.²⁶⁵ Chinese women held recognized rights to own private property, and were encouraged to actively participate in the labor force, which greatly improved the possibility for unmarried women to live

²⁶¹ Xue, Ninglan. (2018). "The Measurement of Gender Equality Values in the New China Marriage Legislation". *Journal of Shandong Women's University*, 1 (137): 85-92.

²⁶² Tang, Shimei. (2015). "The Influence of Marriage Law of 1950 on the Wedding Custom Culture in Hanzhong". *Journal of Culture Heritage*, 3: 110-119.

²⁶³ Zhang, 2010, 35.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 40.

²⁶⁵ Tang, 2015; Xu, Chu. (2015). The Evaluation of the "Marriage Law" of 1950 and Its Enlightenment to the Modern Marriage System. *Technology Economy Market*, 3: 198-200.

independently. The first single wave played a defining role in the changing status of Chinese women in contemporary Chinese history. From that period on, women's rights and interests made hitherto unprecedented legal and official progress in China.

4.1.2 The second wave: the late 1970s

The “*up to the mountains and down to the countryside movement*” in Chinese history refers to the Cultural Revolution period during the 1960s and 1970s.²⁶⁶ In this period, Chairman Mao issued directives that “*the countryside is a vast world, where you can do anything*”,²⁶⁷ and “*educated urban youth should go to the countryside to undergo re-education by poor peasants, which is very necessary*”²⁶⁸. This movement, which swept through the entire Chinese country, not only affected the lives of more than 20 million urban young people involved in the Cultural Revolution, but also affected their parents, families, schools, and surrounding society. From the early 1960s to the late 1970s under the power of the state, nearly 17 million educated youths underwent “*voluntary and involuntary*”²⁶⁹ collective movement to the countryside. These movements during the Cultural Revolution period negatively affected the lives of countless Chinese people. The forced migration of educated youth to the countryside during the movement accounted for more than one-tenth of China's urban population, and directly affected around half of Chinese urban families. The Cultural Revolution movement was like a hurricane in Chinese history lasting more than a decade, and created deep and long-lasting traumas for a generation of educated Chinese youth.²⁷⁰ The

²⁶⁶ *The Cultural Revolution* was officially known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, and was a radical sociopolitical movement in China from 1966 until 1976.

²⁶⁷ In Chinese: “广阔天地，大有作为”，advocated by Chairman Mao in 1968.

²⁶⁸ In Chinese: “知识青年到农村去，接受贫下中农的再教育，很有必要”，advocated by Chairman Mao in 1968.

²⁶⁹ Liu, Xiaomeng. (1998). *History of Zhiqing in China: the spring tide (1966–1980)*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press.

²⁷⁰ Xie, Yu., & Jiang, Yang. (2008). “Did Send-Down Experience Benefit Youth? A Re-evaluation of the Social Consequences of Forced Urban-Rural Migration during China's Cultural Revolution”. *Social Science Research*, 37 (2): 686-700.

educated urban youth suffered from the hardships in rural areas and delays to their studies and professional careers, and lost the best times of their life at a young age.²⁷¹

The second era of the single wave occurred in the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. In this period the Cultural Revolution had ended, and a large number of educated youths had returned to their cities of origin from the countryside. Consequently, the cities quickly gathered a great number of single people of marriageable age, with the majority being single women. In this period, many educated male youth who had been living in the countryside had already chosen to marry local young rural women; however most of the educated female youth from the big cities preferred to remain single instead of marrying rural men. Many educated female youth in the countryside could not find their life partners, either because of social distance or a lack of common feelings or language with local rural men. Therefore, at the end of the Cultural Revolution, as young people returned to the cities from rural areas, a large number of educated women of marriageable age in the cities could not get married, which consequently created a second wave of single women in China.²⁷²

Although a nationwide policy issued by the government in 1979 allowed all conscripted youth to return to their original cities, the educated youth who were already married to local residents or were formally employed in rural areas had to continue enduring their hardships in rural areas.²⁷³ They could not formally return to the cities of origin due to the restrictions of *Hukou* registration system²⁷⁴, unless they choose to divorce with their rural wives and become single again.²⁷⁵ The tide of educated youth returning to the city from the late 1970s scattered

²⁷¹ Liang, Haixiang. (2014). "Marriage in the era of no regrets: The study of educated youth under the life course theory". *Economic Research Guide*, 16 (234): 207-212.

²⁷² Liu, Xiaomeng. (1994). *Youth Research*, (8): 37-43; Liu, Xiaomeng. (1995). "The marriage of educated youth in the countryside". *Twenty-first Century*. 30. The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, Hong Kong.

²⁷³ Zhou, Xueguang., & Hou, Liren. (1999). "Children of the Cultural Revolution: The State and the Life Course in the People's Republic of China". *American Sociological Review*, 64 (1): 17-18.

²⁷⁴ In 1958 the Chinese government created the hukou housing registration system to control the migration of Chinese citizens from rural to urban areas.

²⁷⁵ Xie & Jiang, 2008, 690.

and disrupted many families, which had developed during the “*up to the mountains and down to the countryside movement*”.²⁷⁶

Of course, some married urban men did choose to abandon their marriages to their rural wives in order to return to the cities. In the “*Xishuangbanna Farm Field*” in Yunnan province, which was once a key settlement for migrating educated youth during the countryside movement, there were an unprecedented 3,000 collective divorce cases within the first five days after the issuing of the “*returning to the cities of origin*” policy change.²⁷⁷ Educated youth, who would not or could not divorce with their rural spouses, had to remain living in rural areas. In addition, many educated youth who were married or had children in rural areas could not transfer their spouses’ and children’s Hukou registration to the cities, which caused great trouble for those who later resettled in urban cities, and sought to transfer to an urban Hukou.²⁷⁸

Thus, this second single wave lasted from the late-1970s to the mid-1980s, and resulted from the end of the “*up to the mountains and down to the countryside movement*”.²⁷⁹ However, after 10 years of living in rural areas, such single women were no longer young when returning to their home cities, and as unmarried women above 30 had considerably less advantage in choosing partners. Therefore, many single women had to wait for a long period to find someone to get married or had to remain single. In 1984, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China even held a special session to discuss the issue of helping unmarried youth over the age of 30 to find life partners.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Zhou & Hou, 1999, 12-36.

²⁷⁷ “Xishuangbanna Farm Field”, Yunnan province is located at the southwest part of the People’s Republic of China. It was a key area for educated youth to live during the Movement. In Chinese: 知青插队西双版纳农场.

²⁷⁸ Zhou & Hou, 1999, 25.

²⁷⁹ Liang, 2014.

²⁸⁰ Zeng, Shi. (2011). “*Single female economy concept*. Guangzhou report.” Available at: http://www.360doc.com/content/11/0723/14/5694583_135374416.shtml (accessed 21 April 2018).

Summary of the first and the second single wave

Both the first single woman wave in the 1950s and the second from the late-1970s can be attributed as a direct result of state policies. As noted, the first single wave occurred due to the impact of the first Marriage Law in China. It was the first time that Chinese women had conscious awareness of having equal rights and equality with men. In addition to marriage, being single was opened up to women as an alternative life possibility. The second wave however only involved educated urban women directly impacted by the “*up to the mountains and down to the countryside movement*”, and who later returned to their home cities from the late-1970s. However, this experience of voluntary single life can also be considered as another opportunity where Chinese women collectively re-examined the meaning of marriage, in light of their new opportunities and legal rights.

4.1.3 The third wave: the 1990s

Marriage and family hold great importance in China, with a particular emphasis on the fertility and family responsibilities of married women.²⁸¹ At the same time, unmarried women are considered to be a negative influence for only paying attention to their perceived personal enjoyments, at the expense of societal female responsibilities.²⁸² Nevertheless, the third single wave spread widely in the 1990s as a result of the transformation of traditional family forms triggered by more than 10 years of economic and social change during “*China’s reforms and opening up*” period²⁸³. In this context, Chinese women again questioned traditional family and marital expectations, and their expected responsibilities within the family unit.²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ Wolf, Margery. (1984). “Marriage, Family, and the State in Contemporary China”. *Journal of Pacific Affairs*, 57 (2): 213-236.

²⁸² Chen, Mengfei. (2008). *The third single wave*, 8 (283): 56-57.

²⁸³ “In 1978, the Chinese government under the leader Deng Xiaoping adopted a new policy that has altered China’s development policy from one based on self-sufficiency to one of active participation in the world market.” Huan, Guocang. (Winter 1986). “China’s Open Door Policy, 1978-1984”. *Journal of International Affairs*, 39 (2): 1-18.

²⁸⁴ The China Daily. (14 November 2016). “More than 200 million Chinese are single, bringing the 4th wave of singledom”. Available at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-11/14/content_27366446.htm (accessed 21

With the new found ideological and economic independence of women, new trends such as “single life” and “non-marriage doctrine” emerged among the younger single women during this historical period. With new ideas of personal freedom emerging in China, young educated people sought to seek out new ways of living based on personal free will and happiness. Since the economic reforms, an enormous rate of economic development began to emerge in China, and an increasing number of Chinese women chose to take advantage of the new economic and educational opportunities to pursue their dreams.²⁸⁵ In addition, during this period many kinds of dating agencies, single clubs, single women unions, and other new dating options emerged in China, which helped a new generation of Chinese women to make their own choices regarding their personal lives. Many independent women were not willing to settle for an unfulfilling partner, while many women began to enjoy their single status as a fashionable, casual and free lifestyle. In 1990, the number of single females aged between 30 to 50 in Beijing exceeded 100,000 for the first time.²⁸⁶

Within this third single wave, single women started to become known and positively portrayed as “noble singles”, or “single nobility”.²⁸⁷ In the 1990s, female *noble singles*, as a new and positive cultural concept, represented freedom, high status, youth, and vitality, and consequently the concept and identity of being single became widely accepted and idealized by a large number of youth who competed to pursue this new lifestyle.²⁸⁸ In China, unmarried women are increasingly inclined to consider marriage only as an idealistic mode of life, and if marriage cannot improve the quality of a person’s material and spiritual life, then many would rather choose to remain single. The penetration of Western concepts of “love marriages” and the rise of feminism in China have also played a role in constructions of concept and values of

January 2018).

²⁸⁵ Liu, 2010, 41-49.

²⁸⁶ Feng, Jing., & Liu, Fen. (May 2006). “Why China’s Third Single Wave Arrives”. *Beijing Science and Technology Newspaper*. 18th Edition.

²⁸⁷ Noble singles; Single nobility; Single noble women/单身贵族.

²⁸⁸ Ma, Qizhen. (1994). “Who wants to be a single noble?” *Journal of Price and Market*, 12: 4-5.

choosing to be single among Chinese women that had great impact on the third single wave.²⁸⁹

Summary of the third single wave

The third single wave in the 1990s affected a great number of young Chinese women in China, who were actively and spontaneously choosing to become *noble single woman*. This stage was quite different from the previous two single waves which resulted from political and historical reasons. The first two waves emerged due to the influence of coercive state policies; however, the third single wave resulted from the increasing economic independence many Chinese women experienced, where they actively started to choose their own lifestyles. Chinese women become more serious in demanding their individual rights, which reflected the improved social and legal attitudes towards marriage, family, and the role and responsibilities of women.

4.1.4 The fourth single wave: 21st Century

At the beginning of the 21st century, sustained and rapid economic development and the improvement of women's self-consciousness saw the fourth single wave emerge in China.²⁹⁰ According to a population census, in April 2006 the number of single men and women in Beijing and Shanghai exceeded 1 million, or about 30% of the total population of marriageable age, and was expected to increase further in future.²⁹¹ According to China population statistics in 2011, the single population in China reached 180 million, of which the number of singles in urban areas exceeded 60 million.²⁹² Chinese women have become more powerful and influential, and consequently many highly educated urban women now actively

²⁸⁹ Liu, Mengmeng. (2016). *The Development of Chinese Feminism on Weibo*. Global Honors Theses. University of Washington, Tacoma WA, 32: 1-29.

²⁹⁰ Yan, Haidong. (2013). *The fourth single wave sweeps China*, 3 (340): 19-22.

²⁹¹ Du, Suangyan. (2008). "A sociological analysis of the single boom". *Northwest Population*, 5: 49-54.

²⁹² Mao, Yanling. (2009). "Sociological Perspective of Single Women - Qualitative Research on Single Women". *Theoretical circles*. 181-183.

choose their own lives and seek to challenge the traditional marriage model.²⁹³ The fourth single wave has also generated a “single economy” to satisfy the needs of solo consumers, and many independent Chinese women are even making the decision to buy an apartment on their own, without considering partners and marriage first. Chinese single women are more focused on enhancing their living quality, which is another result of rapid urbanization and a fast-paced lifestyle.²⁹⁴

The fourth single wave is considered to be the longest and the most controversial single wave in Chinese history, which has continued since the beginning of the 21st century.²⁹⁵ However, in recent years, there seems to be a reversing trend towards increasing patriarchal norms and attitudes.²⁹⁶ *The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report on Equality* published in 2008 showed that, China has fallen to 103rd in the world; especially with respect to gender equality in health and politics being lower than the global average.²⁹⁷ The lifestyle choices made by single women during the fourth single wave no longer either wins social respect or support, nor promotes gender equality. Instead, single women suffer from ridicule and personal attacks from every corner of society.²⁹⁸ In contrast however, single men in China are treated with more sympathy and understanding.²⁹⁹ The ongoing fourth wave has had a great impact on Chinese society, but has also aroused continuing conflict and friction between modern and traditional concepts of womanhood. The phenomena of an increased number of single women makes many in Chinese society uneasy, many of whom question whether the

²⁹³ Chen, 2011.

²⁹⁴ Huang, Penny. (30 August 2017). “Data Shows Rise of China’s ‘Single Economy’”. *Women of China*. Available at: www.womenofchina.cn/womenofchina/html1/survey/1708/7024-1.htm (accessed 9 October 2018).

²⁹⁵ Hahn, Christina., & Elshult, Katarina. (2016). *The Puzzle of China's Leftover Women*. Thesis in International Economics with a Focus on China. School of Economics and Management, Lund University, Sweden.

²⁹⁶ Fincher, 2014.

²⁹⁷ *The Global Gender Gap Report 2018*. (2018). World Economic Forum. Available at: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf (accessed 5 January 2019).

²⁹⁸ Merriman, Mazie Katherine. (2015). *China's 'Leftover' women phenomenon: media portrayal and 'Leftover' voices*. Master Thesis of Croft Institute for International Studies Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College of the University of Mississippi. Oxford, USA.

²⁹⁹ Koetse, Many. (29 July 2015). Not ‘Leftover Women’ but ‘Leftover Men’ Are China’s Real Problem. China Insight: Available at: www.whatsonweibo.com/not-leftover-women-but-leftover-men-are-chinas-real-problem/ (accessed 13 November 2018).

emergence of single women may undermine Chinese social structures. Several opponents also fear that the rise of single women could bring about increased social problems in China, such as overturning traditional marriage concepts; increase the aging of society and associated social pension issues; and even bring about a population crisis through a decline in births.³⁰⁰

Summary of the fourth single wave

In the first and the second single waves, most Chinese women remained single in response to arbitrary changes imposed state law and decisions made under state policy. In the third wave however, many Chinese women, actively began choosing to marry late or remain single, and began receiving social recognition and praise as “single nobility”. However, in the ongoing fourth wave social attitudes have changed, and all single Chinese women aged over 30, no matter the reasons for delayed marriage or desire to be single, are pejoratively called “*leftover women*”. Therefore, single women today in China are under great social pressure to get married, and often suffer violence within society on a regular basis.

4.2 The situation of Chinese single women in China in the ongoing fourth single wave

In this section, the continuing fourth single wave in China is discussed in detail. While the previous three single waves described only short time periods affecting marriage behavior, the current ongoing fourth single wave has continued over a much longer period, since the beginning of the 21st century.³⁰¹

4.2.1 Demographic characteristics of single women in China today

According to China’s sixth Census data, 2.47 percent of Chinese women aged 30 and over were unmarried, compared with only 0.92 percent in the previous fifth Census.³⁰² This is an

³⁰⁰ Du, 2008.

³⁰¹ Chen, 2011.

³⁰² The Sixth National Population Census of the People’s Republic of China, 2010.

increase of nearly twice that of 10 years prior.³⁰³ In addition, the number of single women who voluntarily choose to remain single has also increased significantly.³⁰⁴

Together, the China Women's Federation China Marriage and Family Research Association, the China Association of Social Work Association Marriage Industry Committee, and Lily.com together collectively undertook the surveys in all 31 Chinese provinces, and published the "*2010 Chinese Marriage and Marital Status Survey Report*". The study reported that there were 170 million single people nationwide, of which 104 million are men, accounting for 59.6 percent, and 70 million women, accounting for 40.4 percent, with the number of single person still growing dramatically. According to the same survey, 30 years old is the Chinese average age for marriage.³⁰⁵

4.2.2 Negative impacts on Chinese society through the increase in single women

The increasing number of single women in China has also contributed to the rising trend of marrying late or remaining single, which has also brought on a series of social challenges to Chinese society.

First, the increase in the proportion of "leftover women" has been identified as exacerbating the "marriage squeeze" of men living in rural and disadvantaged areas. In 2020, China's "leftover men" are predicted to comprise 30 million to 40 million (12 to 15 percent) of the young male adult population.³⁰⁶ This means that tens of millions of "leftover men" will not

³⁰³ The census is conducted every 10 years in China. Since the founding of New China, China has successfully conducted five national censuses in 1953, 1964, 1982, 1990, 2000, and 2010. The next census will be conducted in 2020.

³⁰⁴ Chen, 2011.

³⁰⁵ Lily Network. (2012). 2011 Chinese Marital Status Survey Report. *Population and Family Planning*. 4. Available at: <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/e789c48ed0d233d4b14e6926.html> (accessed 18 November 2018).

³⁰⁶ Sun, Wanning. (28 September 2017). "'My parents say hurry up and find a girl': China's millions of lonely 'leftover men'". *The Guardian*. Available at: www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/sep/28/my-parents-say-hurry-up-and-find-a-girl-chinas-millions-of-lonely-leftover-men (accessed 9 October 2018).

be able find a wife, which could in turn directly affect social harmony in China. According to the sixth China census, “leftover males” are mainly concentrated in the lower socio-economic and disadvantaged, primarily rural areas.³⁰⁷ Many males are thus affected by serious imbalances in the sex ratio of the population, to the point that many of them would involuntarily become lifelong bachelors.³⁰⁸ In 2014 the fertility rate in China was 1.137 percent, which means that China has begun to enter a period of ultra-low fertility. This in turn leads to the reduction of the Chinese labor force.³⁰⁹

Second, the single wave is also one of the key reasons behind China’s aging population. According to the National Bureau of Statistics “*Statistical Communique on National Economic and Social Development 2014*”, the population aged 60 and over has now reached 212 million and accounts for 15.5 percent of the total Chinese population; equivalent to the combined population of Germany, France and the United Kingdom.³¹⁰ The trend of increasing numbers of single households exacerbates the problem of an aging population and decreases the number of children being born for the future workforce, thereby impacting on economic development.

Finally, the increasing proportion of unmarried Chinese women and men also affects the intergenerational transmission of social culture, and the continuation of traditional ethics in the pursuit of family harmony. This is because the lifestyle of a single woman runs counter to the traditional Confucian views and foundation for marriage and family formation. This

³⁰⁷ Zhang, 2013, 50-53.

³⁰⁸ Wang, Guan. (24 August 2017). “Media: “Single wave” is coming. Why does it affect the economy?” China Youth Network. Available at: http://news.youth.cn/sh/201708/t20170824_10582221.htm (accessed 23 October 2018).

³⁰⁹ The CCTV News. (11 November 2016). *It’s about 200 million people in China. The fourth “single wave” is here!* The 21 Finance Edition. Available at: <https://m.21jingji.com/article/20161111/herald/578b713eebcd1f1939b69765f00cb58c.html> (accessed 10 June 2017).

³¹⁰ 2014 National Bureau of Statistics of China. (26 February 2015). *Statistical Communique of the People’s Republic of China on the 2014 National Economic and Social Development*. Available at: www.stats.gov.cn/english/pressrelease/201502/t20150228_687439.html (accessed 3 May 2017).

directly affects the heritage of traditional Chinese family and marriage culture to a significant extent.³¹¹

4.3 Summary and discussion

In this chapter, four “single waves” in the history of China were reviewed. At each different historical period, the status of Chinese single women has undergone unstable and inconstant situations. In addition, each single wave has its own feature. In the first single wave of the 1950s, Chinese women were for the first time awoken to an independent consciousness, and recognition that they could remain single and not rely on men as a genuine lifestyle choice. In the second single wave ending in the early 1980s, many educated urban women who returned to the cities after the “*up to the mountains and down to the countryside movement*” preferred to be single instead of entering into marriages with rural men with lower education and economic status. This trend reflected a change in Chinese women who wished to pursue personal development and treated marriage more seriously. In the third wave in the 1990s during China’s rapid economic development, women’s freedom to decide their own lifestyle decisions became stronger, and many began to seriously evaluate the meaning of marriage and family and make their own choices. The continuous improvement of female education and economic power also enhanced material security and independence for women to freely choose to live and stay single.

The fourth single wave in 21st century has followed from the continuous development of the Chinese economy. Many Chinese women are getting married much later than the average marriage age, or firmly committing to remaining single. However, due to much larger numbers of single women, the fourth single wave has had a greater negative impact on Chinese social stability, culture, traditional heritage and population balance; as well as

³¹¹ Miao, Guo. (2006). “Rethinking the Intergenerational Conflicts in Ideas from the Single Wave of Young People”.12. *Chinese Youth Research. Special Edition*. 11-15.

undermining longstanding traditional gender roles in China's patriarchal society. Consequently, single women in China today are experiencing unprecedented challenges. As a result of their single status, most Chinese single women are suffering from multiple forms of violence. Chinese society characterizes single women as "fierce floods" and "savage beasts"³¹², and experience ridicule and criticism in the community. This societal sexism and prejudice create significant difficulties and mental health stresses for single women, as well as further challenges for Chinese society.

In Chapter 5, the factors of violence affecting single women in contemporary China during the present fourth single wave are discussed in detail. In Chapter 6, the enormous pressures and hostility that contemporary single women endure in China are explored and analyzed, with special reference to cultural, structural, direct and symbolic violence.

³¹² "*Fierce floods*" and "*savage beasts*", is a Chinese idiom, which means that great evils or great scourges.

Chapter 5 Research Findings Part 1: Factors influencing violence against Chinese single women in contemporary China

Introduction

In Chapter 4, a detailed literature review of the different single waves in the history of China was presented. Under the values of gender equality and the emancipation of women, the status of women in contemporary China has significantly improved, with a female labor participation rate far higher than the world average.³¹³ From the early 21st century, ongoing social transition and intensifying economic transformations has supported the emergence of the fourth single wave in China. However, the fourth single wave has also precipitated significant and ongoing controversy. Chinese single women are experiencing unprecedented challenges and hostility which extends to violence in different aspects of their life, which cannot be separated from broader social attitudes and conditions that continue to exist in Chinese society.

In this chapter, underlying factors contributing to views of Chinese single women in contemporary China are explored, with the aim of understanding how social attitudes affect and reinforce negative perceptions and violence. The principal factors influencing violence against Chinese single women are summarized as the three aspects of *gender power*, *social control*, and *economic demand*; each of which is discussed in detail based on extensive document research.

First, dimensions of overt and covert aspects of gender inequality are discussed to better

³¹³ *Labor force participation rate* is the proportion of the population ages 15 and older that is economically active: all people who supply labor for the production of goods and services during a specified period. In 2017, the female labor rate in China ranged at about 61.5 percent. The global women's labor force participation rate was around 48.5 percent. (Data from the International Labor Organization). Available at: <https://wol.iza.org/uploads/articles/87/pdfs/female-labor-force-participation-in-developing-countries.pdf> (accessed 24 September 2019).

understand how gender power structures work in contemporary China, and how this supports violence against Chinese single women.

Second, the three dimensions of *gender order*, *population order* and *social order* in Chinese society are considered further, to analyze how social control impacts on violence against single women in China. Social control includes the official and societal controls or expectations regarding gender balance and gender domination; population growth and stability; and to official policies secure social and moral order. This understanding builds the connection between the purpose of social control and the experience of single women being attacked by multidimensional violence.

Finally, economic factors are also discussed with respect to their impact on Chinese single women. Economic considerations related to the family unit, market economy and commercial media are presented to present how financial structures perpetuate and continue patterns of violence against single women in China.

Thus, this chapter serves to present a better understanding of how macro-social, political, and economic factors influence the situation of single women both collectively and as individuals, and of the key driving forces which continue to afflict such women in contemporary Chinese society.

5.1 Gender power in contemporary China

Introduction

As a country with a long feudal history, China has longstanding cultural and societal biases against gender equality, with concepts of male superiority and patriarchal society tradition being deeply embedded in the history of Chinese feudal society (from the 11th Century B.C.E.

until the 1910s.).³¹⁴ From the early 20th Century, China remained a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society until 1949. Such an enduring tradition of thought has caused profound suffering to Chinese women, with various aspects of patriarchal culture depriving women rights to education, employment, and personal freedom until the rise of New China, when the feudal system was abolished and gender inequality gradually weakened.

Since Mao's famous slogan in the 1950s that "*women can hold up half the sky*", the status of Chinese women has considerably improved, including expanded access to education and employment and improved status within the family and society.³¹⁵ However, not all social reforms experience straightforward progress, but instead encounter opposition and rollbacks in certain historical periods. In recent years, the influence of patriarchy and expressions of men's superiority to women seems to have returned to modern China, and gender equality in China is facing a reverse trend.³¹⁶ Chinese society today is recognized as being a male-dominated society.

This section seeks to trace the overt and covert forms of gender inequality that continue to exist in China today, to better identify the underlying causes of hostility towards single women within the existing social gender framework.

5.1.1 Visible gender inequality in contemporary China

The pursuit of social justice and elimination of gender inequality has broad support globally,

³¹⁴ Xie, Yu. (2013). "Gender and Family in Contemporary China". *Population Studies Center Research Report 13-808*. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. 3.

³¹⁵ The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. (22 September 2015). *Gender Equality and Women's Development in China*. Available at: www.english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/09/22/content_281475195668448.htm (accessed 13 October 2018).

³¹⁶ Fincher, 2014; Liu, Bohong., Li, Ling., & Chunyu. (2015). *Gender Equality in China's Economic Transformation*, October 2014. United Nations System in China. 1-39. Available at: <http://www.un.org.cn/uploads/20180326/2063f2493b160cd25bb79ce54fe8dcc1.pdf> (accessed 20 December 2018).

however such ideals have not been fully implemented, and gender inequality today remains a pressing issue worth in every society including China.³¹⁷ On the surface, modern China has been tremendously successful in advancing gender equality and promoting women's development, however even so Chinese women hold lower social and economic status than men in many aspects.³¹⁸ Even the degree of inequality between men and women in China seems have to undergone a retrogressive trend in recent years.³¹⁹

Gender division in the family

As early as the 1950s, the first “*Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China*” promulgated after the founding of New China clearly defined women's equal status in marriage and family life. The amendment to the Chinese Marriage Law of 2001 reaffirmed the basic principles of equality between men and women, emphasized the equal status of spouses and the equality of rights and duties in marriage and family, and introduced new regulations prohibiting domestic violence and bigamy to further protect the rights of Chinese women in marriage.³²⁰ As a result, female marriage autonomy has been significantly improved, women's role in family decision-making has been notably enhanced, and personal and property rights have been further protected. Nonetheless in contemporary China, “*the ability for women to achieve equality is still far from secure, and evolving in an ambivalent manner*”³²¹. For example, Chinese women face limitations in the jobs available to them and a significant salary gap between men and women in the employment.³²² The overall China gender wage gap is 17.2 percent in 2018.³²³ Moreover, the roles of a couple remain deeply

³¹⁷ Liu, Li & Yang, 2014, 4.

³¹⁸ Li, 2000, 30.

³¹⁹ Fincher, 2014.

³²⁰ Zhang, Xuejun. (1 December 2002). “Amendment of the Marriage Law in China”. *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, 16 (3): 399-409.

³²¹ Attané, Isabelle. (2012). Being a Woman in China Today: A Demography of Gender. Special feature. Translated by Elizabeth Guill. *China perspectives*, 4: 5-15.

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ Hearle, Chris., & Hu, Difei. (April 2019). “WOW China Country Brief: On gender equality and women's economic empowerment”. *WOW Helpdesk Query 21 Prosperity Fund. UK Aid*. Final Report. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/796706/China-

gendered within Chinese family units, especially participation in domestic decisions, as women clearly remain under the control of their husbands.³²⁴

Currently, “*the role of Chinese women outside the home has been changed, but there is very little change about the expectations within the home*”.³²⁵ In a typical Chinese family, old-fashioned family patterns remain commonplace, as in a traditional Chinese proverb: “*Men are breadwinners; women are homemakers (男主外女主内)*”.³²⁶ In such family units, wives are mainly responsible for family activities within the family, including all unpaid care work, while husbands are mostly responsible for economic activities outside the home. The ancient teachings of “*women should follow three obediences and the four virtues (三从四德)*”³²⁷ and “*a good marriage is better than a career (干得好不如嫁得好)*”³²⁸ also still apply to today’s Chinese families.³²⁹ Gender roles are socially constructed to define male and female social roles, and Chinese women have been conditioned to play the social role of being a “*good wife and good mother*”.³³⁰ In this tradition, the personality of a good wife is cultivated and encouraged to include gentleness, considerateness, obedience, humility, and respect and the feelings of husbands and his parents and relatives as the first priority.

Where such expectations are not met, society may reprimand married women for not taking good care for the family, although married men failing to fulfill family caring role are not

brief.pdf (accessed 21 September 2019). 1-17.

³²⁴ Attané, 2012, 10-12.

³²⁵ Liu, Jianye., & Xu, Li. (2018). *Labor division in household in China: change of trends between 1989 and 2006*. Available at: www.iussp2009.princeton.edu/papers/92990 (accessed 13 October 2018).

³²⁶ Zuo, Jiping., & Tang, Shengming. (2000). “Breadwinner Status and Gender Ideologies of Men and Women regarding Family Roles”. *Sociological Perspectives*, 43 (1): 29-43.

³²⁷ ‘*Three obediences*’ are the three obediences for a woman, which were to obey her father as a daughter, her husband as a wife, and her sons in widowhood. ‘*Four virtues*’ are the four feminine virtues: wifely virtue, proper speech, modest manner/appearance, and diligent work.

³²⁸ It also means that ‘a good marriage is superior to a good career for women’.

³²⁹ Gao, Xiongya. (2003). “Women Existing for Men: Confucianism and Social Injustice against Women in China”. *Interdisciplinary Topics in Race, Gender, and Class*, 10 (3): 114-125.

³³⁰ Travagnin, Stefania. (2017). *Religion and Media in China: Insights and Case Studies from the Mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong*. Routledge, New York. 102.

criticized in the same way.³³¹ Thus, taking good care of family affairs is a continued expectation for married women in the Chinese context.³³² In addition, married women must give birth to children to the maximum extent possible to satisfy her husband's family, particularly after the replacement of China's one-child policy by the two-child policy in October 2015.³³³ These expectations greatly increase the difficulties of eliminating women's educational and professional disadvantages due to the social burdens to procreate from relatives and society.

On the one hand, Chinese women have to fulfill family responsibilities in a family to organize and provide support to her family, undertake child-rearing, care for their husbands, and honor her parents-in-law. On the other hand, most urban women also need to participate in full-time employment. As a result, Chinese women can freely participate in the labor market but also must take on double burdens in both the family and workplace.³³⁴

In addition, China's national laws still adopt double standards for protecting the personal rights of women in society and the family, in that the protection of women's personal rights is divided into two different areas: the public and private sphere.³³⁵ Chinese law protects women's individual rights only in the public domain, while women's individual rights cannot be guaranteed in the private sphere (such as within the family). For example, if a non-family member personally injures a woman, the *Public Security Administration Punishment Regulations* would be invoked to charge the offender; however, when women suffer domestic

³³¹ Bøe, Camilla Aasen. (December 2013). *Women and Family in Contemporary Urban China: Contested Female Individualization*. MA. Thesis. Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen, Norway. 66.

³³² *Ibid*, 78.

³³³ Zeng, Yi. (2016). "The effects of China's universal two-child policy". *Journal of the LANCET*, 388 (10054): 1930-1938.

³³⁴ Ohashi, Fumie. (2015). "The Construction of the Double Burden: Gendered Childcare System in Post-Mao China". *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 4 (1): 21-39.

³³⁵ Wang, Qiumeng. (2016). *Domestic Violence Law of China and the Institutional Design of Counter-DV Mechanism*. Master Thesis of the University of Washington, USA.

violence action can only be taken under civil law, unless a couple is divorced. In this way, China's legal provisions are mostly silent on the issue of family violence.³³⁶

Gender gap in education and employment

China's compulsory education law clearly defines women's rights and opportunities to receive education. The State takes practical measures and actions to ensure girls' rights to at least nine years of compulsory education and to increase women's access to secondary and higher education, while eliminating illiteracy and improving women's lifelong education and average years of schooling.³³⁷ In China's education system, women's literacy campaigns have been carried out in rural and urban areas since 1949, even through the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976).³³⁸

Since the promulgation of the *Compulsory Education Law* in 1986, the proportion of girls receiving higher education has grown rapidly.³³⁹ In 2016, female postgraduates reached about 50.6 percent in China.³⁴⁰ In addition, the Chinese family planning system has also promoted gender equality in education, especially for those one-child families in cities, where even patriarchal parents have had to "raise girls as boys" and place limited educational resources onto the only girl, this improving family expectations on their daughter's success.³⁴¹ Thus, Chinese women appear to enjoy equal educational rights and opportunities with men.

³³⁶ Liu, Meng., & Chan, Cecilia. (2008). "Family violence in China: Past and present". *Journal of New Global Development*, 16 (1): 74-87.

³³⁷ Wang, Jianliang. (1990). Compulsory Nine-Year Education in China: Issues and Prospects. *Journal of Education Finance*. The Oxford Round Table (Spring 1990), 15 (4): 487-497; Chakrabarti, Sreemati. (2014). *China's Compulsory Education Law*. Department of East Asian Studies. Working paper at the Institutes of Chinese studies. Beijing. 1-13. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/10000968/Chinas_Compulsory_Education_Law (accessed 5 November 2018).

³³⁸ Lavelly, William., Xiao, Zhenyu., Li, Bohua., & Freedman, Ronald. (1990). "The Rise in Female Education in China: National and Regional Patterns". *The China Quarterly*, 121: 61-93.

³³⁹ Fang, Hai., Eggleston, Karen N., Rizzo, John A., Rozelle, Scott., & Zeckhauser, Richard J. (June 2012). *The Returns to Education in China: Evidence from the 1986 Compulsory Education Law*. NBER Working Paper No. 18189. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

³⁴⁰ Hu, Ximeng. (28 October 2017). "Women dominate higher education in China". *Xinhua News*. Available at: <http://en.people.cn/n3/2017/1028/c90000-9285962.html> (accessed 21 September 2019).

³⁴¹ Tsui & Rich, 2002, 74-92.

Nevertheless, according to data released by the State Council's Outline for the Development of Children in China (2001-2010), although the current rate of enrolment of school-age girls in China has reached 98.8 percent, the rate of "missing" girls and girls dropping out from education before reaching middle school is still higher than that of boys. It is estimated about 3 million every year, in which two-thirds of them are girls.³⁴² Especially in rural areas, many girls are forced to leave school early to work to support their families' livelihoods, or because scarce educational resources are given to their brothers instead due to ingrained gender bias and prejudices.³⁴³

In addition, according to the statistics of the Ministry of Labor, the proportion of working-age women with professional skills is much lower than that of men in contemporary China.³⁴⁴ Since the first market-oriented economic reforms in the 1980s, the labor force participation rate of Chinese women has actually declined.³⁴⁵ Although the official description of gender equality is more optimistic, the fact is that women in China's fast-growing urban workforce are regressing in terms of labor and economic participation.³⁴⁶ According to census data, the full-time employment rate of urban working-age women has dropped from 77.4 percent in 1990 to a new low of 60.8 percent in 2010, with the female work participation rate being 20.3 percentage points lower than that of men.³⁴⁷

³⁴² Cai, Yiwen. (13 November 2017). "Changing rural education one girl at a time". *Women of China*. Available at: <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1001171/changing-rural-education-one-girl-at-a-time> (Accessed September 21 2019); *National Program of Action for Child Development in China (2001-2010)*/中国儿童发展国家行动纲领(2001-2010). Available at: <https://www.womenofchina.cn/womenofchina/html1/source/0/514-1.htm> (accessed 15 October 2018).

³⁴³ Li, Jingrong. (25 June 2004). "High Dropout Rates in Rural Schools". *China Through A Lens*. Available at: <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2004/Jun/99362.htm> (accessed 15 October 2018).

³⁴⁴ Li, 2002; Zhang, Tiedao., & Gao, Shuguo. (2003). *Matching gender disparity in China: achievement and lessons*. Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2003/4. Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality. Available at: https://portal.unesco.org/education/en/file_download.php (accessed 7 September 2018).

³⁴⁵ Liu, Li & Yang. 2014.

³⁴⁶ Charbonne, Donna. (ed.) (21 May 2013). "China's Entrenched Gender Gap". *The International Herald Tribune*. Available at: <http://www.w-t-w.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Chinas-Entrenched-Gender-Gap.pdf> (accessed 18 October 2018).

³⁴⁷ Liu, Li & Yang, 2014, 13; Fincher, 2014, 21; Attané, 2012, 8-9.

Although it is a global phenomenon that women experience workplace discrimination, in China it appears even more serious. In the Chinese workplace, women's marital status is an important consideration for employment, and married women face employment discrimination due to their perceived family responsibilities of giving birth and then taking long periods of maternity leave. To avoid this discrimination, many Chinese women return to work shortly after giving birth, even they have not recovered completely, for fear of losing their job.³⁴⁸ Compared to men, Chinese women are also more engaged in unstable and insecure flexible and casual work, and enter the informal employment field in the period after becoming a mother, which is a last resort for many Chinese women.³⁴⁹

Furthermore, the increasing employment gender gap in the labor market also includes age discrimination against older women, which undervalues women's experience and capabilities to varying degrees.³⁵⁰ The employment situation for Chinese women is not optimistic, and women are always first victims of resource competition for jobs in China. In 2017, China's unemployment rate was around 3.9 percent, and as the unemployment rate rises, a “*women return to the Home*” movement has emerged in China.³⁵¹ Women are called to resign in times of rising unemployment to make way for unemployed men, with the public support of the state media and some local governments.³⁵² The State has thus sought to restructure society according to the current situation of labor market to prioritize men and send women back to the domestic sphere.³⁵³ This has coincided with a resurgent belief in traditional gender roles which has continued to develop during a period of social economic transition. In other words,

³⁴⁸ Yi, Chin-Chun., & Chien, Wen-Yin. (2002). “The Linkage Between Work and Family: Female's Employment Patterns in Three Chinese Societies”. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 33 (3): 451-474. University of Toronto Press, Toronto.

³⁴⁹ Liu, Mingwei., & Smith, Chris. (2016). *China at Work: A Labour Process Perspective on the Transformation of Work*. Palgrave, London. 131-135; Bulger, Christine M. (2000). Fighting Gender Discrimination in the Chinese Workplace. *Journal of Boston College Third World Law*, 20 (2): 345-391; Huang, 2017.

³⁵⁰ Liu, 2009.

³⁵¹ Liu, Li & Yang, 2014, 17.

³⁵² Hong, Lida. *New York Times* (22 May 2013). *China's Entrenched Gender Gap*. Available at: <https://cn.nytimes.com/opinion/20130522/c22fincher/dual/> (accessed 12 October 2018).

³⁵³ Lee, Sangwha. (2016). “The Patriarchy in China: An Investigation of Public and Private Spheres”. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 5: 19-49.

the value of women in employment has never been treated as a seriously and permanent part of the Chinese labor market.

Gender limitations in political participation

Before the foundation of the New China in 1949, male power was predominant in China's semi-feudal society and women had few rights or ability to participate in political activities. Although a handful of female political participants did emerge in Chinese history, such as Empress Wu Zetian³⁵⁴ and Empress Cixi³⁵⁵, such exceptions were regarded as negative female models because they subverted the traditional image of the obedient Chinese woman. Nowadays, the development of advanced ideological trends such as democracy, freedom, and equality has supported the emergence of a Chinese feminist movement, and Chinese women have begun to engage in and support political activities to fight for their own rights and interests.

After the founding of the New China in 1949, the Chinese government formally advocated to improve women's political and legal status, and promulgated a series of important laws and regulations to enshrine equality between men and women as one of the legislative principles, and clearly stipulate the political and civic rights of women.³⁵⁶ The status of male dominance in the political arena has been challenged for a long time, however only a few women have begun to participate in the political arena, and fewer women still have held senior leadership roles within the Chinese political system.

Although Chinese women's political status since 1949 has greatly improved and women have

³⁵⁴ Empress Wu Zetian was a Chinese sovereign who ruled unofficially as Empress Consort and Empress Dowager and officially as Empress Regent during the brief Zhou dynasty (684-705 C.E), which interrupted the Tang dynasty. Wu was the sole officially recognized empress Regent of China in more than two millennia.

³⁵⁵ Empress Ci Xi was a Chinese Empress Dowager and Regent who effectively controlled the Chinese government in the late Qing dynasty for 47 years, from 1861 until her death in 1908.

³⁵⁶ Liu, Li & Yang, 2014.

greater involvement in the country's political life, women's political participation still does not equal their strength in Chinese society. Beyond the full realization of equal political participation between men and women, there are still significant problems in the actual level of participation, both in the proportion of female representatives and the ways in which Chinese women participate in the political field.³⁵⁷ The ratio of female candidates in political elections is relatively low, only accounting for 24 percent in the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China³⁵⁸, and is particularly under-represented in senior decision-making positions. Furthermore, where women hold decision-making roles, they are more often located in deputy positions.³⁵⁹

The degree of political participation of Chinese women, their rate of promotion, and the proportion of senior leaders in leadership positions are all far lower than those of men, as in terms of the proportion of women in politics, China has maintained a static rate of around 21 percent for many years, while the UN has set a global target of 30 percent.³⁶⁰ Female political participation also reflects outcomes in the Chinese corporate world, where the number of women in commercial senior management is far lower than that of men.³⁶¹ For example, in 2018 women only made up 9.4 percent of board directors in China's publicly traded companies.³⁶²

Globally political participation is a traditional field of men, and although women's political

³⁵⁷ Zeng, Benxiang. (February 2014). "Women's Political Participation in China: Improved or Not?" *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 15 (1): 136-150.

³⁵⁸ Xi, Jinping. (October 2017). *Compilation of the documents of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*. First edition. People's Publishing House, Beijing.

³⁵⁹ Howell, Jude. (January 2002). "Women's Political Participation in China: Struggling to Hold Up Half the Sky". *Journal of Parliamentary Affairs*, 55 (1): 43-56.

³⁶⁰ Yu, Fang. (September 2009). "Chinese Women's Participation in Politics: Problems, Causes and Countermeasures". *Journal of Nanchang University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, 40 (5): 23-28; Liang, Xuguang. (2000). "Problems, Causes and Countermeasures of Chinese Women's Participation in Politics". *Theoretical Journal*, 12 (95): 11-17.

³⁶¹ Zheng, Jianmin., & Qian, Wenrong. (June 2017). "Women Entrepreneurs' Political Participation in China". *Journal of Asian Women*, 33 (2): 23-42.

³⁶² Catalyst. (9 January 2019). *Women in the Workforce - China: Quick Take. Workplaces that work for women*. Available at: <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-the-workforce-china/> (accessed 23 September 2019).

participation and gender equality has become an important indicator of political and social progress, the political participation of Chinese women lags far behind international trends.³⁶³ Currently, only a few women (8 members) hold senior roles in the State Council (about 50 members in total) but in supportive or non-senior roles. In 2017, the new China Politburo includes only one woman - Sun Chunlan³⁶⁴ among its 25 members.³⁶⁵ In short, Chinese female political leaders exist mainly in a subordinate role, and provide a token response to formal commitments to gender equality. Combatting gender discrimination in the political field thus remains one of the key problems to addressing female equality in modern China.

Summary

With the continuous development and progress of Chinese society, the status of women has considerably improved and greater gender equality has been implemented in many aspects of social life. However, compared with other national policies such as the economic reform and liberalization, the basic national policy for gender equality has not truly penetrated into the values and concepts of Chinese society. Chinese women cannot be treated fairly as equal citizens, and there are still many inequalities between men and women in society, which are ignored in comparison to economic reforms.

China's economic development has not brought about great advancement in gender equality, and as earlier waves of labor shortages have ended in recent years, the return to traditional cultural gender concepts has again begun to hinder women's economic participation in China. Workplaces are collaborating with social attitudes to expel women from public spaces including paid work, and urging them returning to home and the private sphere. In response,

³⁶³ Zeng, 2014, 15-16.

³⁶⁴ Since 2018, Sun Chunlan has been a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee, Vice Premier of the State Council, and member of the party group of the People's Republic of China.

³⁶⁵ Ruwitch, John. (25 October 2017). "Women fail to crack China's glass ceiling as party picks new leaders". *World News of Thomson Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-congress-women/women-fail-to-crack-chinas-glass-ceiling-as-party-picks-new-leaders-idUSKBN1CU19I> (accessed 23 September 2019).

the return to traditional gender values has become more mainstream and taken for granted in modern China.

Following the economic opening up policy of China since 1978, Chinese women were encouraged to expand their horizons from the private to the public domain. Today however, an increasing number of people, including young women themselves, consider that family happiness and career success cannot be achieved together, and that women should prioritize family duties. The full-time wife phenomenon has emerged in China largely since the late twentieth century. For those married women, this may be an ideal state (they have the skills and experience to work, but choose to take care of her family at home), or for women who worry about the conflicts between family and work. On the other hand, to be full-time wives also carries social and economic status, as it further proves that they are married to good men with high incomes.³⁶⁶ In the “Gender Disparity Report” published by the World Economic Forum, China’s gender equality score remained among the top 60 of the world’s 145 countries in 2008 and 2009, with an economic equality score of 38 in 2009. However, in recent years since the reemergence of official calls for “women returning home”, the equality of men and women in China has reduced to 99 of 144 in the same Gender Disparity rankings.³⁶⁷

5.1.2 Invisible gender inequality

Although different countries in the world hold varied religious beliefs and historical traditions, the subordinate status of women below men is common across almost all cultures. Nevertheless, specific cultures hold significant influence on gender inequality, which is connected to different cultural values.³⁶⁸ According to gender theory, social differences

³⁶⁶ Fang, Ying., & Walker, Alan. (December 2015). “Full-time wife and the change of gender order in the Chinese City”. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology*, 2 (4): 1-19.

³⁶⁷ The World Economic Forum 2016. *The Global Gender Gap Report in 2016*. (2016). Available at: <https://www.reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/rankings/> (accessed 15 October 2018).

³⁶⁸ Hofstede, Geert. (2011). “Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context”. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*. 2.1. <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014>

between the sexes are determined not by natural differences, but are rather constructed by cultural practices and shaped by the institutional arrangements in society.³⁶⁹ In recent decades however, despite recent progress gender inequality has become increasingly ambiguous and hidden, as legal and political reforms have fostered the perception of equal treatment that is not yet matched by reality in contemporary China.

Many Chinese women remained silent not only in previous periods of Chinese history, but continue to be absent from mainstream discourse today. Women's liberation and a full awareness of gender inequality have not been awakened in mainstream Chinese society. Under a stereotyped understanding of economic determinism, the gender equality movement since the 1950s, like many other social movements in China, has placed significant emphasis on material and institutional equality, while neglecting the maintenance of unequal ideas and concepts which remain embedded in Chinese traditional culture.³⁷⁰ In particular, many women do not recognize gender inequality but accept the status quo, and have been inured to pervasive social inequality. In terms of democratic participation, societal apathy towards female political participation is a widespread phenomenon in China, which reflects and results from low autonomy and self-awareness of female rights and equal status in China.³⁷¹

From this perspective, reasons for women's low participation results from women's own social and cultural restrictions, which could be manifested in three aspects. Firstly, there is the constraint of low economic power. Any citizen's participation in politics requires a certain economic material basis, and women are no exception. However, compared to men, women typically bear a double burden both inside and outside the home. As a result, women have historically suffered disadvantages in terms of employment, income and economic

³⁶⁹ Lindsey, Linda L. (2011). *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective*. (5th Edition). PHI Learning, New Delhi. India. 4.

³⁷⁰ Zeng, 2014, 147.

³⁷¹ Guo, 2013, 27.

independence.³⁷²

Secondly, there are insufficient institutions and mechanisms for women to fight for their legal, economic and political rights. Chinese regulations, laws and mechanisms to promote women's participation in politics are still insufficient. In addition, people's respect and application of relevant laws and regulations to promote female equality or equal participation are also lacking.³⁷³

Thirdly, Chinese women struggle against the negative impact of aspects of Chinese traditional culture. In a male-centric society, gender bias cannot be easily removed. The strong tendency of traditional Chinese culture to discourage women from active participation in decision-making encourages political indifference among a large portion of the middle class.³⁷⁴ From a gender perspective therefore, traditional Chinese culture is a male-dominant culture that devalues women and perceives women as vassals for men, and which seeks to exclude and marginalize women from social and political life.³⁷⁵

Summary

Thus, although women's rights have increased in education, work and political participation since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the measures for gender equality achieved in China have been largely concessionary, and lacking in true ideological commitment needed to combat gender-based violence, employment discrimination and marginalization. Gender equality remains mainly a propaganda slogan in politics, and pre-existing feudal ideas of male superiority remain deep-seated in Chinese society.³⁷⁶

³⁷² *Ibid*, 38; Liu, Li & Yang. 2014, 5-6.

³⁷³ Guo, 2013, 34-36.

³⁷⁴ Zeng, 2014, 147; Guo, 2013, 15.

³⁷⁵ Shi, Fenglian. (2010). *Research on contemporary Chinese women's political participation from the perspective of gender*. PhD Thesis, Shandong University, China.

³⁷⁶ Li, Huiying. (2012). "Advocacy and Advocacy of New Population Concept and Gender Equality". *Journal of Scientific Socialism*, 2: 107-112.

Government slogans used to promote gender equality are not specific, such as “*Girls and boys have equal rights*”, or “*Promoting gender equality, eliminating gender discrimination*.”³⁷⁷ However, what are the equal rights? Is the right to live, personal rights, rights of health, development, and education, or the right to participate in politics and employment? How are they enforced? What are the provisions of the law? If these rights are violated, what are the rights protection channels? This type of simplistic slogan however fails to play a real educative role to promote equality between men and women. Women are still seen as inferior to men, while the lack of independent consciousness among Chinese women also hinders the development of gender equality. In short, women’s subjugation, passivity and lack of awareness on demanding gender inequality prevent the further advancement of gender equality in contemporary China to the level seen in other countries.

5.1.3 Conflicts between gender power and Chinese single women

The following section focuses specifically on the ways in which the ideology of male superiority supports gender inequality, and on how this has shaped the subsequent gender power structures in China. Such dynamics have supported the continuation of gender as a key form of unquestioned power in Chinese culture and society.

In contemporary China, gender equality remains an unattainable dream, despite significant progress in promoting gender equality and the advancement of women in many fields over recent decades. Nevertheless, due to the constraints and restrictions on the level of economic and social development, and especially in building awareness on improving women’s status, the promotion of gender equality in China continues to face many obstacles to progress. Behind the public recognition and celebration of gender equality, underlying societal values

³⁷⁷ Jiang, Jue. (October 2018). “Women’s Rights and Gender Equality in China: The Development and Struggle in Chains of State Feminism.” Sarah Biddulph and Joshua Rosenzweig (eds.), *Handbook on Human Rights in China*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Northampton, Massachusetts, USA. 1-21.

continue to expect women to take on the burden of childcare and housework at home.³⁷⁸ For example, according to the 2012 Attané statistics report³⁷⁹, a Chinese working woman spent on average 2.5 to 3 times longer each day on domestic tasks than men; however few married women challenged this division of tasks. Nowadays, unequal opportunities between women from different regions, social classes, cultures, and educational levels have made the advancement of women's interests more complex. Increased social stratification between women of different backgrounds therefore increased the need and urgency of protecting common interests affecting all women, and reducing barriers between different women's groups.³⁸⁰ This includes barriers between married and unmarried women or divorced women; and between rural, migrant women and urban women. In many areas of China, the history and cultural practices of inequality have not yet been eliminated, which further complicates efforts to advance gender equality.

As addressed, China remains a male-dominated culture, and Chinese women are not treated equally in society as portrayed in state propaganda. While on the surface the status and rights of Chinese women have improved, unfortunately, gender discrimination has become subtler, changing its hue and adapting even as the Chinese state professes to outlaw the mistreatment of women. Cultural expectations and standards towards women have also not yet become more diverse, and marriage is still a key standard to evaluate a woman's success and life.

Overall men have higher status and more rights than women in China. Women are valued primarily for their family functions of taking care of home life, reproduction and child-rearing, and these concepts centering gender roles. Single women thus challenge and break with

³⁷⁸ Fincher, 2014.

³⁷⁹ Attané, Isabelle. (2012). *Being a Woman in China Today: A Demography of Gender*. No. 2012/4. Special feature. China perspectives. Translated by Elizabeth Guill. 4: 5-15.

³⁸⁰ Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. (22 September 2015). White Paper on Gender Equality and Women's Development in China. Published on the Official Website of the Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. *Journal of Chinese Women*, English Monthly, 10: 26-27.

tradition due to remaining single. In recent years, the increasing numbers of single women has upset a rigidly-patriarchal society in a way that threatens inherent gender power structures in China, and challenges the gender rule of male rights to some extent.³⁸¹ Thus, many cultural traditionalists fear that the rise in single women would overturn the inherent social structures. If this continues, then patriarchy could not be maintained. In response, reinforcement of gender power could be an important means to prevent substantive social change. This also applies to gender-based violence against Chinese single women, which derives from a dualistic gender concept and the use of gender to regulate and control women's agency.³⁸² Single women exist outside of the broader gender framework enforcing increasing patriarchal norms in China.³⁸³ In other words, the role of single women breaks the rules of the game inherent in the patriarchal culture that exists in Chinese society.

Therefore, single women experience the struggle between traditional social customs and expectations and changing modern attitudes towards marriage. In accordance with research findings from in-depth interviews (discussed further in Chapter 6), single women are also experiencing a resurgence of gender inequality including violence in China. Based on individualized accounts of single women's suffering, it is likely that violence against single women will increase in parallel with the growing "marriage squeeze" in China, with single women facing increased pressure and resentment due to their personal relationship choices.

³⁸¹ Zhou, Songqing. (2010). "Leftover women" and gender domination". *Journal of China Youth Research*, 5: 14-18.

³⁸² Fan, 2014.

³⁸³ Hahn & Elshult, 2016.

5.2 Social control in contemporary China

Introduction

To achieve social stability, in 2006 former President Hu Jintao promoted the slogan of “*Building a harmonious society*” as one of the central political slogans in China.³⁸⁴ To achieve this goal, everything should follow, be shaped or adapted by means of social control from the government.³⁸⁵ To achieve this, the “*Chinese Dream*”³⁸⁶, an inspirational slogan proposed by president Xi Jinping in 2013, aimed to strengthen and build a “*Harmonious China (amity among social classes)*”³⁸⁷. In the face of increasing inequality and social dissatisfaction during the transition period of economic transformation, the goal of achieving a “*harmonious society*” has been prioritized with the aim of “*maintaining stability*” at all costs.³⁸⁸

The following section explores three aspects of social control in contemporary China, namely: *maintaining gender order*, *maintaining population order*, and *maintaining social order*. These aspects are relevant to ascertain whether the increasing number of single women is seen to negatively impacted on current societal stability, and thereby also be a factor behind Chinese single women being disfavored and discriminated against in contemporary China.

³⁸⁴ Hao, Shiyuan. (2015). *Building a Harmonious Society and Achieving Sound Development. How the Communist Party of China Manages the Issue of Nationality*. Jiangxi People's Publishing House. Nanchang City, China. 233-278.

³⁸⁵ Zheng, Yongnian., & Tok, Sow Keat. (October 2007). “*Harmonious society and harmonious world: China's policy discourse under Hu Jintao.*”China Policy Institute of the University of Nottingham. UK. 26: 1-12. Available at: <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/iaps/documents/cpi/briefings/briefing-26-harmonious-society-and-harmonious-world.pdf> (accessed 20 December 2018).

³⁸⁶ Xi's *Chinese Dream* is described as achieving the material goal of China becoming a “moderately well-off society” by about 2020, the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party, and the modernization goal of China becoming a fully developed nation by about 2049, the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic.

³⁸⁷ The Chinese Dream has four parts: Strong China (economically, politically, diplomatically, scientifically, militarily); Civilized China (equity and fairness, rich culture, high morals); Harmonious China (amity among social classes); Beautiful China (healthy environment, low pollution).

³⁸⁸ Han, Aiguo. (August 2008). “Building a Harmonious Society and Achieving Individual Harmony”. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 13 (2): 143-164.

5.2.1 Maintaining gender order³⁸⁹

Gender order in China

Gender roles are conditioned by culture, social structures, social policy, and political economy, and regulate the different personalities, roles and actions of men and women.³⁹⁰ Chinese society has been a long and stable history, with a patriarchal culture continuing for thousands of years. The traditional adage of “*man caring for the outside, woman caring for the family*” is still considered by many Chinese to apply to the present day. In the past, men had indispensable roles as agricultural workers, as soldiers, and as the breadwinner in Chinese families. Due to the primary role that men played in farming, men were also dominant both outside and within the family.

In contrast, continuing demands for mental labor and applied skills in the modern knowledge economy has significantly reduced the importance of personal physical strength and endurance, which in turn has reduced the basis for men’s dominance in physical endeavors. In addition, economic reforms and the *Open Door policy* occurring since the 1980s in China has also brought about massive changes in people’s social life, leading to the awakening of women’s initial independent consciousness and realization of their equal status.³⁹¹ Many Chinese women began to push for equal status in the workplace or within the family, not only expecting to gain equal status with men, but also to have an increased role in decision-making. Therefore, the traditional gender order and power relations are facing an unprecedented challenge in contemporary China, and the social dynamics of individuals who live outside traditional gender constructs.

³⁸⁹ In this study, “gender order” refers to the heteronormative marriage and patriarchal gender order.

³⁹⁰ Fang & Walker, 2015.

³⁹¹ Min, Dongchao. (2011). “From Men-Women Equality to Gender Equality: The Zigzag Road of Women’s Political Participation in China”. *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies*, 17 (3): 7-24.

Role of single women

In the traditional gender order, domestic work and family life are the most important areas that determine the status of women; however, economic and labor participation makes it more difficult for women to balance their family and domestic needs.³⁹² In the 21st century, many employed women are choosing to delay marriage or remain single, which is becoming a growing phenomenon. Furthermore, with the improvement of living standards and individualism, more and more women see a better personal life as a right.³⁹³ Many single women do not see the advantage of getting married anymore, due to their increasing economic stability and independence.³⁹⁴ Nevertheless, many Chinese feel the position of single women poses a threat to China's inherent gender order structure, with fears that the old gender order could be replaced by an increasing number of single women.³⁹⁵ Many urban single women also hold certain advantages in terms of economic strength and an advanced educational background, which provide advantages to remaining outside of the gender framework of a traditional marriage and family life:

*Long-term singles do not meet gender expectations, that is, women's social values are determined by their relationship with men and the perception that women's primary role is to care for husbands and children.*³⁹⁶

The emergence of a large number of single women has therefore created unease in the hitherto extremely stable patriarchal society in China, as the concept of single women challenges the supreme power of men to make rules, and by their existence opposes traditional moral standards of women being in a subordinate position. In recent years (and in spite of state gender equality measures), the Chinese State has supported both official and unofficial means

³⁹² Fang & Walker, 2015.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁴ Becker, 1981.

³⁹⁵ Hahn & Elshult, 2016, 21-22.

³⁹⁶ Yodovich, Neta., & Lahad, Kinneret. (2018). 'I don't think this woman had anyone in her life': Loneliness and singlehood in Six Feet Under." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 2018, 25: 444-454.

for ensure the existing gender order.³⁹⁷ For example, the increasing use of the pejorative term “*leftover women*” in recent years, including in state media, has been a highly effective social tool to attack single women, and to try to coerce and encourage women to enter the marriage market. Nevertheless, in China’s social and economic transition, the independence and growing status of female groups has become more apparent, which inevitably questions the dominant economic and social power of men. In short, the role of single women challenges and threatens the gendered order of men being prioritized over women, which has been taken for granted in China for centuries as an unshakable social position.

Responses to maintain gender order

As a patriarchal country, China’s gendered advantage towards males has been guaranteed completely since ancient times. However as there has been a rise in the number of single women, one consequence is a corresponding increase in unmarried men. The tendency however of single women as a generally higher-status, economically significant social group represents a kind of subversion and challenge to the patriarchal culture, and a challenge to the dominance and primacy of men.³⁹⁸ Consequently, the role of single women sharply conflicts with the existing gender order in China, in which maintaining the status quo becomes an imperative for those threatened by change.

5.2.2 Maintaining population order

Population gender imbalance in contemporary China

The number of males per 100 females in a population measures the sex ratio in a country.³⁹⁹ According to the law of natural reproduction, the ideal sex ratio should be approximately

³⁹⁷ Fang & Walker, 2015.

³⁹⁸ Fan, Xiaoguang., & Yuan, Rihua. (2006). “Youth Bachelor in Social Change: A Sociological Interpretation”. *Journal of Youth Studies*. Beijing. 8-10.

³⁹⁹ Hesketh & Zhu, 2006, 5; Bhattacharya, Prabir C. (November 2012). *Gender Inequality and the Sex Ratio in Three Emerging Economies*. Heriot-Watt University Economics Discussion Papers 1201. Department of Economics, School of Management and Languages, Heriot Watt University. Dubai. No. 2012-01.1-29.

1:1.⁴⁰⁰ However, in many countries and regions, especially in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, there are higher numbers of men than women, and with a higher number of male newborns than girls.⁴⁰¹ This has led to the phenomenon of “*missing women*” or “*missing girls*”⁴⁰², in which “*many female babies are never born because they disappear before birth or die early in childhood*”.⁴⁰³ In China, one of the major negative effects of the one-child policy has been a huge reduction of the female population.⁴⁰⁴ The sex ratio deviates from these norms because of the tradition of son preference, and the pursuit of other measures to select baby gender.⁴⁰⁵ Furthermore, population migration from rural to urban areas has also impacted on a changed gender imbalance in persons of marriageable age in the cities, as educated women in particular migrate to urban areas.⁴⁰⁶ Single child families in urban areas also have better access to education and employment opportunities, which could be another reason why unmarried women mostly reside in cities.

Although China is a populous country, the “*one-child policy*”⁴⁰⁷ introduced in 1979 effectively controlled the population for an extended period, except in remote areas of China.⁴⁰⁸ In many disadvantaged areas and rural areas where patriarchal concepts are deeply entrenched, many families prefer to have sons at all costs, while some clinics adopted illegal practices such as identifying gender when pregnant, to increase the odds of having a boy.⁴⁰⁹ This has created a situation where there are far more boys and fewer girls in contemporary

⁴⁰⁰ Wilson, David Sloan., & Colwell, Robert K. (September 1981). Evolution of Sex Ratio in Structured Demes. *Journal of Society for the Study of Evolution*, 35 (5): 882-897.

⁴⁰¹ Sen, Amartya. (20 December 1990). *More Than 100 Million Women Are Missing*. The New York Review of Books. Available at: <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1990/12/20/more-than-100-million-women-are-missing/> (accessed 2 December 2018).

⁴⁰² Sen, A., 1990; Jiang, Quanbao., Li, Shuzhuo., & Feldman, Marcus W. (2013). China's Population Policy at the Crossroads: Social Impacts and Prospects. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 41 (2): 193-218.

⁴⁰³ Jiang, Li & Feldman, 2013, 193-218.

⁴⁰⁴ Hahn & Elshult, 2016, 1-2; Jiang, Li & Feldman, 2013.

⁴⁰⁵ Hesketh & Zhu, 2006.

⁴⁰⁶ Zhang, 2013, 50-53.

⁴⁰⁷ In 1979, the Chinese Government introduced a mandatory social policy requiring couples from China's ethnic Han majority to limit themselves to having only one child. The family planning program aimed to control China's rapidly growing population.

⁴⁰⁸ Li, Jiali. (September 1995). “China's One-Child Policy: How and How Well Has It Worked? A Case Study of Hebei Province, 1979-88”. *Journal of Population and Development Review*, 21 (3): 563-585.

⁴⁰⁹ Murphy, Tao & Lu, 2011, 665-690.

China.

The persisting sex ratio imbalance in China including from selective terminations derives from negative attitudes towards women under traditional patriarchal ideology, which if unaddressed, may lead to social instability. Since the mid-1980s, the sex ratio at birth (male to female newborns) in China has been high, leading to a situation in which the current proportion of men and women at the age of marriage is unbalanced.⁴¹⁰ According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the male population in China was 33.76 million higher than the female population in 2014, mostly due to gender-selective abortions.⁴¹¹ According to the “*Population Development and the 2020 Plan*” (2006) issued by the State Council, it is expected that there will be around 30 million more males than females aged 20 to 45 years old (at the marriageable age) by 2020. Additionally, the imbalance between male and female means that many young people may not be able to get married. In this context, the increase in single women is seen to worsen the demographic situation of “more men and fewer women” in the marriage market. In such a patriarchal construct, the advancement of women is seen as benefiting society as a whole.⁴¹²

As the population structure is thus unbalanced, which is not conducive to the sustainable development of the population, and China’s low birth rate and high number of unmarried people may in time lead to a shrinking population.⁴¹³ The increase in population being single, especially more and more single women, directly leads to an decrease in the number of people

⁴¹⁰ Hesketh, Therese., & Zhu, Weixing. (September 2006). Abnormal sex ratios in human populations: Causes and consequences. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 103 (36): 13271-13275;

⁴¹¹ Jiang, Quanbao., Li, Shuzhuo., Feldman, Marcus W., & Sánchez-Barricarte, Jesús Javier. (2012). “Estimates of Missing Women in Twentieth Century China”. *Continuity and Change*, 27 (3): 61-479; Shi, Peijun, 2016, 14.

⁴¹² Qu, Wenyong., & Wang, Fang. (2009). “Analysis of the social causes of the popularization of being single”. *Journal of Youth Exploration*, 4: 89-91.

⁴¹³ Chang, Gordon G. (May-June 2015). “Shrinking China: A Demographic Crisis”. *Journal of World Affairs*. Available at: www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/shrinking-china-demographic-crisis (accessed 18 October 2018).

of prime marriage and childbearing age, and a decrease in the fertility rate. According to China's National Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Civil Affairs, China's marriage rate in 2018 was the lowest since 2013⁴¹⁴, at 'only 0.72 percent'⁴¹⁵. This is matched by an increasing number of "*leftover men*" as well as "*leftover women*", who are also of marriageable age but cannot find a partner.

The loosening of traditional family marriage and family structures (such as the filial piety culture) has further weakened the functions of family production, consumption and childbirth, and has resulted in series of related social problems and further "marriage squeezes" on women. The sex ratio of Chinese single men and women born in the 1980s was 1.36, while the sex ratio of single men and women born in the 1970s doubled to 2.06 in China.⁴¹⁶ Therefore, the proportion of men and women of current childbearing age is seriously out of balance in contemporary China. In addition, it is noteworthy that people with lower educational levels in rural areas have more willingness to have more children, compared to other groups in urban areas. During the period of the one-child policy, more stringent controls on birth restrictions were applied towards civil servants, employees of state-owned enterprises and residents of big cities, compared to other Chinese in rural areas. Therefore, the task of encouraging increased fertility rates is more challenging in urban areas, where the majority of single unmarried women live.

The "*Population and Family Planning Law of China*", promulgated in 2005, further stipulated that: "*Both husband and wife should jointly assume responsibility for family planning, and provided favorable conditions for achieving gender equality in family life as well as the rights*

⁴¹⁴ China Daily. (21 March 2019). "Marriage rate in China hits lowest on record". Available at: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201903/21/WS5c92ee53a3104842260b1c11.html> (accessed 25 September 2019).

⁴¹⁵ 'Only 0.72 percent' means that 7.2 people per 1000 people got married.

⁴¹⁶ Xie, 2017.

to the survival and development of baby girls and girls are guaranteed’.⁴¹⁷ In this way, the government also sought to curb phenomenon of unbalanced sex ratio of birth babies.⁴¹⁸ Furthermore, China’s Population and Family Planning Law prohibits the use of ultrasound technology and other technical means for non-medical fetal sex identification, and does not allow non-medically needed artificial sex termination of pregnancy.⁴¹⁹ The Chinese government sees this is a major problem that it seeks to reverse at all costs. However, these policies have been initiated too late, and have not been enforced effectively in many rural or even some urban areas in China. As such, there exists a serious problem of imbalanced sex ratio across many generations of Chinese citizens.⁴²⁰

An aging society

Societal development results from the combined effects of material and individual production. Many states fear that, with a static population size, an aging society cannot compete with other countries in terms of innovation, creativity, progress and vitality.⁴²¹ Birth restrictions and increasing life expectancies therefore increase the demographic process of aging. Under a stringent fertility restriction policy, China’s average age is increasing, and its aging population may eventually rank the largest in the world.⁴²² Long-term effects of a low fertility rate will continue to deepen China’s aging problem, and may lead eventually to a decline in the

⁴¹⁷ The National Working Committee on Children and Women under the State Council. (2015). *White Paper on the State of Gender Equality and Women’s Development in China*. Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China. 《中国性别平等与妇女发展状况》白皮书. 中华人民共和国国务院新闻办公室. Available at: http://www.nwccw.gov.cn/2017-04/11/content_155757.htm (accessed at 23 September 2019).

⁴¹⁸ *Population and Family Planning Law of the People’s Republic of China* (Order of the President No.63). Available at: http://www.gov.cn/english/laws/2005-10/11/content_75954.htm (accessed 18 October 2018).

⁴¹⁹ Attané, 2002.

⁴²⁰ Wang, Feng. (2017). “Policy Response to Low Fertility in China: Too Little, Too late.” *Asian Pacific Issues*. 130. Publisher: Honolulu: East-West Center. 1-4.

⁴²¹ Dong, Keyong. (August 2016). *Population Aging and Its Influences on the Economy and Society in China*. Component One of Social Protection Reform Project (EU-CHINA). Renmin University of China. Beijing. 1-59. Available at: https://www.euchinasprp.eu/images/ProjectMemorabilia/2016Reports/Chinas_ageing_population_and_its_economic_and_social_impact.pdf (accessed 8 November 2018).

⁴²² Chi, Dehua. (27 February 2018). “China’s elderly population continues to rise, with 241 million now 60 or over”. *Bringing China Closer*. Available at: <https://gbtimes.com/chinas-elderly-population-continues-to-rise> (accessed 19 October 2018).

productivity of the population.⁴²³

The aging population in China is becoming a more pressing financial and social concern, as the parents of the only-child generation are approaching old age⁴²⁴ and placing stress on China's pension system.⁴²⁵ According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, in 2016 China's working population aged 16-59 was 907.47 million; however in 2017, the population declined to 900.91 million, or a decrease of 5.48 million.⁴²⁶ This was the sixth consecutive year-on-year decline in the working-age population since 2012. With both the birthrate and working-age population declining, China's demographic age profile has further increased in China.⁴²⁷ In 2016, the proportion of the population aged over 60 in China accounted for 16.7 percent of the total population; in 2017, this proportion increased to 17.3 percent, or about 240 million persons. Among them, the population over 65 years old accounted for 11.4 percent of the total population, or close to 160 million.⁴²⁸ It is estimated that by 2030, China will prematurely begin status as a "super aging society", and the proportion of people over the age of 60 will be about 25 percent.⁴²⁹

To solve the problems of an aging population, China needs to improve the social pension security system and vigorously develop the pension industry; and also to increase the fertility

⁴²³ Dong, Zhiqiang. (2000). "Economic Analysis of Marriage". *Journal of Reform and Theory*, 116 (8): 42-44.

⁴²⁴ China Power Team. (15 February 2016). "Does China have an aging problem?" *China Power*. Available at: <https://chinapower.csis.org/aging-problem/> (accessed 19 October 2018).

⁴²⁵ Liu, Tao., & Sun, Li. (2016). "Pension Reform in China". *Journal of Aging & Social Policy*, 28 (1): 15-28.

⁴²⁶ The National Bureau of Statistics of China. (20 January 2017). *2016: A Good Start for China's Economy during the 13th Five-Year Plan Period*. Available at: http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/pressrelease/201701/t20170120_1455922.html (accessed 20 October 2018).

⁴²⁷ Mu, Guangzong. (24 January 2018). *China's worrying decline in birth rate: China Daily columnist*. Available at: <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/chinas-worrying-decline-in-birth-rate-china-daily-columnist> (accessed 20 October 2018).

⁴²⁸ Wright, Anne. (27 February 2018). "China: An Ageing Society, The Next Big Challenge for Policy Makers". *CEO World*. Available at: <https://www.ceoworld.biz/2018/02/27/china-an-ageing-society-the-next-big-challenge-for-policy-makers/> (accessed 15 October 2018).

⁴²⁹ Kotecki, Peter. (13 August 2018). "China's 'one-child' policy led to a demographic time bomb, and now the country is scrambling to undo it." *Business Insider*. Available at: <https://www.businessinsider.de/china-demographic-time-bomb-one-child-limit-2018-8?r=US&IR=T> (accessed 15 October 2018).

rate. The characteristics of aging in Chinese society are fast and widespread. In addition, the poverty rate among China's elderly population aged over 60 is approximately 17.5 percent, which is much higher than the average level of the countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).⁴³⁰ According to the 2018 China Pension Actuarial Report released by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the income growth rate for pensions has dropped to less than 10 percent, while expenses are still high, and the current government expense growth rate has slipped to only 5 percent.⁴³¹

In this context, the phenomenon of a growing single population is becoming more noticeable in China, including its effect on a lower fertility rate, and the increase in the unmarried population in the most suitable marriage and childbearing age.⁴³² The increased benefits of higher education and expanding opportunities for individual actualization have brought about new economic options and freedoms for individuals, but with consequences for childbearing. In a society where a single population accounts for 30% of the total population, the future population impact is just as important as population aging, because unmarried and infertile individuals also lead to a faster rate of population decline.⁴³³

Thus, China's imbalanced population structure, decreased working-age population, and serious aging problem all create challenging conditions to the maintenance of a sustainable population size in contemporary China.⁴³⁴

⁴³⁰ Jiang, Q., Yang, S., & Sánchez-Barricarte. (18 July 2016). "Can China afford rapid aging?" *Journal of Springerplus*, 5 (1): 1107.

⁴³¹ China Pension Actuarial Report 2018-2012. 《中国养老金精算报告 2018-2022》.

⁴³² Wang, 2017.

⁴³³ Brainerd, Elizabeth. (2014). "Can government policies reverse undesirable declines in fertility?" *IZA World of Labor*. 23. Bonn, Germany. 5.

⁴³⁴ Zeng, Yi., & Hesketh, Therese. (October 2016). The effects of China's universal two-child policy. *Journal of The Lancet*, 388 (10054): 1930-1938.

Impact of the two-child family policy

In 2016, the Chinese government formally ended its one-child policy it had implemented for more than 30 years, and replaced it with a new system where most families can have up to two children.⁴³⁵ The implementation of the second child policy has occurred in response to changing economic development and population structures, and sought to achieve greater freedom of the birth rate. However it also resulted in another huge experiment in population engineering, as the Chinese government still aims to control the overall birthrate of the population.⁴³⁶ Faced with a sharp drop in birth rates, an aging population and a shrinking workforce, it is hoped that the two-child policy will achieve 3 million new births each year by 2020, and by 2050 increase the labor force by more than 30 million.⁴³⁷ In spite of the implementation of the two-child policy, people's fertility desires are getting lower as family economic pressures increase, and the expected baby boom has not appeared.

After implementing the new two-child policy in 2016, many experts predicted a bounce in childbearing in 2017. However, birth data for 2017 showed that many experts overestimated the willingness of couples of childbearing age to have two children. In the first year of implementation of the new policy in 2016, the total number of births reached 17.86 million, an increase of 1.31 million over the previous year. This was the highest year for newborns in China since 2000.⁴³⁸ The primary reason for this initial increase is the desire of many couples to have two children, which had previously been prevented by the one-child policy. However,

⁴³⁵ A two-child policy is a government-imposed limit of two children allowed per family, or the payment of government subsidies only to the first two children. Since 2016, it has been implemented in China, replacing the country's previous one-child policy.

⁴³⁶ Fincher, Leta Hong. (20 February 2018). *China Dropped Its One-Child Policy. So Why Aren't Chinese Women Having More Babies?* Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/20/opinion/china-women-birthrate-rights.html> (accessed 20 October 2018).

⁴³⁷ Zhong, Xiaohua. (2016). "Evaluation and Optimization Strategy of the Implementation Effect of the "Comprehensive Two-Child" Policy-Based on the Survey of the Willingness to Re-fertility of Urban "Double-Family" Couples". *China Administration*, 7: 127-131.

⁴³⁸ Li, Dandan. (2018). *The second year of the "Comprehensive Two-Child" policy: The population born in 2017 fell*. Available at: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1589915207609436875&wfr=spider&for=pc> (accessed 10 October 2018).

compared with the previous year, the birth rate in China fell by 3.5 percent in 2017.⁴³⁹ Thus, the couple's desire to give birth was concentrated in the period of the initial release of the policy. In the coming years, the country's birth population is likely to continue to decrease.

Underlying reasons for the low fertility desire could be that the cost of raising children is too high, and many working women worry that having two children would lead to unfavorable situation or affect their promotion in the workplace, aggravating existing implicit employment discrimination.⁴⁴⁰ In other words, China's latest family planning policy (the two-child policy) is a continuing violation of women's rights. Because fertility is still regulated by the state, and not based solely on personal choice, this is an ineffective means of setting the government's population growth agenda. Furthermore, in China, as in other countries in the world, there is a higher fertility rate in the countryside compared to urban areas. With the acceleration of urbanization in China, the fertility rate is likely to continue to decline. From this perspective, the growing number of single persons who are not married or have no children means an aging workforce with fewer new workers supporting an aging society.

As previously noted, the increased number of single women has dramatically changed the structure of Chinese society. With a high rate of singles, the fertility rate inevitably decreases and the age structure of the population is inverted. Even so, despite an increasing single population, the family is still regarded as the basic structure of Chinese society, and the stability of the marriage and traditional family unit remains the basis for social stability. This creates significant pressure and discrimination on single persons, particularly women, to fit a family model that no longer matches the reality of Chinese society.

⁴³⁹ Mu, Guangzong. (2017). "The effect and prospects of the implementation of the "Comprehensive Two-Child" policy." *China Economic Report*, 1: 24-27.

⁴⁴⁰ Gu, Hejun., & Li, Qing. (2017). "Impact of the comprehensive two-child policy on the number and structure of the working-age population in China: 2017-2050". *Journal of Population and Economics*, 4: 1-9.

State measures to reversing the growth of single women

Previously, during the implementation of the one-child policy from 1979 to 2015, the government forced a large number of female abortions or other invasive birth control measures to control and curtail population growth.⁴⁴¹ However today, due to sex ratio imbalance, aging problem, and the increasing number of single women, the government is instead again adjusting state birth control policies to praise childbearing and encourage families to have two children, with the same state enthusiasm previously used to advocate the one-child policy.⁴⁴² No matter the policy however, women's fecundity is the primary focus of population plans for realizing the development agenda of the country.

Additionally, the Chinese government has initiated propaganda campaigns targeting urban educated single women, and "*Don't miss your best childbearing age!*" has become a frequent headline appearing in official media. According to the government, the optimal childbearing age for women is before the age of 30.⁴⁴³ In China, single women have limited reproductive rights, although many of them have strong desire to have children. In recent years a small number of single women have chosen to store frozen eggs or pursue artificial reproduction abroad, however this is expensive and is not available to the majority of single women wanting to give birth.⁴⁴⁴ Furthermore, the government also organizes official "blind dates" through the Central Committee of China's Communist Youth League, which aim to help and encourage singles to find a partner.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴¹ Kane, Penny., & Choi, Ching Y. (9 October 1999). "China's one child family policy". *British Medical Journal*, 319 (7215): 992-994.

⁴⁴² Zeng & Hesketh, 2016.

⁴⁴³ Fincher, 2018.

⁴⁴⁴ Chen, Dan. (27 March 2017). "It is Time to Give China's Single Mothers Their Rights". *Sixth Tone*. Available at: <http://www.sixthtone.com/news/2111/its-time-to-give-chinas-single-mothers-their-rights> (accessed 20 October 2018).

⁴⁴⁵ Zhao, Yusha. (18 September 2017). "China pushes for organized blind dates". *Global Times*. Available at: <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1067027.shtml> (accessed 20 October 2018).

5.2.3 Maintaining social order

Social security

As noted, in the face a considerable number of Chinese women delaying marriage or remaining single there is a corresponding increase in the number of unmarried men. The higher sex ratio makes it increasingly difficult for a large number of men to find a suitable spouse, and increases the potential risk of unstable male groups generating problems that contribute to a high crime rate and social disruption. In many instances, men tend to be aggressive when living in groups, away from home and without stable family, whereas: *“being married is associated with an average reduction of approximately 35 percent in the odds of crime compared to non-married status for the same man”*.⁴⁴⁶

In China, men in the lower social strata are perceived as resorting to violence and crime partially from a failure to realize their self-value and self-worth, and thus pose a threat to social stability.⁴⁴⁷ With a low level of education, such single men hold a relatively weak position in social competition but also in the marriage market, and are less likely to be selected by unmarried women of the same age.⁴⁴⁸ For example, many violent incidents occur among migrant workers in cities, especially between single migrant male workers. Such incidents may include minor anti-social activities ranging from gambling, loitering, gang theft, and street fighting.⁴⁴⁹ According to the research report *“China’s Gender Imbalance and its Economic Performance”* by the Australian Centre on China in the World at the Australian National University in 2018, the presence of unmarried men, both at the family and community level, is detrimental to the economic psychological and social status of the family,

⁴⁴⁶ Sampson, Robert J., Laub, John H., & Wimer, Christopher. (2006). “Does marriage reduce crime? A counterfactual approach to within-individual causal effects”. *Journal of Criminology*, 44 (3): 465-508.

⁴⁴⁷ Edlund, Lena., Li, Hongbin., Yi, Junjian., & Zhang, Junsen. (December 2007). “More Men, More Crime: Evidence from China’s One-Child Policy.” *IZA Discussion Paper Series*. 3214. Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit Institute for the Study of Labor. 1-47.

⁴⁴⁸ Xie, 2017.

⁴⁴⁹ Zhang, Dejun. (2014). “Status and Causes of Chinese Migrant Workers’ Crimes”. *Journal of Asian Social Science*, 10 (9): 62-70.

also constrains the economic development of the community.⁴⁵⁰

Traditional moral standard and health issues for being single

From an ethical viewpoint, the pressure on singles who cannot avoid self-criticism or social disapproval also creates adverse consequences. Single persons living independently have often been found to have poorer psychological conditions and higher mortality rates, which in turn affects the overall development of the entire population.⁴⁵¹ According to a study published in the Journal of Epidemiology in USA in 2011, unmarried older women face a 23 percent higher mortality risk compared to married women, while compared with married men, single men have a 32 percent higher risk of death in their lifetime.⁴⁵²

In addition, being single for an extended time not only causes some degree of psychological damage, but may also cause a certain degree of anti-social behavior. This kind of behavior is not necessarily a physical one, but places some pressure on interpersonal relationships.⁴⁵³ For example, the mental health of single women is generally poor, with anxiety, loneliness and depression very common. Some singles may also outwardly present as being arrogant or paranoid when dealing with others, which may reflect an extended experience of unfulfilled desires, or low self-esteem due to social pressure.⁴⁵⁴ However such responses may be driven by defensive reactions to being pressured or discriminated against due to their single status.

⁴⁵⁰ Golley, Jane., & Tyers, Rod. (August 2012). *China's Gender Imbalance and its Economic Performance*. Centre for China in the World of Australian National University. Available at: <http://www.thechinastory.org/chinas-gender-imbalance-and-its-economic-performance/> (accessed 20 October 2018).

⁴⁵¹ Zhang, Limin. (2016). "Analysis of the reasons that affect the mental health status of single women". *Journal of Dietetic Health*, 3 (9): 236.

⁴⁵² Raymond, Joan. (18 August 2011). "Single people may be younger, new study finds". *NBC News*. Available at: <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/44122528/ns/health-behavior/t/single-people-may-die-younger-new-study-finds/#.XyZSLibX9NM> (accessed 26 September 2019).

⁴⁵³ China Youth Daily. (December 2007). *Research Report on the Development Status of Contemporary Chinese Youth Population*. Published on 2007-12-11. Available at: <http://m.news.xixik.com/content/913c7e69998dd12d/> (accessed 28 November 2018).

⁴⁵⁴ Liu, Zhiyi. (April 2010). "Investigation on mental health and personality traits of single group". *Journal of Xi'an University of Arts and Science* (Social Science Edition), 13 (2): 113-116.

Both individual emotions and needs of single women or men are thus not mutually supported in Chinese society.

At the same time, single people form a relatively isolated group in mainstream Chinese society, even as the social and economic circumstances encourage greater numbers of the younger generation to choose to live single. These results in an uneasy atmosphere, with single women perceived as not only undermining the existing social structures, but also bringing about a series of social problems.

In terms of China's inherent social structure, the increase in the number of single women aged 30 or over is presented as especially harmful to social development. On the one hand, social stability, a balanced population structure, and optimization of population growth all require women to marry at a more appropriate age. If not, many men are perceived to miss out on obtain a harmonious family life in a timely and effective manner.

5.2.4 Social control influencing violence against Chinese single women

Chinese single women, in the landscape of urban China, usually have a good income, independence, and a high educational background. Their good living conditions allow them to have more individual life options, but their overall lifestyle may also lead to “unstable factors” to society as a whole. This becomes a hidden danger in the social development of the country and is also an emotional issue faced by many families in contemporary China. As previously mentioned, the existence of the single women phenomenon has caused a series of direct social impacts, such as disruptions to traditional gender status, population decline, along with other secondary factors affecting social stability.

This new demographic change has also driven responses by government agencies and legal

systems in contemporary China. As a result, through efforts to maintain the gender order, population and social order, the Chinese government, state media, and wider society have been at pains to attack and reverse the advancement of single women. Such responses have emerged despite increasing appeals by single women for equality, including in child rearing and reproductive services; the elimination of education and workplace discrimination; reduction in gender stereotypes; and greater civil and legal rights for women within marriages and against domestic violence. The increased single population has also led to demands for changes to housing rights and related social welfare, and new challenges to the existing social system.

All of these developments have reduced the perceived benefits obtained under the old Chinese gender model of family and marriage. Overall, single women are perceived to challenging established gender power norms; but in response, the government, the media, and parents are pushing back and exerting great pressure on single women to revert to relationship norms.

5.3 Economic demands influencing violence against Chinese single women

Economic factors are the main driving force in securing family harmony and promoting social development. Marriage improves sources of income for a family and secures fixed assets; and in the economic sphere also encourages and supports the wedding-related service industry. Moreover, in China, the term of “leftover women” against single women has been widely reported in various forms in the media, in part to support spending in the wedding industry. In this section, exploration of economic spheres including *the family economy*, *the market economy*, and *the media economy* are presented and further discussed, to realize the interplay between economic factors and the impact of violence against Chinese single women in society.

5.3.1 The family economy

In people's family and marriages, economic factors (job status and prestige, income, household wealth, and family background) play an important role, and to a major extent influence the beginning, development and end of a marriage.⁴⁵⁵ Economic factors underwrite the conditions for building a marriage and family, and cannot be ignored when considering broader conditions affecting economic and social stability.⁴⁵⁶ In a traditional society, marriage is primarily regarded as a means to promote the prosperity of families.⁴⁵⁷ From a collective perspective, marriage is thus seen as an optimal combination of family wealth and security, and economic factors continue to play a very important role in Chinese marriages.⁴⁵⁸ In the marriage decision process, the economic background of the partner's family is an important influence on partner selection.⁴⁵⁹ Therefore, economic factors are the basis for people's survival and development, as the key factor in promoting marriage and family, and a powerful driving force for the development of marriage and family.

Traditional marriage in China was the primary means for low status women to change their destiny and social status, and so wise marriage selection has been a key factor in women's fate.⁴⁶⁰ Generally, in the process of partner selection, women usually seek to find a partner with better or at least equivalent economic conditions to their own families. Few Chinese women are willing to choose a partner with an unfavorable economic background. A partner's income situation is an important criterion for choosing a spouse, and is directly related to the

⁴⁵⁵ Westmark, Edward Alexander. (1891/2015). *The History of Human Marriage*. Translated to Chinese by Li, Bin. The Commercial Press. Beijing.

⁴⁵⁶ Wang, Yadong. (2015). "On the Important Role of Economic Factors in Marriage and Family". *Northern Economy and Trade*, Harbin City, China, 3: 19.

⁴⁵⁷ Galvan, Bryan Michael. (14 September 2017). "Do Single People Harm Economic Growth?" *Beijing Review*. 37. Available at: http://www.bjreview.com/Opinion/201709/t20170911_800104411.html (accessed 20 October 2018).

⁴⁵⁸ Dong, 2000; Wang, 2015.

⁴⁵⁹ Sun, Wensheng., & Tong, Jianliang. (May 2003). "On the role of economic factors in marital relations". *Journal of Economics and Management*, Shijiazhuang City, China, 5: 62-63.

⁴⁶⁰ Xu, Wei. (2011). *From Marriage Revolution to Revolutionary Marriage: Marriage Practice of the Chinese Communist Party in Modern Era, 1910s-1950s*. Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository. 232. The University of Western Ontario, London.

quality of family life after marriage. On economic considerations, both traditional and modern Chinese families hold similar values towards marriage, and although modern Chinese families have tried to abandon many old practices (such as strong patriarchal influence and filial piety), the importance attributed to economic status remains.⁴⁶¹

Today, as in the past, marriage still improves economic sources for a family. Through marriage, women can gain and build equity in fixed assets, such as real estate and bank deposits.⁴⁶² In modern society, the quality of marriage can improve based on the economic status of both partners.⁴⁶³ In many marriages, one of the major obstacles to the development of partner relationships is relative economic power within the family unit. Once a sufficient economic foundation can be guaranteed, the couples have more time and energy to deepen their love feelings and respect each other, which in married life, can reduce oppression and family disputes due to economic factors.⁴⁶⁴ Without necessary assets and economic security, basic married life is difficult to maintain, which often leads to marriage breakdown or decline in the marriage relationship.⁴⁶⁵

For these reasons, marriage has always been of great economic importance to Chinese women. Before getting married, girls typically lacked the conditions for economic independence, and had to rely on their parents' family for survival. Today, most Chinese parents regard supporting their children in adulthood as irresponsible, and so they strive to facilitate the early marriage of their children, particularly daughters.⁴⁶⁶ However, according to To⁴⁶⁷, there is a

⁴⁶¹ Betts, Jennifer L. (2018). *Chinese Family Values*. Lifestyle of Family Edition. Available at: <http://www.family.lovetoknow.com/chinese-family-values> (accessed 22 October 2018).

⁴⁶² Zhao, Yange. (2014). "Talking about the main factors affecting family harmony and the countermeasures". *Youth and Society*, Kungming City, China, 12: 235-236.

⁴⁶³ Wang, 2015.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ Sun & Tong, 2003.

⁴⁶⁶ Hu, Bingyao. (2017). "A Comparative Study of Weddings Between China and Western Countries". *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 13 (3): 21-26.

⁴⁶⁷ To, S. (2013). "Understanding Sheng Nu ('Leftover Women'): The Phenomenon of Late Marriage among Chinese Professional Women". *Symbolic Interaction*, 36 (1): 1-20.

conflict between Chinese parents' "modern views" of encouraging their daughters' strong economic achievements, and their "traditional views" of expecting their daughters' to follow traditional gender roles in marriage. Consequently, even though it is not as strict as before, parental approval of the marriage choices of their children is still very important today.⁴⁶⁸ In partner selection, men tend to seek young and beautiful women to continue their family lineage, however the economic status of female partners is not valued to the same extent. Women however are conditioned and encouraged to seek and marry a high-income, "quality" man from their youth.⁴⁶⁹ The old Chinese expression: "*the older, the less valuable* (女人越老越不值钱)" thus continues to reflect parents' worry about their daughters' future, with parents consistently urging their unmarried daughters to find an acceptable partner as early as possible.

Through the process of economic transformation, other social conflicts in China have also emerged driven by various aspects of inequality, limiting economic and social development and discouraging the improvement of people's well-being.⁴⁷⁰ In 2019 China's economic growth has slowed down to 6.2 percent annual growth, according to the most recent International Monetary Fund report. As the economy slows, China is facing employment challenges.⁴⁷¹ Consequently, due to increased uncertainty about the future, securing a stable family structure is of increasing concern to people in contemporary China. Parents are concerned for their children, while single women in particular feel a great uncertainty about their future. Although most parents want their daughters to be happy in a stable marriage with sufficient economic support, such expectations have the unfortunate effect of increasing

⁴⁶⁸ Wong, Weiwei. (2016). "Past matchmaking norms and their influence on contemporary marriage markets in China". *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, 8 (3): 372-384.

⁴⁶⁹ Qiu, Yueyi. (2013). *Chinese Marriage Traditions: Exploring Contemporary Changes*. Department of Sociology of Lund University, Lund, Sweden.

⁴⁷⁰ Zhang, Lixin. (2017). Analysis of the connotation of major contradictions in China's society in the new era. *Century Bridge, Harbin City, China*, 12: 9-14.

⁴⁷¹ UN News. (August 2019). *International Monetary Fund report: China's economic growth is expected to slow down to 6.2% in 2019*. Available at: <https://news.un.org/zh/story/2019/08/1039791> (accessed 27 September 2019).

psychological pressure on unmarried daughters. Thus, contrary to expectations, continual demands and pressure on unmarried daughters to marry and have children constitutes a form of direct verbal violence against single women within the family. Therefore, single women are under double pressure to marry and start a family, both from themselves and from their family members.

5.3.2 The market economy

Despite recent changes, China remains a culturally-traditional country where marriage is highly valued, and long-term economic considerations are a relevant topic across all sectors of society.⁴⁷² Marriage is a major event in life, and so most Chinese people take great care and expense when getting married, which include buying new houses or cars, holding elaborate wedding ceremonies, and exchanging significant dowries.⁴⁷³ According to the Wedding Industry Development Report of China in 2014, Chinese couples now spend 76,141 Yuan (roughly 9,762 Euro) on average on their wedding; however in 2014 according to China's National Bureau of Statistics, the average annual wage of urban employees is only 56,339 Yuan (roughly 7,223 Euro). This means that Chinese people invest significantly from both their salaries and accumulated savings into marriage.⁴⁷⁴

Market economy is the main force that promotes the development of a country, while marriage is not only important to the familial economic situation but also drives a huge wedding consumer market, with significant contribution to GDP.⁴⁷⁵ In this way marriage behavior also holds direct relevance to a series of businesses in the market economy.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷² Marketing to China. (10 June 2018). *The Chinese Wedding Market: A Golden Mine*. Available at: <http://www.marketingtochina.com/understand-chinese-wedding-market/> (accessed 22 October 2018).

⁴⁷³ Hua, Wenlong. (2016). *Xi'an City Wedding Market Consumer Behavior Research*. Master thesis of Xi'an University of Technology, Xi'an City, China.

⁴⁷⁴ Abkowitz, Alyssa. (15 October 2015). "Inside China's extreme wedding craze". *BBC News*. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20151014-big-weddings-mean-big-business-in-this-asian-powerhouse> (accessed 22 October 2018).

⁴⁷⁵ Sun & Guo, 2013.

⁴⁷⁶ He, Wei. (2012). *Research on wedding consumption based on the perspective of symbolic consumption*. Master thesis of Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, Chengdu City, China.

In recent years, the market of Chinese marriage services has seen a surge in sales and generated a substantial increase in employees. Because of this, the marriage service industry has received unprecedented attention in analysis of China's economic development. In the last five years, an annual average of 8.11 million couples married, with wedding consumption in urban areas alone amounted to 418.3 billion Yuan (roughly 53.63 billion Euro). Various associated industries, such as real estate, furniture sales, jewelers, tourism and other sectors, all in turn derive huge profits through wedding celebrations.⁴⁷⁷ The national market potential associated with wedding-related sales and consumption reached 1.56 trillion Yuan (roughly 200 billion Euro), while in addition 70 percent of all real estate and renovation industry sales were related to marriages, and amounted to 467.7 billion Yuan (roughly 59.96 billion Euro).⁴⁷⁸

Marriage thus generates and stimulates demand for catering services, real estate, consumer items, and travel, and encourages the production of children to further increase personal needs.⁴⁷⁹ The impact of marriage on GDP extends both from economic stimulus derived from marriage-related industries, to the creation of new households and children which in turn increase economic growth.⁴⁸⁰ In short, marriage itself is a major contributor to the Chinese economy and GDP.

However, the increase in single women may hinder the rapid development of the economy in China. In this framework, single women may become objects to be negatively evaluated not only by the family members, but also by other stakeholders. Consequently, relevant interest groups with vested interests in the marriage industry, such as wedding companies, wedding media programs, real estate brokers, may intensify the psychological verbal violence against

⁴⁷⁷ Yang, Qingyin. (November 2011). *On the development and trend of the wedding industry*. Baidu Wen Ku.

⁴⁷⁸ *2012-2016 Chinese marriage service industry forecast & investment strategic planning analysis report*. Available at: <http://www.askci.com/reports/201302/28172910192647.shtml> (accessed 10 June 2016).

⁴⁷⁹ Cheng, Junyi. (2010). "10 Economic Principles in Love." *Business Story*, Chongqing, China, 11: 66-67.

⁴⁸⁰ Beijing Zhonghong Jinglue Information Consulting Co., Ltd. (20 December 2016). *2017 China wedding industry development prospects forecast*.

single women. Although single urban professionals have a strong purchasing power which is changing China's overall consumption model and benefiting new industries, such as entertainment and personal care, the increasing number of single workers is also seen as having a negative impact on the current economy.⁴⁸¹ As single people are often considered to have fewer responsibilities than married peers, they are often assumed to have an idle attitude towards life, and a lack of motivation which extends to avoiding family responsibilities through remaining unmarried.⁴⁸² In particular, there are still many single adults living with their parents. Because of their dependence on their parents, their contribution to society and economic development is seen as minimal.⁴⁸³

Consequently, the high rate of unmarried people is perceived as having a negative impact on the economy, as their lifestyles may affect broader economic trends.⁴⁸⁴ Many single people believe that they only need enough income to financially support themselves, and so there is no pressure to create more wealth for the family.⁴⁸⁵ Meanwhile, people's sense of security in staying single is increasing, although compared to married persons single people remain more concerned about issues such as pension, economic pressure, and emotional stress.⁴⁸⁶ Single people are faced with the pressure to plan their own future, which in turn can influence them to not buy high-value consumer items, but instead invest more in insurance and financial products.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸¹ China Daily. (14 February 2018). *China's 'single economy' provides business opportunities*. Available at: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201802/14/WS5a8316c4a3106e7dcc13c967.html> (accessed 23 October 2018).

⁴⁸² Thinker. (28 August 2017). *"Single Society" is here, but may not necessarily be a good thing*. Available at: <http://www.sike.news.cn/statics/sike/posts/2017/08/219523255.html> (accessed 23 October 2018).

⁴⁸³ Du, 2008.

⁴⁸⁴ Kasperkevic, Jana. (30 October 2013). *Why single people are hurting the economy*. *The Guardian*. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/money/2013/oct/30/marriage-single-people-hurting-economy> (accessed 23 October 2018).

⁴⁸⁵ Li, Shigong. (14 September 2017). "Do Single People Harm Economic Growth?" *Beijing Review*. 37. Available at: http://www.bjreview.com/Opinion/201709/t20170911_800104411.html (accessed 28 September 2019).

⁴⁸⁶ Sohu News. (14 August 2017). *Why do Chinese singles harm the economy?* *Sohu Society*. Available at: http://www.sohu.com/a/164474868_644346 (accessed 23 October 2018).

⁴⁸⁷ Zhong, David. (21 September 2017). "Single damage to the economy, who takes the responsibility?" *Tencent Finance*. Available at: <https://finance.qq.com/a/20170921/026846.htm> (accessed 30 October 2018).

As noted, family in China still plays a central role as the most important unit of society.⁴⁸⁸ The influence of changes in the structure of the family however endanger China's model of sustainable economic growth.⁴⁸⁹ A family includes both the supply of labor and shifts in the level of economic demand. Currently, the number of singles living in mainland China is equivalent to the total populations of Russia and the United Kingdom.⁴⁹⁰ However despite the existence of large numbers of singles with disposable income and a willingness to spend, single people in mainland China have not made significant contributions to the economy as expected.⁴⁹¹ The purchasing power and average spending of a nuclear family are much higher than those of a single person, and married people are more confident about their financial status and stability because they are not the only source of income in the family.⁴⁹² Furthermore, young parents may spend a considerable amount of money on baby care and child products, and are more willing to spend money on partners and other family members to increase domestic consumption.⁴⁹³ In contrast, single people spend less and use more social public resources than non-single people, which have a negative impact on the coordinated development of population, resources and environment.⁴⁹⁴

In conclusion, the considerable and growing number of long-term single women and men is starting to be seen by many in China as negative factor for the national economy, to associated industries dependent on the wedding industry, and for other social actors with vested interests in family formation. Therefore, market economic factors also create pressures and hostility in

⁴⁸⁸ Xie, 2013; Xu & Xia, 2014.

⁴⁸⁹ Golley, 2012.

⁴⁹⁰ Kuntz, Katrin. (3 August 2018). "The Matchmakers: China's 200 Million Singles Are a Big Business". *Der Spiegel Online. Edition of International World*. Available at: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/the-matchmakers-china-s-200-million-singles-are-a-big-business-a-1221127.html> (accessed 22 October 2018).

⁴⁹¹ Wang, Guan. (24 August 2017). "Media: "Single tide" is coming. Why does it affect the economy?" China Youth Network. Available at: http://www.news.youth.cn/sh/201708/t20170824_10582221.htm (accessed 23 October 2018).

⁴⁹² Xu, Qiong. (2010). "Family Changes in Contemporary China: A Review of Parenting and Fatherhood". *International Journal of Current Chinese Studies*, 1: 125-140.

⁴⁹³ China News. (17 August 2017). "Singles in China reach 200 million-marriage is to contribute GDP". Available at: <http://mini.eastday.com/mobile/170817204427960.html#> (accessed 10 November 2018).

⁴⁹⁴ Du, 2008.

society towards Chinese single women.

5.3.3 Media economy and media influence on attitudes to single women

Since the arrival of the social media era, people's living environment and social space has expanded through continuous access to information transmitted by the media. The essential attribute of modern mass culture via media communication is not to create works of art that can satisfy people's spiritual needs, but to create products that can obtain commercial profits. In such way, the development of modern media communications has had far-reaching effects through the cultivation of audiences, with concept and ideas being repeatedly reported and promoted through mass media.⁴⁹⁵

In many markets such as China, mass media not only manufactures products of consumerism, but also delivers covert messages of ideological control.⁴⁹⁶ In order to make a profit and win the majority of the audience, the media must meet the "demand" of a wide range of audiences.⁴⁹⁷ Furthermore, in order to meet the ever-expanding requirements for consumption, the media encourages symbolic consumption, satisfying and further encouraging people's interests to consume information content. Driven by economic interests, the pursuit of "eyeball economy" through media is a general trend that demands increased attention and audience engagement.

From a gender perspective, gender-based consumption has taken a dominant position in contemporary Chinese consumer society.⁴⁹⁸ Chinese women are encouraged to emulate and practice fashionable marriage concepts and romance trends repeatedly reported and promoted

⁴⁹⁵ Friedman, David. (2000). *The Economics of Life*. Huaxia Publishing House, Beijing.

⁴⁹⁶ Zygmunt, Bauman. (1998). *Globalization: The human consequences*. Columbia University Press, New York.

⁴⁹⁷ Ma, Xingyue. (June 2016). "Research on the Pan-entertainment of TV Shows-Taking 'Running Brothers' as an Example." Master Thesis of Harbin Normal University, Harbin City, China.

⁴⁹⁸ Feldshuh, Hannah. (2018). "Gender, media, and myth-making: constructing China's leftover women". *Asian Journal of Communication*, 28 (1): 38-54.

in the mass media.⁴⁹⁹ Due to the usually higher economic status and spending power, “leftover women” can bring more profits to the media economy, such as entertainment, information consumption, and purchases, which benefits the Chinese media industry.⁵⁰⁰

However, at the same time, ready-made film and television themes, literary genres, and music recognize that devaluing single women can bring good economic benefits. The topic of leftover women is therefore over-hyped and reused by Chinese media, as the negative attention the topic generates creates positive market returns for media companies.

For instance, the marriage and love dating program “*The Perfect Match* (or *If You Are the One*/非诚勿扰)”⁵⁰¹ transmitted by Jiangsu Satellite TV since 2010, is aimed at solving the problem of single women’s marriage and has attracted a large audience.⁵⁰² In 2017, its advertiser income exceeded 2 billion Chinese Yuan (roughly 256 million Euro), supporting claims that advertising revenue is a strong driver behind media company’s promotion of the “leftover women” phenomenon. In addition, various TV stations and broadcasters have also screened numerous TV dramas and movies where single women are seen as negative targets, aiming to attract potential consumers and driven by economic benefits.⁵⁰³ In conclusion, to pursue high circulation, high ratings, and high click-through rates, the topic of the “leftover women” has been fostered in Chinese media as a means to satisfy the psychological needs of the audience to judge and condemn single women, while meeting the interests of both advertisers and political interests.

⁴⁹⁹ Friedman, 2000.

⁵⁰⁰ Becker, 1987.

⁵⁰¹ “*The Perfect Match* or *You Are the One*” is a social life service reality show produced by Jiangsu Satellite TV, which is based on marriage and dating. It was launched on January 15, 2010.

⁵⁰² Qin, Lan. (2011). *Analysis of the pros and cons of TV dating programs and their development---taking Jiangsu Satellite TV as the case of “If You Are the One”*. Master’s Thesis. School of Communication Science and Art, Chengdu University of Technology, Chengdu China. 11.

⁵⁰³ Jiang, Lei. (2011). “A feminist interpretation of the leftover women image in the TV series”. *Journal of Anhui Literature*, 1: 16-20.

In China, the vigorous promotion of single women as “leftover women” has long existed, with the cost of targeting single women is low and the benefits high. Thus the topic of leftover women has become a low-risk issue for discussion across various Chinese media.⁵⁰⁴ Through media propaganda pieces repeated across websites, TV shows, and soap operas plotlines, and other media forms, single women are regularly depicted negatively.⁵⁰⁵ Chinese media adopts a position of simultaneous ridicule and pity of “leftover women” which caters to their audience’s blame and “hunting” psychology, and which satisfies people’s pre-existing psychological biases.⁵⁰⁶ In this way, media seeks to attract more audiences, increase circulation, and wins higher commercial returns.

Moreover, behind the scenes of numerous negative media reports on well-educated single women, there are the influence matchmaking companies, which are mostly owned by international capital. These companies foresaw the potential opportunities in the rising Chinese single population, especially middle class single individuals with great purchasing power. Through media messaging jointly syndicated through internet platforms, TV programs, magazines, and dating services, such companies have reinforced pressure on single women and their families and friends by promoting the idea that being “leftover” is problematic, in an effort to attract more single women to use online matchmaking services.⁵⁰⁷

Consequences of the stereotype image of single women in China have evolved and developed gradually. To this end, the profit motives of the media have also played an important role in the formation of stereotypes of negative images of single women in contemporary China, with competitive media interests being advanced by supporting traditional cultural attitudes against

⁵⁰⁴ Feldshuh, 2018.

⁵⁰⁵ Zheng, Jing. (2015). *Xiangqin: matchmaking for Shengnü (“leftover women”) in China*. Ph.D. thesis of University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong. 18.

⁵⁰⁶ Feldshuh, 2016.

⁵⁰⁷ Zheng, 2015, 18.

single women.⁵⁰⁸ In summary, single women become victims of competitive media market, alongside social discrimination.

As the collector and disseminator of information, modern media plays an important tool in revealing the existence of violence.⁵⁰⁹ However, in China, media sources do not play a positive role for promoting an open environment, but usually act as the de facto accomplice for violence.⁵¹⁰ In China's social transformation period in recent decades, the collision of different ideas has led to single women being portrayed in the media as an embarrassing exception, so that single women experience social psychological exclusion, collective humiliation, and internalized self-contempt. The principle of violence is repeated at all levels of society, and spreads to every aspect of social activity.⁵¹¹ Chinese media seldom conducts in-depth analysis into the structural causes of violent incidents affecting single women, and often only directs the public's attention to assessing the status of individual women, rather than treatment of single women as a social group. Such a perspective reflects a general indifference and hypocrisy towards unmarried women, which even contributes to physical violence.⁵¹² Therefore, media strengthens the violence against Chinese single women.

5.3.4 Economic demands influencing violence against Chinese single women

Although the overall proportion of the population in poverty has greatly declined in China, the gap between the rich and the poor has become wider. To achieve relative and absolute economic advancement is therefore the primary objective for most Chinese. The current section explored the contribution of marriage to the family economy, market economy, and

⁵⁰⁸ Li, Qi., & Niu, Lijuan. (2017). "The era of 'leftover women': the collusion between patriarchal culture and the mass media-based on the documentary "The Leftover Woman's Era"". *Journal of Guilin Institute of Aerospace Technology*, 2: 208-213.

⁵⁰⁹ Recuero, Raquel. (April-June 2015). "Social Media and Symbolic Violence". *Social Media-Society*. 1-3.

⁵¹⁰ Fernández, Emelina Galarza., Bedía, Rosa Cobo., & Cerdá, Mar Esquembre. (2016). "The media and the symbolic violence against women. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 71: 818-832.

⁵¹¹ Farmer, 2004.

⁵¹² Wang, Youfeng. (2009). "Structural violence and its manifestations in the context of economic globalization". *Journal of World Economics and Political Forum*, 6: 32-37.

media economy, as well as how single people hinder the economic development. It is precisely through the interplay between economic factors that many single women have become victims of negative social portrayals. In most Chinese families, parents believe that only marriage can serve to secure a permanent economic security, which could be one of the reasons that they choose to impose moral pressure and coerce single daughters to marry early. In the market economy, marriage industries also contribute to the prosperity of the market economy, and thus singles are not welcomed by the state as a useful demographic to benefit the national economy. The media itself is not a means of neutral communication, but instead promotes propaganda for national and commercial interests, which plays a key role in vilifying single women and boosting symbolic violence within Chinese society.

5.4 Summary and reflections

Under the slogan of “*building a harmonious society*” supported by the Chinese government, the increasing number of single women has been decried as undermining both social stability and the deeply-rooted gender hierarchy in China. Therefore, both families and the public increasingly attack or marginalize single women for violating expected social norms. While China’s economic and social transition has allowed women many more opportunities for education and career development, unfortunately however, traditional concepts of male supremacy remain dominant. Under a gendered power construct, women who desire independence and self-determination to exercise their freedom are considered with suspicion and hostility. Due to their long experience of oppression and subordination therefore, it is very difficult for most Chinese women to overcome a passive situation of obedience. This tension indicates that single women as a group have become one of the main victims of China’s economic transition period, and a scapegoat for the shifts in China’s social structure.

In chapter 6, a detailed analysis of the cultural, structural, direct, and symbolic acts of violence against Chinese single women is presented, based on a series of in-depth interviews undertaken in 2017 across urban China.

Chapter 6 Research Findings Part 2: Violence against Chinese single women in contemporary China: Cultural, structural, direct and symbolic

Introduction

In China, unmarried women over a certain age (aged 30 or above), are considered unusual, marking out those single women as abnormal, and making them feel awkward and excluded from society.⁵¹³ In this way, most single women are gradually becoming an isolated group, despite the fact that unmarried women are a rapidly growing demographic group in contemporary China.⁵¹⁴ Single women, although statistically a minority, are free from the traditional spouse system; however in turn they are faced with obstacles, social ostracism and employment discrimination.⁵¹⁵ Chinese single women perceive themselves as existing against a bigger picture of systemic discrimination driven by various intents, including maintaining social stability and gender hierarchy norms.⁵¹⁶ Therefore, violence against Chinese single women is an important area for analysis in the Chinese cultural context, and it is also my unique consideration to this research field.

Through examining the negative experiences of participants by in-depth interviews, I seek to explore the sufferings Chinese single women are facing on a daily basis due to their identity as single women. The famous triangular violence model of Galtung and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence are employed as a key reference to explain the suffering of contemporary Chinese single women. Through exploring the lived experiences of such women, this study seeks to expand knowledge of how single women endure social and psychological pressure, both from family and society in contemporary China. This section further contributes to expanding the concept of gender-based violence from cultural violence to structural and

⁵¹³ Gaetano, 2010, 2-3; Hahn & Elshult, 2016, 13.

⁵¹⁴ You, Jing., Yi, Xuejie., & Chen, Meng. (2016). *Love, Life, and "Leftover Ladies" in Urban China*. Available at: <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/70494/> MPRA Paper No. 70494 (accessed 10 January 2019).

⁵¹⁵ Huang, 2017, 6-7.

⁵¹⁶ Fincher, 2014.

interpersonal direct violence, with particular reference to the emotional and psychological pressures applied to single women in contemporary China.

In this chapter, a detailed analysis of how single women suffering from cultural, structural and direct violence in contemporary China is presented. Figure 3 below presents the summarized findings of this study through reference to the triangular violence of Galtung's theory:

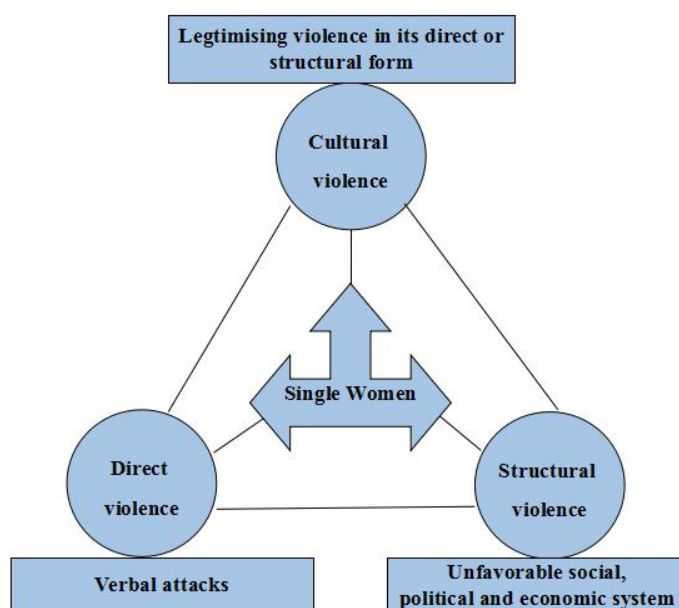


Figure 3: Triangular structure of violence against Chinese single women.⁵¹⁷

This figure shows that culture, as an authority, has consistently labeled single women negatively, which serves to sustain and legitimize both direct and structural violence. In other words, cultural violence motivates actors to escalate to direct violence and forms of structural violence that reinforce by people's existing world views, as if they were doing the right thing. Cultural violence convinces people that the status quo is the correct and only way, and that single women are transgressing accepted social rules. It forces single women to be moral and

⁵¹⁷ Figure 3 is the triangular structure of violence applied to Chinese single women, which is projected and experienced within contemporary Chinese society. These factors coexist in a circle. In the model, direct, structural and cultural forms of violence interrelate, with single women existing in the center of violence factors impacting against them.

right to adhere to collective norms, because cultural and social norms support the violence. Structural violence is based on unfavorable social, political and economic systems which disadvantage women, and especially lead to unequal opportunities for Chinese single women. Direct violence is identified by visible verbal attacks towards single women, primarily due to Chinese single women being unmarried in daily life. This chapter is structured according to three dimensions of violence, as originally proposed by Johan Galtung.

6.1 Cultural violence against Chinese single women in contemporary China

Introduction

This section begins with an analysis of *cultural violence* against single women, in order to explain how cultural factors both influence and reinforce violence against single women in contemporary China. Galtung's (1990) concept of cultural violence is an important framework in this study for understanding the potential clashes with Chinese traditional culture caused by the increased agency and independence of single women in recent decades. This seeks not only to familiarize readers with the relevant Chinese cultural background for this study, but also to identify how some aspects of traditional culture are used to legitimize or justify acts of direct and structural violence so that they seem "*to be right thing to do, or at least not wrong*"⁵¹⁸.

This study explores concepts of *traditional patriarchal culture*; *marriage and family culture*; *filial piety (Xiao) culture*; and Chinese *collectivist culture*. All of these cultural concepts have been directly or indirectly applied as a discipline or weapon to control, manage, and even force people's actions, particularly women, in historical and contemporary China. These cultural values are further analyzed to explain why such processes operate to legitimize or justify violence against Chinese single women, and suppress or disempower any responses by

⁵¹⁸ Galtung, 1990.

women to respond to such cultural oppression.

In this way, Chinese women are subject to four key cultural constructs which regulate moral and ethical standards of social behavior, and legitimize and justify violence against single women:

- *Patriarchal culture*
- *Traditional Family Forms and Marriage Culture*
- *Filial piety (孝 'Xiao') culture, and*
- *Collectivist culture.*

6.1.1 Chinese cultural context

6.1.1.1 Patriarchal Culture

Patriarchy refers to the existing rights and controls based on male perspectives and interests, which operate in the socio-cultural, economic, political, and ideological spheres.⁵¹⁹ The patriarchal system describes an exploitative system or structure which normalizes gender differences in social construction in a way that reproduces and legitimizes male domination.⁵²⁰ Political philosopher Engels (1884) argued that historically: “*the overthrow of mother-right (matriarchal culture) was the world historic defeat of the female sex*”.⁵²¹ Human development of the concept of private property also involved the replacement of matriarchal by patriarchal systems, with existing values of equality and harmonious relationships in matriarchal societies broken by new social production forms.⁵²² Gradually, patriarchal power thus became the

⁵¹⁹ Becker, Mary. (1999). “Patriarchy and Inequality: Towards a Substantive Feminism”. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1 (3): 20-88.

⁵²⁰ Ebert, Teresa L. (1996). *Ludic Feminism and After: Postmodernism, Desire, and Labor*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

⁵²¹ Engels, Friedrich. (1884). *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. (Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats). Translated from German by Ernest Untermann (Charles H. Kerr, & Co, Chicago, 1909).

⁵²² Brandmaier, Grace Varada. (2015). *Patriarchy and the Power of Myth: Exploring the Significance of a Matriarchal Prehistory*. Senior Projects Spring 2015. Bard College Bard Digital Commons,

dominant force in most societies, and the origins for morality and ethics. Thus, women are ideologically excluded or marginalized from the field of social production, and economic and political engagement.⁵²³ Women can therefore only exist in the male power of mainstream culture.⁵²⁴

In both Western and Eastern cultures, patriarchy is deeply rooted in common social discourse. In a general sense: “*patriarchy is a set of social relations that men use to rule women, as a system characterized by power, domination, hierarchy and competition*”⁵²⁵. With male authority at the center of power, women have been traditionally restricted from equal access to political, economic, cultural resources and power.⁵²⁶ In many physical and physiological forms, the differences between men and women are innate, and women are usually physically weaker than male counterparts. However from this basis, males as a ruling class have developed a series of cultural ideas and prejudices in to maintain their dominance, thereby forming patriarchal culture.⁵²⁷ Under the instruction of surrounding patriarchal culture, women are more likely to accept that their social restrictions and inferior status as defined by patriarchal culture, as they want to adhere to cultural norms and be socially accepted.⁵²⁸ Through such processes, patriarchal culture becomes a form of social subconscious reflecting social stereotypes that exist in peoples’ minds. Patriarchal culture, for the sake of maintaining its own position, forces women to accept male-centered consciousness through various means of instruction and public censure, which continuously reinforces the concept of male dominance and female subordination, and which ultimately encourages women to accede to

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. 9.

⁵²³ Sultana, 2011.

⁵²⁴ Wang, Dan. (2005). “Patriarchal Culture and Female Image and Contemporary Women’s Liberation”. *Journal of Liaodong University*, 6.7 (45): 28-30.

⁵²⁵ Soman, Uthara. (May-August 2009). “Patriarchy: Theoretical Postulates and Empirical Findings”. *Sociological Bulletin*, 58 (2): 253-272.

⁵²⁶ Fan, 2014, 98.

⁵²⁷ Zhang, Shiwen. (2010). “Research on the influence of “masculineism” values on women’s status”. *Journal of Chinese and Foreign Education Research*, 12: 66-68.

⁵²⁸ Chen, Shuwen. (2010). “Analysis of the adverse effects of male culture on modern Chinese marriage and family”. *Journal of Knowledge Economy*, 20: 54-55.

oppression.⁵²⁹

Therefore, in such respects, patriarchal culture is an ideological construct designed to ensure male dominance in the relationship between men and women.⁵³⁰ Patriarchal culture is derived from male culture;⁵³¹ with the establishment of patriarchy further supporting the establishment of a gendered ruling class which bounds and oppresses women in various ways to defend the status quo.⁵³²

Patriarchal Culture in China

Chinese society has long been regarded as a typical patriarchal society, in which a set of gender concepts and gender systems have developed under a dominant patriarchal culture leading to barriers that significantly disadvantage women in political, economic, social and other fields.⁵³³ In addition, the long period of feudal rule in China has further encouraged the deep-rooted development of patriarchal ideology.⁵³⁴ Patriarchal culture thus a long and extended history in China, with a deep-rooted adherence to gender roles embedded in social discourse.⁵³⁵ This is reflected in numerous cultural practices and beliefs, including the ancient Chinese saying:

Three Obediences & Four Virtues/(三从四德)” dictates that: “a woman in family was to be subordinate to her father in youth, her husband in maturity, and her son in old age, and wifely virtue, wifely speech, wifely manner/appearance, and

⁵²⁹ Johnson, Alan G. (2014). *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy*. Third Edition. Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, Philadelphia. 6-8.

⁵³⁰ Sultana, 2011, 4.

⁵³¹ Peng, Wangyang. (2008). “Female Psychology inlaid in a Male Society”. *Journal of Social Psychology Science*, Z1: 50-53.

⁵³² Becker, 1999, 26-28.

⁵³³ Shen, Yifei. (2014). “China in the “Post-Patriarchal Era”: Changes in the Power Relationships in Urban Households and an Analysis of the Course of Gender Inequality in Society”. *Journal of Chinese Sociology & Anthropology*, 43 (4): 5-23.

⁵³⁴ Chen, 2010, 54-55.

⁵³⁵ Lee, 2016, 9-49.

*praised wifely work.*⁵³⁶

Since the founding of New China in 1949, Chinese women have gradually shed millenia-long patterns of social obedience and developed more independent standing and personalities. Nowadays, the status of Chinese women has progressed more than ever before. Outwardly, Chinese society seems to be more and more accepting of gender equality. With the elimination of traditional feudal concepts and restrictions on women's freedoms in modern society, patriarchal culture seems to be untenable. Nevertheless, Chinese society is still considered to be a highly patriarchal culture.⁵³⁷ This can easily be seen in many areas of Chinese society, where there are different treatments for men and women, and wide gender inequalities remain not only in access to education, employment, and health; but also in matters of property inheritance, income distribution, political participation, and decision-making both in public and within the family unit.⁵³⁸

In the in-depth-interviews, research participants unanimously confirmed their strong belief that China is still a strongly patriarchal society. Interviewees claimed that: *"Most resources and discourse power are mastered by men, but women are only being given. In other words, women have only limited access that is offered by men."*⁵³⁹

Other interviewees observed common themes of gender discrimination, including that:

Women are in a lower position than men are in Chinese society today. Men almost dominate the whole world. Women grow up under the patriarchal culture, thus

⁵³⁶ Shao, Jirong. (2006). *The Family Status of Chinese Women: the Past and Present*. Student Affairs Digital Community Development. The University of Rhode Island. p. 2; Gao, 2003, 115; Lee, Wongyin. (1995). Women's education in traditional and modern China. *Women's History Review*, 4 (3): 345-367.

⁵³⁷ Xie, 2013, 3-4; Attané, 2012, 14-15; Zuo, Jiping., & LaRossa, Ralph. (August 2009). Rethinking Family Patriarchy and Women's Positions in Presocialist China. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71 (3): 542-557.

⁵³⁸ Attané, 2012, 6-7.

⁵³⁹ Interview with Ms. C, 40 years old, in Shanghai, 4 June 2017.

*most of them have lost their power and qualifications to achieve equality.*⁵⁴⁰

Other interviewees noted the structural discrimination in modern Chinese society:

*Although the status of women is improved, the subconscious thinking of people is still that of the patriarchal society. As the only child in my family, I feel fine. However, no matter looking for a job or at work in the workplace, there are indeed many barriers under the patriarchal power that I have to face.*⁵⁴¹

Most respondents also mentioned social discrimination and disrespect against women in the employment. One interviewee described that: *“In the workplace, male colleagues often smoke in the office with impunity, even sometimes neglecting pregnant female colleagues. Although female colleagues complained many times, it was useless.”*⁵⁴² Another interviewee noted:

*I once worked in an advertisement company. I worked as the same position and took the same tasks with two other male employees. However, my income was much lower than the male employees earn due to being female even if I had better performance than they did. For this, I think that I lost many opportunities and could not win the appropriate rewards and respect that I deserved.*⁵⁴³

In short, China remains a male-dominated society where women are subordinate to men because of different divisions of labour, even if many professional women have become economically dependent. Despite economic and workforce changes, gender relations within the family still take on traditional gender norms where the male is the breadwinner in

⁵⁴⁰ Interview with Ms. S, 48 years old, in Beijing, 2 May 2017.

⁵⁴¹ Interview with Ms. L, 30 years old, in Beijing, 13 May 2017.

⁵⁴² Interview with Ms. U, 39 years old, in Shanghai, 26 May 2017.

⁵⁴³ Interview with Ms. Ti, 45 years old, in Beijing, 17 May 2017.

marriage, and which is widely accepted in both rural and urban Chinese areas.⁵⁴⁴

6.1.1.2 Traditional Family Forms and Marriage Culture

The importance of family in China

A family is “a group of people connected by marriage or blood that is considered the most basic social, economic and residential collective unit in most human societies, including Chinese culture”.⁵⁴⁵ Although the concept of family is a near-universal social institution, its expression and meaning does change over time in different societies. Therefore, understanding the Chinese family model is crucial to understanding Chinese culture and society. In addition, the family unit in China represents a long-standing concept of nation and society.⁵⁴⁶ Family prosperity is seen as an essential foundation for stability, which in turn explains Chinese emphasis on marriage and childbearing as a social responsibility.⁵⁴⁷

Given the social importance on family, Chinese family members need to maintain close ties. The Spring Festival is the most important holiday in China, and has deep cultural connotations, particularly for families.⁵⁴⁸ As the most important Chinese family reunion period, each Spring Festival lasts for 15 days in China, and has strong associations to the concepts of family responsibility and duty.⁵⁴⁹ During the period, Chinese people reunite with their families no matter how far they work or study from their hometown, and return home to have reunion dinner on New Year’s Eve and meet their relatives in the following days. During the Spring Festival, family members, old friends and relatives gather to reconnect and form

⁵⁴⁴ Ji, Yingchun. (July 2015). Between Tradition and Modernity: “Leftover” Women in Shanghai. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77 (5): 1-17.

⁵⁴⁵ Xie, 2013.

⁵⁴⁶ Freedman, Maurice. (Winter 1961-1962). “The Family in China, Past and Present”. *Journal of Pacific Affairs*, 34 (4): 323-336.

⁵⁴⁷ Li Guilan. (2002). *Analysis of current marital status and moral construction in China*. Master Thesis. Yanbian University, Yanji City, China.

⁵⁴⁸ Yang, Sha. (2008). “Conceptions of the Spring Festival and Christmas of Shanghai’s Young and Middle-aged People: A Qualitative Study of Similarities and Differences”. *Intercultural Communication Studies XVII: 1 2008*. Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai. 248-259.

⁵⁴⁹ Zhao, Bin. (1998). “Popular family television and party ideology: The Spring Festival Eve happy gathering”. *Media, Culture & Society*, 20 (1): 43-58.

bonds. “*Festival greetings convey family ethics among relatives and friends*”, which is an integral part of maintaining interpersonal relationships among family members.⁵⁵⁰

Marriage values in Chinese culture

In essence, marriage is a cultural phenomenon, and different cultures ascribe distinctive values and characteristics to marriage.⁵⁵¹ In China, traditional culture is much more discriminatory against women. Women, as a distinct social group, suffer from repression and oppression under the background of a male-dominated culture, which is also manifested in married life.⁵⁵²

In traditional Chinese culture, marriage is a must, because marriage means to maintain and continue the family and Chinese people have been continually advised to “*raise children to provide against old age*”⁵⁵³. Chinese culture previously retained a custom of “*marrying on the belly of an abdomen (指腹为婚)*”⁵⁵⁴, which refers to marriages arranged by families when children were still very young. In addition, traditional Chinese culture practiced the habit of “*bringing up children with children (童养媳)*”⁵⁵⁵. Girls were married off early as minors, which was based in large part on a marriage culture where family members played a strong role in arranging marriages. Arranged marriages organized under the approval and supervision of family elders was widespread until the “May 4th Movement in 1919”,⁵⁵⁶ when politically

⁵⁵⁰ Zheng, Zhouqiu., & Su, Yan. (2008). “Comparison of Spring Festival and Christmas”. *Journal of Hunan Vocational College for Nationalities*, Yueyang City, Hunan Province, China, 4 (12): 8-10.

⁵⁵¹ Higgins, Louise T., Zheng, Mo., Liu, Yali., & Sun, Chun Hui. (February 2002). “Attitudes to Marriage and Sexual Behaviors: A Survey of Gender and Culture Differences in China and United Kingdom”. *Journal of Sex Roles*, 46 (3-4): 75-89.

⁵⁵² Wu, Shufeng. (January 2001). “Isomorphism and Reconstruction of Culture and Marriage - The Marriage Culture’s Bondage to Women’s Marriage”. *Chongqing Social Sciences*, 1: 86-90.

⁵⁵³ “*Raise children to provide against old age*”, translated from the old Chinese saying: “养儿防老”.

⁵⁵⁴ This saying means that while the child is still in the mother’s stomach, the parents have already given him or her a marriage partner (所谓“指腹为婚”，就是指子女尚在娘肚子里，父母亲就给指定了婚姻).

⁵⁵⁵ In traditional Chinese culture, betrothed girls (both baby girls and young girls) were often raised by the husband’s family until the formal marriage took place in adulthood. In pre-modern China, 童养媳 was a popular family arrangement. (“童养媳”，就是由婆家养育女婴、幼女，待到成年正式结婚。旧时，童养媳在中国甚为流行).

⁵⁵⁶ Forster, Elisabeth. (2014). *The invention of the new culture movement in 1919*. Doctoral Thesis of University of Oxford, Oxford, England; Xu, 2015.

active, progressive young people in Chinese cities began to promote and adopt new ideas of “love marriages” and marital unions based on mutual feeling. Even today, family elders still play a significant role in determining their children’s marriage choices, according to their own wishes and family circumstances.⁵⁵⁷

In contemporary Chinese society, although traditional arranged marriage culture has largely disappeared, it has not been fully eliminated. Many families exert pressure on their children to accept marriage ties or proposals arranged by family elders, as in Chinese tradition, and marriage is not seen solely as a matter of one couple, but of a link between two families.⁵⁵⁸ Families believe that political and economic connection can thus be achieved through the form of a marriage contract. In addition, because of the Chinese concept of “*homogeneity between family and country* (家国同构)”, marriage is often presented as the moral foundation of “home”, which in turn forms the moral foundation for society and the Chinese state.⁵⁵⁹

Marriage as a determinant of women’s success or failure

In contemporary China patriarchal culture remains strong, and marriage is still regarded as an important standard for measuring the success or failure of a woman.⁵⁶⁰ In Chinese family culture, men tend to look for women equal to their own socio-economic status, while women tend to seek partners with higher socio-economic status than themselves.⁵⁶¹ The term *status hypergamy* thus describes the desire of women to marry men with higher social status, which reflects the traditional marriage customs in China.⁵⁶² This cultural norm continues in

⁵⁵⁷ Xia, Ruth Xia., Wang, Haiping., Do, Ahn., & Qin, Shen. (2014). “Family Policy in China: A Snapshot of 1950-2010”. *Handbook of Family Policies Across the Globe*. Springer, New York. 257-272.

⁵⁵⁸ Hu, Yang. (2016). “Marriage of matching doors: Marital sorting on parental background in China”. *Demographic Research*, 35 (20): 557-580.

⁵⁵⁹ Wang Ping. (2010). “On Confucius’s Concept of Family and State Isomorphism”. *Journal of Jinzhong University*, 5: 62-64.

⁵⁶⁰ Fang, Xudong. (2016). “Leftover Women, Individualism and Family”. *Journal of Social Science Forum* 2016/7. 174-184.

⁵⁶¹ Xu, Yanli., & Wang, Wei. (2014). “Gender Analysis of Marriage Problems of Urban Unmarried Women”. *Journal of China Women’s University*, 26 (5): 41-45.

⁵⁶² Thornton, Arland., & Lin, Hui-Sheng. (1994). *Social Change and the Family in Taiwan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Xu, Xiaohe, Ji, Jianjun., & Tung, Yuk-Ying. (2000). *Social and Political Assortative Mating in*

contemporary China, although to a certain extent partner choices have shifted from parental arrangements to decisions based on personal desire, love and affection.⁵⁶³

In both contemporary and historical China, women generally seek to improve their status through marrying men of higher educational and economic status, whereas men do not seek women who are too independent, but pay more attention to physical appearance.⁵⁶⁴ In traditional Chinese concepts of marriage, women are born to serve the family and girls are potential wives and mothers. Thus the role of women is more restricted to the family or private sphere rather than an individual in society, with the saying: “*doing well is not better than marrying well* (干得好不如嫁得好)”⁵⁶⁵ being a good example of social expectations for Chinese women.⁵⁶⁶ Marriage therefore determines the success or failure of a woman.⁵⁶⁷

Blind date matching in China

A blind date is a date between an unmarried man and woman, aiming at concluding a marriage through the auspices of a matchmaker or introducer.⁵⁶⁸ Blind dating culture in China has a long history as a social engagement between two unmarried people who have not previously met, and is usually arranged by their family, mutual acquaintance, neighbours, or co-workers, or even professional matchmakers.⁵⁶⁹

Urban China. *Journal of Family Issues*, (21): 47-77; Floyd, Cedric N. (May 2014). Male Hypergamy and Social Status. *Oglethorpe Journal of Undergraduate Research*. Article 2, 3 (1): 1-8.

⁵⁶³ Xu, Xiaohe., & Whyte, Martin. (August 1990). “Love Matches and Arranged Marriages: A Chinese Replication”. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 52: 709-722.

⁵⁶⁴ Wang, Pan. (2015). *Love and marriage in globalizing China*. Routledge, London.

⁵⁶⁵ “*Doing well is not better than marrying well* (干得好不如嫁得好)”, is a traditional Chinese idiom that is usually to be used to belittle the working independent women.

⁵⁶⁶ Yang, Juhua., & Du, Shenghong. (2017). “Theoretical thinking on ‘doing better than marrying well.’” *Journal of Humanities*, 10 (10): 110-121.

⁵⁶⁷ Wu, Lijuan. (2017). “Gender-specific production in multi-expressions: discourse analysis of ‘good marriage’ and ‘doing well’”. *Journal of China Women’s University*, 29 (1): 69-76.

⁵⁶⁸ Luo, Rumin. (2014). *Becoming Urban: State and Migration in Contemporary China*. Kassel University Press, Kassel, Germany. 37-38.

⁵⁶⁹ Eaton, A. A., & Rose, S. (2011). “Has dating become more egalitarian? A 35 year review using sex roles”. *Journal of Sex Roles*, 64 (11-12): 843-862.

The traditional blind date culture began in the pre-Qin period of Chinese history (221 BCE), and has influenced Chinese culture for thousands of years.⁵⁷⁰ In ancient China, people married only with the help of matchmakers, or through the arrangement of their parents. Blind date culture continues to be a very important culture phenomenon in China today, and is a central part of contemporary marriage culture.⁵⁷¹ In contemporary China, many young people are busy with their work, and have smaller social circles where they can get to know other people and potential partners.⁵⁷² As a result blind date culture has never disappeared in Chinese society, and it is still very common way for unmarried people to find a partner, especially for older unmarried people. For many older single persons, a blind date can seem to be the only way to find a partner later in life.⁵⁷³

In addition to the arrangements by parents, colleagues, or friends, many single people also seek out help arranging blind dates from marriage agencies, dating advertisements or online marriage platforms that have emerged in China since the 1980s.⁵⁷⁴ After 2004, blind date websites such as *Baihelove.com*, *Zhenai.com* and others have been established to provide an online communication platform for unmarried men and women.⁵⁷⁵ In recent years, many parental matchmaking corners have also been established in public city parks, where many parents advertise and exchange information about their unmarried children. For instance, since 2005 a ‘matchmaking corner’ has existed in Shanghai People’s Park, where every weekend and on holidays some parents gather to find mates for their unmarried children.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁰ Dong, Jing. (2013). “Blind Date Culture and Media Communication Mission”. *Journal of Youth*, 12: 157.

⁵⁷¹ Wang, Rui. (2011). “Analysis of the culture of blind date between China and Japan - centered on the role of matchmaker”. *Journal of Literatures*, 12: 153-155.

⁵⁷² Zhang & Sun, 2014, 133.

⁵⁷³ Betul, Demir. (2015). “Talking about the causes and effects of the recent blind date boom”. *Journal of Beauty and the Times (City Edition)*, 5: 13-14.

⁵⁷⁴ Wang, 2015, 49.

⁵⁷⁵ Baidu. (2019). ‘*Baihe network and Zhenai network, who will eventually become the big coffee in the love and marriage industry?*’ Available at: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1622229198138770212&wfr=spider&for=pc> (accessed 20 September 2019).

⁵⁷⁶ Zhang, Jun., & Sun, Peidong. (2014). “When Are You Going to Get Married? Parental Matchmaking and Middle-class Women in Contemporary Urban China.” In: *Wives, Husbands, and Lovers: Marriage and Sexuality in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Urban China* (edited by Deborah Davis and Sara Friedman). Stanford University Press, Stanford CA. 129. p. 118.

Here, parents are fighting the wishes of their children to seek happiness as unmarried individuals. In sum, blind matching is still a common way for single people to meet a potential partner in contemporary China.

6.1.1.3 Filial piety (孝 ‘Xiao’) culture

What is Filial Piety?

Filial piety, expressed by the character “孝” in Chinese⁵⁷⁷, is a core cultural value of Chinese traditional culture, and Chinese family structure is based on filial piety.⁵⁷⁸ Based on obligations, obedience principles and strict hierarchical system, filial piety consists of three parts:

*The old should be supported by the younger generation; the young are burdened and oppressed by the old; and the purpose of the family is the continuation of the family line.*⁵⁷⁹

Throughout history, Chinese culture has always attached great importance to the outstanding virtue of filial piety.⁵⁸⁰ Filial piety culture thus forms an implicit norm of morality and ethics, with the purpose of regulating contradictory interests and relationships in the family unit. Filial piety rules stipulate that within the family, children must consciously abide by their responsibilities for caring for their parents, and fulfill their obligation to respect their elders.⁵⁸¹ Thus, filial piety culture not only occupies the field of ethics and morality, but also has become a comprehensive ideological and moral system supporting existing power structures,

⁵⁷⁷ 孝, in Pinyin: xiào.

⁵⁷⁸ Poškaitė, Loreta. (2014). “Filial Piety (xiao 孝) in the Contemporary and Global World: A View from the Western and Chinese Perspectives”. *Asian Studies* II, XVIII (1): 99-114.

⁵⁷⁹ Ikels, Charlotte. (2004). *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia*. (Stanford University Press, Redwood City, CA, 2-3.

⁵⁸⁰ Low, Patrick Kim Cheng., & Ang, Sik-Liong. (2012). *Filial Piety and Good Leadership*. Berlin, E-Leader.

⁵⁸¹ Yeh, K.-H. (2003). “The beneficial and harmful effects of filial piety: An integrative analysis”. (67-82). In K.-S. Yang, K.-K. Hwang, P. B. Pedersen., & I. Daibo (eds.) *Contributions in Psychology No. 42: Progress in Asian Social Psychology: Conceptual and Empirical contributions. The Academy of Management Review*, 29 (3): 518.

including both Confucian teachings and state rulers.⁵⁸² Filial piety culture thus forms a fundamental aspect of Chinese culture, which has deeply infiltrated and imprinted on all aspects of Chinese social life through thousands of years of Chinese history.

Relationships between parents and children in China

In contemporary life, filial piety culture is mainly reflected in the relationship between parents and children. Parental pressure in China is more pervasive than in Western societies, because parents believe that they are right and that their expectations are good for their children. Children are treated as an extension of their parent's private property, which satisfies the desire for control, and reinforces the status and power of parents in a patriarchal social structure.⁵⁸³ Moreover, parents are usually guided on standards of conduct set by Chinese society as a whole, and so often exert tremendous psychological pressure on their children.⁵⁸⁴ If children resist and decide to completely disregard the advice of their parents, they will be afraid of being treated as outcasts. The traditional model of parental care is thus widely attributed to deep-rooted cultural beliefs in filial piety, which is in turn a basic element of the Chinese family care system.⁵⁸⁵ Until today, filial piety in China is still an important family custom and ideology, and a system that regulates power relations within the family.

Filial piety is often also regarded as inherent common sense, and parents' demands and expectations are constantly influenced and strengthened by general social attitudes. Through cycles of gratitude and indebtedness, generational power hierarchies are reproduced in daily

⁵⁸² Yang, Yanjing. (December 2014). "Contemporary Connotation and Practical Significance of Filial Ethics". *Journal of Hebei University of Economics and Business (Comprehensive Edition)*, 14 (4): 36-42.

⁵⁸³ Qiao, Dongping. (February 2005). "Child abuse in China: A yet-to-be-acknowledged 'social problem' in the Chinese Mainland". *Child & Family Social Work*, 10 (1): 21-27.

⁵⁸⁴ Zeng, Yi., George, Linda., Sereny, Melanie., Gu, Danan., & Vaupel, James W. (December 2015). "Older parents enjoy better filial piety and care from daughters than sons in China - and policy discussions to reduce son-preference and high sex ratio at birth". MPIDR Working Paper. Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Rostock, Germany.

⁵⁸⁵ Zhu, Yaogeng., & Wang, Xiaoding. (2008). "Filial ethics in the context of aging society". *Lanzhou Academic Journal*, 3 (174): 161-164.

life, so that the old enjoy privileges over the young and parents enjoy privileges over their children.⁵⁸⁶ By doing this, Chinese parents follow the Confucian tradition and have absolute authority to train and nurture their children to make advancement, so that they can bring honor to themselves in the future.⁵⁸⁷ For children, it is their responsibility to take care of their parents, even if this may mean that their own interests will be greatly sacrificed. Children who do not meet expectations face strong parental pressure and may face social rejection.⁵⁸⁸ Thus, it can be concluded that in the traditional family relationship, Chinese parents have recognized authority conferred by the social system, and are the ones that hold power and dominance over their children. Thus, parents are in a strong position relative to their children in Chinese families.

6.1.1.4 Collectivist culture in China

What is Collectivist Culture?

Chinese communities have always functioned according to collectivist culture principles.⁵⁸⁹ Collectivist culture is considered to be one of the most significant features of Chinese culture, which directs people's behavior on most aspects of daily life.⁵⁹⁰ For millennia, Chinese culture has accepted and shaped the notion of collectivism in China.⁵⁹¹ People in any group who share common interests are expected to have concern for each other's welfare or happiness, which may extend to family members, relatives, colleagues, and members of common ethnic,

⁵⁸⁶ Ikels, 2004, 182.

⁵⁸⁷ Deutsch, Francine M. (March 2006). "Filial Piety, Patrilineality, and China's One-Child Policy". *Journal of Family Issues*, 27 (3): 366-389.

⁵⁸⁸ Ong, Theresa. (2015). *Changing notion of filial piety in urban China. Selected works of Bepress*. Course paper of Social Institutions of Contemporary China. Nanyang Technological University of Singapore.

⁵⁸⁹ Wang, Georgette., & Chen, Yi-Ning Katherine. (2010). "Collectivism, relations, and Chinese communication". *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 3 (1): 1-9.

⁵⁹⁰ Hofstede, Geert. (1984). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-related Values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage; Hofstede, G., & Bond, M.H. (1988). "The Confucius Connection: From Cultural Roots to Economic Growth". *Organizational Dynamics*, 16: 4-21.

⁵⁹¹ Leung, Kwok., & Bond, Michael Harris. (1984). "The Impact of Cultural Collectivism on Reward Allocation". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 47: 793-804; Shenkar, O., & Ronen, S. (1987). "Culture, Ideology or Economy: A Comparative Exploration of Work Goal Importance among Managers in Chinese Societies". *Academy of Management Journal*, 30 (3): 564-576.

cultural or religious community.⁵⁹²

In a collectivist society, people are taught since infancy to respect the community to which they belong, and remain loyal to social units such as family, school, religious community and wider society.⁵⁹³ From a very young age, Chinese children are taught to obey their parents, listen to their teachers at schools, and respect their elders everywhere.⁵⁹⁴ In return, the family or group has a collective responsibility to protect all individuals when they are in need.⁵⁹⁵ Today, the Chinese state still strongly values and promotes collectivism under the official slogan of “*achieving harmony in society*”, and Chinese people are considered to be more collectivist than many other societies in the world.⁵⁹⁶

Chinese culture is a collective culture that is both hierarchical and vertical.⁵⁹⁷ “Harmonious” and “collectivist” values are highly revered, compared to the Western cultural emphasis on individualism.⁵⁹⁸ However, individual personality and self-expression under the collectivist culture can be suppressed in certain occasions, when individual and collective attitudes

⁵⁹² Triandis, Harry Charalambos. (1998). “Vertical and horizontal individualism and collectivism: theory and research implications for international comparative management”. *Advances in International Comparative Management*. 12:7-35; Wang, Shudao. (December 2000). “Individualism and Collectivism: Reflection and Integration”. *Tianxia Journal*, 15 (6): 20-25.

⁵⁹³ Hofstede, Geert. (2011). “Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context”. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2.1. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014> (accessed 30 November 2018).

⁵⁹⁴ Wang, Xisu. (2016). “Collectivist Culture, Key to Understanding China”. *LinkedIn*. Available at: <http://www.linkedin.com/pulse/collectivist-culture-key-understanding-china-xisu-wang> (accessed 22 November 2018).

⁵⁹⁵ Hofstede, Geert. (1991). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. London, McGraw-Hill.

⁵⁹⁶ Van de Vliert, E., Yang, H., Wang, Y., & Ren, X. (2013). “Climato-economic imprints on Chinese collectivism”. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*. 44(4):589-605; Steele, Liza G., & Lynch, Scott M. (2013). “The Pursuit of Happiness in China: Individualism, Collectivism, and Subjective Well-Being during China’s Economic and Social Transformation”. *Social Indicators Research: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal for Quality-of-Life Measurement*, 114 (2): 441-451.

⁵⁹⁷ Armstrong, Tamara L., & Swartzman, Leora C. (2001). “Cross-Cultural Differences in Illness Models and Expectations for the Health Care Provider-Client/Patient Interaction”. In: *Handbook of Cultural Health Psychology*. London, Academic Press. 63-84.

⁵⁹⁸ Guo, Jinxiu. (June 2007). “Collectivism and Individualism--The Differences in Values between Chinese and American on Cultural Backgrounds and Their Cultural Roots”. *Journal of Xiaogan University*. 81-84; Wong, Edward Yui-tim. (February 2001). *The Chinese at work: collectivism or individualism?* Working Paper 2-3. Hong Kong, Lingnan University.

conflict.⁵⁹⁹ In collective cultures, people with too much independence of thought can be viewed negatively, resulting in social exclusion.⁶⁰⁰ Collective culture encourages personal sacrifice, to the effect that people in collectivist cultures tend to associate individualism as a selfish behavior.⁶⁰¹ In this worldview only by sacrificing individual interests, a common community interest can be protected and achieved.⁶⁰²

Furthermore, while power is instrumental for achieving a desirable goal, culture also serves to foster normative standards that legitimate power structures in society.⁶⁰³ Therefore, while Chinese people benefit from collectivist culture in terms of greater support at difficult times; it can also violate personal rights, and depends very much on which interests are prioritized in the exercise of collective rights.⁶⁰⁴

Concepts of Guanxi (关系) and Face (面子)

Guanxi is one important aspect within collectivist Chinese culture. It means that “*Certain attributes of interrelationship or contacts between people*”, or it can simply be translated as “social connection” or “interpersonal network”.⁶⁰⁵ According to Alston (1989), “*guanxi is a vague way as a ‘particular’ relationship or ‘special’ ties to differentiate it from ordinary relationships.*”⁶⁰⁶ Furthermore, “*guanxi implies social obligation, priority interests or special*

⁵⁹⁹ LeFebvre, Rebecca., & Franke, Volker. (2013). “Culture Matters: Individualism vs. Collectivism in Conflict Decision-Making”. *Societies*, 3: 128-146.

⁶⁰⁰ Xu, Anqi., & Xia, Yan Ruth. (Winter 2014). “The Changes in Mainland Chinese Families During the Social Transition: A Critical Analysis”. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, XLV (1): 31-53.

⁶⁰¹ Michailova, Snezhina., & Hutchings, Kate. (2006). “National Cultural Influences on Knowledge Sharing: A Comparison of China and Russia”. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43 (3): 383-405.

⁶⁰² Trfarodi, Romin W., & Walters, Patricia. (1999). “Individualism-collectivism, life events, and self-esteem: a test of two trade-offs”. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 29: 799-801.

⁶⁰³ Chiu, Chi-Yue., & Hong, Ying-yi. (2006). *Social psychology of culture*. New York, Psychology Press.

⁶⁰⁴ Torelli, Carlos J., & Shavitt, Sharon. (2010). “Culture and Concepts of Power”. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 99 (4): 703-723.

⁶⁰⁵ Zhang, Chi., & Hong, Seock-Jin. (2017). *Guanxi Culture: How it Affects the Business Model of Chinese Firm*. In book: *The China Business Model, Originality and Limits*. Chapter 2. Edited by Elisabeth Paulet Chris Rowley. 19-40.

⁶⁰⁶ Alston, Jon P. (1989). Wa, Guanxi, and Inhwa: Managerial principles in Japan, China, and Korea. *Business Horizons*, 32 (2): 26-31.

favors".⁶⁰⁷ In contemporary society, China is still a country that prioritizes attention to private network "*Guanxi*", rather than relying completely on a well-organized protection system.⁶⁰⁸ Throughout Chinese history, China is a highly nepotistic society, and various social relationships are maintained through personal contacts that protect and support individual and collective interests.⁶⁰⁹ In this cultural context, the sense of personal security is required to respond to unexpected risks, which in turn depend on the informal social ties and relationships between colleagues, friends and family. Strong social relationships can therefore help to alleviate or solve various problems, and allow people to better respond to adversity and external events.⁶¹⁰

In collective societies, there is also less concept of personal privacy. For example, people feel free to discuss marriage status with anyone, even in public.⁶¹¹ According to traditional views, an adult life being single can be wretched. Only married life can bring people happiness, and expand a person's network and prosperity. Consequently, women who remain single for a long time are considered to have poor mental health, because only marriage can protect human health.⁶¹² Unmarried women living in societies with high marital values (such as China) are also considered to be very abnormal or disharmonious.

The concept of "*Face*/ (面子)" is also deeply rooted in Chinese culture, and represents a

⁶⁰⁷ Chang, Kuangchi. (December 2011). A Path to Understanding Guanxi in China's Transitional Economy: Variations on Network Behavior. *Sociological Theory*, 29 (4): 315-339.

⁶⁰⁸ Zhang, Juwei. (2010). "Social Protection in China: Current Status and Challenges". in Asher, M. G: S. Oum and F. Parulian (eds.) *Social Protection in East Asia - Current State and Challenges*. ERIA Research Project Report 2009-9. Jakarta, ERIA. 371-398.

⁶⁰⁹ Dong Wei., & Cui Fangfang. (2010). "Analysis of the human society". *Legal system and economy*, 4: 129-130.

⁶¹⁰ Ye, Zhengdao. (2004). "Chinese categorization of interpersonal relationships and the cultural logic of Chinese social interaction: An indigenous perspective". *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 1-2: 211-230.

⁶¹¹ Zhao, Hui., & Dong, Haixin. (June 2017). "Research on Personal Privacy Protection of China in the Era of Big Data". *Journal of Scientific Research*, 5 (6): 139-145.

⁶¹² Becker, Christoph. (2019). *Marriage, parenthood and social network: Subjective well-being and mental health in old age*. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6656342/> (accessed 27 November 2019).

person's sense of honor, reputation, and feeling of being respected by people and society.⁶¹³ As a person's presentation in a social context⁶¹⁴, face is a personal psychological endorsement and a social esteem accorded by others.⁶¹⁵ In China, face refers to an intrinsic part of someone's social status, self-respect, dignity, and reputation.⁶¹⁶ Face can be a positive influence on people, while losing face is equal to appearing losing respect by others or lacking self-control. In Chinese culture, self-image and self-respect depend very much on how individuals believe they are viewed by others.⁶¹⁷ For example, one's marital status can help him or her to gain face or lose face in China. In China, unmarried women above a certain age (30 years or older) are often considered to lose face, as do their parents. In contrast, Chinese families are considered to gain honor and respect if their children have a good marriage. An older unmarried daughter in the family may cause parents to feel ashamed, as if it was their own individual problem. Especially in today's era of one child families, Chinese parents of an only daughter place strong pressure on their child to marry and continue the family lineage.⁶¹⁸

In summary, China's collective culture emphasizes the needs and goals of the entire group or family, rather than the interests of each individual or family member. Collectivism promotes a sense of solidarity in society or the family. However, in order to meet collective expectations, individuals are expected to sacrifice personal interests in the collectivist system. In short, the interests of the collective are usually prioritized over the dignity of the individual in China.

⁶¹³ Kim, Kun-Ok. (1993). What is Behind "Face-Saving" in Cross-Cultural Communication. *Intercultural Communication Studies* III: 1 1993. 39-47; Smith, Davis. (2013). *Guanxi, Mianzi, and Business: The Impact of Culture on Corporate Governance in China*. Aberdeen Asset Management of Advisor Perspectives. Available at: <https://www.advisorperspectives.com/commentaries/2013/03/07/guanxi-mianzi-and-business-the-impact-of-culture-on-corporate-governance-in-china> (accessed 15 June 2019).

⁶¹⁴ Goffman, Erving. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NJ, Doubleday.

⁶¹⁵ Earley, P.C. et al. (1997). *Cross - cultural work groups*. London, Sage. 117.

⁶¹⁶ Chen, Min. (1995). *Asian management systems: Chinese, Japanese and Korean styles of Business*. New York, Routledge.

⁶¹⁷ Gesteland, R.R., & Seyk, G. F. (2002). *Marketing across cultures in Asia*. Copenhagen, Copenhagen Business School Press. 20.

⁶¹⁸ Zhang & Sun, 2014.

6.1.2 Single women challenge aspects of traditional Chinese culture

Chinese women, who were previously ruled and oppressed, now have greater opportunity to challenge the patriarchal system and culture as they realize their true potential and sense of economic status and self-awareness. The functional needs of today's economy and social development in fact support no inherent gender differences, as most aspects of wage labor do not entail gender differences in work roles.⁶¹⁹ Women can complete most productive work in the same measure and worth as a man, and are in theory able to receive equal pay for paid work. In addition, since the foundation of the New China⁶²⁰ in 1949, the country has undergone major social changes with respect to gender and relationship norms. From 1950, China's first "Marriage Law" officially legalized the free choice of marriage partners and explicitly recognized the equality of wives and husbands.⁶²¹ In addition, changes in education and employment opportunities, pension and endowment insurance system, and economic model and structure in recent decades have also greatly changed family life in contemporary China, which is more conducive to women's autonomy and independence.

Today, a large percentage of Chinese parents, especially those with higher education, are gradually adjusting to changes in traditional Chinese values that were previously entrenched in maintaining family structures.⁶²² Thus in recent decades, China's gender relations and family patterns have undergone tremendous changes, and China's marital behavior has also converged to relationship patterns common in Western countries, such as late marriage, cohabitation before marriage, and higher divorce rates.⁶²³ Under such a social background, many independent women in China have started to challenge traditional patriarchy culture,

⁶¹⁹ Wang, 2005, 28-30.

⁶²⁰ The *New China* refers to the national period after the end of the Chinese Civil war founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949.

⁶²¹ Diamant, Neil J. (March 2000). "Re-Examining the Impact of the 1950 Marriage Law: State Improvisation, Local Initiative and Rural Family Change: *The China Quarterly*, 161: 171-198.

⁶²² Xie, 2013.

⁶²³ Yang, Fang. (June 2017). "Conflict and integration of traditional marriage concept and contemporary college students' concept of marriage". *Journal of Henan Judicial Police Vocational College*, 15 (2): 120-123.

while making marriage decisions independently has thus become one of the key personal challenges for independent urban women in China.

Even so, despite the significant improvement in women's socioeconomic status, traditional cultural values still hold significant sway over Chinese marriages. In many areas of China, people's expectations for their children to build a family, growing consumer desires, and the rapid rise in house prices have created tremendous economic pressure on the younger generation planning to get married.⁶²⁴ This is especially true for men with lower socioeconomic status along with women with higher socioeconomic status, who are each experiencing increasing difficulty in fulfilling marriage aspirations partly as a result of social expectations of women "marrying up" (finding a more economically successful husband) and men "marrying down".⁶²⁵ Researcher Sandy To conducted in-depth interviews with single women, and found that: "*men feel intimidated by women who are as successful as they are*", and that "*most single women do look forward to get married but are rejected by men due to their higher achievements*".⁶²⁶

The phenomenon of a growing number of single women has had a big impact on a hitherto unchanging patriarchal culture in China.⁶²⁷ If the number of single women continues to increase, then this would inevitably affect the inherent marriage culture and family structure in China. Single women are seen to reject and challenge traditional family and marriage culture ideals, and they are seen as an aberration.⁶²⁸ Undeniably, the increased number of single women has challenged and subverted longstanding family and marriage systems that

⁶²⁴ Sun, Peidong. (2012). *Who will marry my daughter: Shanghai blind date corner and "white hair blind date"*. China Social Science Press, Beijing, China; Attané, 2012.

⁶²⁵ Schwartz, Christine R., Zeng, Zhen., & Xie, Yu. (2016). "Marrying Up by Marrying Down: Status Exchange between Social Origin and Education in the United States." *Sociological Science*, 11: 1003-1027.

⁶²⁶ To, Sandy. (2015). *China's Leftover Women: Late Marriage among Professional Women and its consequence*. New York, Routledge.

⁶²⁷ To, 2015; Fincher, 2014; Ji, 2015.

⁶²⁸ Ferguson, Susan J. (February 2000). "Challenging Traditional Marriage: Never Married Chinese American and Japanese American Women". *Gender and Society*, 14 (1): 136-159.

have existed in China for thousands of years. However in addition, the role of single women is further seen as subversive, and as an affront to long-standing cultural traditions.⁶²⁹

Alongside economic reforms and accelerating globalization, the spread of Western ideas has also had a serious impact on traditional *Xiao* culture in Chinese society.⁶³⁰ Faced with an emerging demographic crisis where the population is aging faster, internal relations in the family are changing. Increasing indifference towards filial piety in society, and the challenges of supporting a growing elderly population caused by smaller family sizes and unmarried singles, are also creating serious challenges to the maintenance of traditional filial piety culture.⁶³¹ As a result, single women are considered by many in Chinese society to be defying authority and neglecting the elderly.⁶³² Furthermore, as a rapidly changing society, Chinese traditional culture and western thought are constantly merging and coexisting in contemporary China. Consequently, collectivist culture in China faces challenge from other ideas including individualism.⁶³³ Today, the rise of single women has overturned the collective understanding and perceptions of family and marriage that have been highly valued throughout Chinese history, with the role of single women in particular seen to conflict with ideas of *Xiao* culture and collectivism.⁶³⁴

In conclusion, Chinese single women in contemporary China are seen to challenge traditional patriarchal culture, family and marriage culture, as well as concepts of filial piety and collectivist culture. With Chinese single women perceived as defying traditional Chinese culture, traditional ideas and concepts are in turn being used against the “single women”

⁶²⁹ Gaetano, 2010.

⁶³⁰ Wang, Fengyan., Xu, Zhimeng., Sun, Yuexi., & Zhou, Ling. (2014). “The Status Quo and Changes of Chinese Filial Psychology”. *Psychology Exploration*, 34 (6): 529-535.

⁶³¹ Xie, Yu., & Xie, Jianshe. (2016). “The values of filial piety in the perspective of localization and Application in social work”. *Social Work and Management*, 16 (5): 66-72.

⁶³² Ji, 2015, 4.

⁶³³ Moore, Robert. (Autumn 2005). “Generation Ku: Individualism and China’s Millennial Youth”. *Ethnology*, 44 (4): 357-376.

⁶³⁴ Fincher, 2014; Ji, 2015; Sun, 2012.

social group. As a result, and due to continuing cultural influence of traditional Chinese beliefs, single women experience attacks and social violence in Chinese society.

6.1.3 Aspects of traditional Chinese culture legitimating violence against single women

6.1.3.1 Traditional patriarchy culture and single women

In a society strongly influenced by traditional patriarchal norms and attitudes, women are much more likely than men to become victims of underlying societal prejudice and injustice.⁶³⁵ According to Galtung (1996), cultural violence is a form of violence where some aspects of culture are deeply rooted in people's beliefs, and is related to gender discrimination or attitudes limiting women's development opportunities.⁶³⁶ Under the rule of a patriarchal system, any woman who seeks to protest or overturn perceived physiological restrictions can expect to encounter overt or covert punishment from society, as women are expected to meet the chauvinistic attitudes of male power.⁶³⁷

As a long-standing system, the patriarchal response to increased women's independence is to correspondingly seek to increase control.⁶³⁸ Men's direct control over women is gradually declining in China today, however women are still expected to follow the essential patriarchal construct of marriage/household/children. As one interviewee explained: "*Some women struggle to get rid of the control of patriarchal culture, but as they are quiet and weak, they receive less support*".⁶³⁹ Such efforts to belittle and control women have been recreated continuously in the patriarchal system. In addition, in recent years, patriarchal gender traditions have even undergone a resurgence in contemporary China.⁶⁴⁰ For example, "*the*

⁶³⁵ Hunnicutt, 2009, 553-573; Sultana, July 2010-June 2011.

⁶³⁶ Muthien, Bernadette., & Combrinck, Helene. (2013). "When rights are wronged: gender-based violence & human rights in Africa". In: M. B. Kuumba & M. White (eds.) *Transnational transgressions: African women, struggle and transformation in global perspective*. Africa World Press, Trenton, NJ.

⁶³⁷ Becker, 1999.

⁶³⁸ Serres, Drew. (2016). "*Why Patriarchy Persists (and How We Can Change It)*". Available at: www.organizingchange.org/patriarchy-persists-can-change/ (accessed 21 November 2018).

⁶³⁹ Interview with Ms. S, 48 years old, in Beijing, 2 May 2017.

⁶⁴⁰ Fincher, 2014.

patriarchal thought is rejuvenated to a certain degree, women's traditional wife and mother role is once again stressed in contemporary China."⁶⁴¹

As noted, due to a departure from cultural traditions, Chinese single women are often considered as disloyal in patriarchal societies. In turn, patriarchal culture attempts to curb the existence of single women. In an era of rapid social transformation, these older unmarried women therefore have to live with a self-contradiction of living according to their wishes and meeting family expectations.⁶⁴² Single women continuously experience insufferable gossip and stress in the surrounding social environment, and any violent actions towards single women due to their single status become justified, because of the support of traditional patriarchal culture. Thus, in response to single women's emancipation, the patriarchal system has assumed a new defiant attitude in contemporary Chinese discourse, proudly proclaiming that they still represent mainstream social culture in China through suppressing Chinese single women.

6.1.3.2 Traditional Family and Marriage Culture legitimizing violence against Chinese single women

The traditional view of family dynamics in China is that a "*husband/male is in charge of earning money to support the family, while the wife/female is responsible for doing housework*".⁶⁴³ This has not changed at all in 21st Century China, even if many professional women are already economically dependent. Marriage and giving birth are seen as necessary tasks to complete the social responsibilities placed on women. However, Chinese single women challenge traditional patriarchal norms and attitudes and thus become victims of

⁶⁴¹ Ji, Yingchun. (2017). *A Mosaic Temporality: New Dynamics of the Gender and Marriage System in Contemporary Urban China*. Temporalités (26). Available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/temporalites/3773> (accessed 5 December 2019).

⁶⁴² Peng, Qingqing., & Li, Lei. (August 2017). An Empirical Study of the Chinese Marriage Market: "Leftover" or Not? *Journal of Scientific Research*, 5 (8): 229-247.

⁶⁴³ In Chinese, (男主外女主内): "Men earn money while women take care of household chores".

potential social prejudice and injustice.

This reality was cited repeatedly by research participants, who observed that:

*“According to the traditional Chinese thinking, women must marry, and unmarried people have some problems.”*⁶⁴⁴

*“Women have to marry and have children; otherwise, she is considered to be incomplete.”*⁶⁴⁵

*“Marriage is ancestral succession, therefore people must have children.”*⁶⁴⁶

China has not found a response to solve the growing demographic issues raised by single women, and has only sought to suppress and reinforce existing cultural norms and biases. One interviewee stated:

*My parents push me to get married which hurts me. However, if the majority is married then I become an abnormal person. It seems that single women are treated as useless, like rubbish.*⁶⁴⁷

Another noted the difficulties faced by single women without financial independence:

*Without independent thinking and enough financial support, to be single would be very difficult, so I have to struggle to protect myself. Public opinion follows the mainstream culture, nobody can avoid it.*⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁴ Interview with Ms. X, 31 years old, in Xi'an, 15 August 2017.

⁶⁴⁵ Interview with Ms. D, 33 years old, in Lanzhou, 28 June 2017.

⁶⁴⁶ Interview with Ms. B, 31 years old, in Zhengzhou, 10 August 2017.

⁶⁴⁷ Interview with Ms. G, 33 years old, in Guangzhou, 23 July 2017.

⁶⁴⁸ Interview with Ms. I, 32 years old, in Shanghai, 2 June 2017.

The pressure this creates on individuals, particularly single women, was also described by some interviewees:

*In our country, a person who does not follow the rules of the country will be attacked and marginalized. Our country is a patriarchal and collectivist society with the elimination of individuality; people have no room to pursue individualism. If a girl is not economically independent, the only fate for her is to marry for survival. As long as a woman is still single above 30, there is no right for her to speak loudly in public; being single is considered to be wrong, and to be attacked. If society wants you to be good and controlled, you must live according to their will.*⁶⁴⁹

Therefore, it can be understood that traditional Chinese family and marriage culture encourages people to push single women to get married, regardless of the circumstances. In an era of rapid social transformation, these older unmarried women live with a self-contradiction of living according to their wishes and meeting family expectations to get married.

6.1.3.3 Filial Piety Culture justifying violence against single women

The dominant public morality thus supports certain kinds of discrimination and inequality against single women aged over 30. In contemporary China there has been a shift towards a later age of marriage; however Chinese women aged over 30 who are neither married nor have children are still considered to have brought the greatest unfilial respect toward their parents. Parental pressure to push children to get married is also imposed more on unmarried daughters than single sons.⁶⁵⁰ This is because a women's fertility cycle is much shorter than

⁶⁴⁹ Interview with Ms. U, 38 years old, in Shanghai, 25 May 2017.

⁶⁵⁰ Sun, Peidong. (2012). *Who will Marry My Daughter? The Parental Matchmaking Corner in the People's Square of Shanghai*. China Social Sciences Press, Beijing.

for men, and the older the women, the lower the likelihood of childbearing. A single woman aged over 30 not only affects her parents' social reputation, but also the likelihood of grandchildren. In the face of discrimination and moral condemnation, single women expect equal rights to pursue their own private lives.⁶⁵¹ However, cultural norms can also support and encourage the use of violence.⁶⁵²

Filial piety becomes a means of moral condemnation to push daughters to obey the will of their parents.⁶⁵³ This is reflected in an old Chinese saying that: "*There are three ways to be unfilial, the worst is to not produce offspring*"⁶⁵⁴. Traditionally, such piety also means that although the child and the parents are formally separated, parents' social responsibilities are not completely fulfilled until their children are married.⁶⁵⁵ Therefore, it is commonly held that unmarried women are not filial to their parents. Some women who choose to remain single have to suffer from parental criticism or violent actions. This was reflected in responses from many research interviewees, who reported a high degree of parental pressure to get married:

*No matter how successful you are in your career, without a marriage, you are totally rejected by the majority of the society. In the name of filial piety, my mother feels pressure and then turns her arrows on me. This is moral blackmail to force those unmarried women to get married.*⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵¹ Sun, Wanning., & Guo, Yingjie. (2013). *Unequal China. The political economy and cultural politics of inequality*. Routledge. London and New York.

⁶⁵² World Health Organization. (2009). *Changing cultural and social norms that support violence*. WHO Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data. Geneva. Switzerland. 1-15. Available at: https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/norms.pdf (accessed 24 June 2018).

⁶⁵³ Canda, Edward R. (2013). "Filial piety is a Confucian value common in Chinese society". *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 22 (3-4): 213-234.

⁶⁵⁴ The Chinese saying, 不孝有三，无后为大/ states that "there are three unfilial things, not to have a child is the first one."

⁶⁵⁵ Blake, Fred C. (1979). "The feelings of Chinese daughters towards their mothers as revealed in marriage laments". *Folklore*, 90 (1): 91-97.

⁶⁵⁶ Interview with Ms. M, 33 years old, in Shenzhen, 1 July 2017.

Other participants emphasized that a woman who is not married is not seen as behaving in a filial manner:

*I feel that my parents are very selfish. People who think that women must marry before they are “normal” have not yet gotten rid of the peasant way of thinking. My mother is a strong woman with a high education but who still has a strong sense of filial piety, let alone other mothers.*⁶⁵⁷

*In other cases, my mother always let me know that she feels uneasy before I get married, which greatly brings me psychological burden. Sometimes think whether I am unfilial or not, and whether I should sacrifice my personal happiness for filial piety, and complete my marriage duty with a casual acquaintance to fulfill their expectations.*⁶⁵⁸

With the moral support of filial piety culture, parents of such single women have turned themselves into abusers, by holding their children in pain due to their fear of losing face:

*There is a terrible expression of ‘all what I am doing is for your happiness’ in Chinese culture. My parents are no exception. By imposing the name of love as an excuse to dominate individual rights that is an injustice. Once I choose not to do what parents want, I would be labeled as unfilial.*⁶⁵⁹

Few people recognize that the behavior of pushing people to get married in the name of filial piety hurts people through emotional blackmail. Furthermore, the concept of “*raising children to provide for old age* (养儿防老)”⁶⁶⁰ has a long tradition in China, and so adult children’s

⁶⁵⁷ Interview with Ms. Z, 30 years old, in Beijing, 26 April 2017.

⁶⁵⁸ Interview with Ms. P, 30 years old, in Beijing, 17 September 2017.

⁶⁵⁹ Interview with Ms. Ti, 45 years old, in Beijing, 17 May 2017.

⁶⁶⁰ *Raising children to provide for old age* (养儿防老): Raising children and preventing old age is a traditional

care for older parents is considered a realization of filial piety. However, such expectations encounter huge challenges in contemporary China, with many urban Chinese families who have only one child caused by one-child-policy having to address the financial constraints and pressures of aged care. Faced with continued urbanization and globalization, and the greater mobility of the younger generation, the likelihood that children will be able to provide care to their parents will continue to decline.⁶⁶¹ Therefore, the discrimination directed against single women could also be a response to the anxieties and panic held by Chinese people to the unpredictable future created by China's social transition period. In summary, the ongoing discrimination against single women in Chinese society can be seen as a phenomenon partly justified by filial piety culture.

6.1.3.4 Collectivism justifying violence against Chinese single women

Chinese single women are not completely free from the shackles of collectivist culture in their personal lives. Independent single women are not respected and welcomed in Chinese collectivist society, and are instead considered to violate and undermine cultural, gender and collectivist traditions. *"In China, women who are too individual are often subject to being isolated and attacked."*⁶⁶² Therefore, unmarried women are pushed to enter into marriage at all levels of Chinese society, with such coercion coming from the national, workplace and family levels, respectively.

National influences

In 2007, the concept of *"leftover women"* was proposed by the *All-China Women's Federation*,

concept of providing for the elderly by raising children to provide care and support in old age. The direct reason for this concept is that the problem of aged care cannot be provided by society but must be solved by the family itself. In China, this concept is an objective reflection of thousands of years of economic uncertainty and patriarchy.

⁶⁶¹ Jiang, Yiwei. (2017). "Social Intervention in Marriage-Based on the Interview Survey on "Chinese-style forced marriage" in "Knowledge". *Zhejiang Social Sciences*, 11: 70-79.

⁶⁶² Interview with Ms. U, 39 years old, in Shanghai, 26 May 2017.

with the original intent of helping single women achieve marriage.⁶⁶³ However, in the years since, it has become a pejorative term to suppress single women in China. The irony of the term's creation by the *Women's Federation* was also noted by some research participants: “*Just unbelievable! The Women's Federation, which always promotes equality between men and women, has become instigator of discrimination against single women.*”⁶⁶⁴

In an official message issued via *Microblog* on 17 May 2017, He Junke, Executive Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, declared that “*unmarried people have become a major concern to be solved in our society*”.⁶⁶⁵ To this end, the Communist Youth League has conducted education campaigns through the media and organizations to help singles establish a correct concept of marriage, including the initiative “*To help young people find the right partner*”, was supported by the Youth League, government bodies including labor unions and women's federations. Social youth organizations also carry out activities that facilitate exchanges, coordinate and promote matchmaking services to help older singles find the right partners. By 2017, various government organizations had organized blind dates for more than 100 million unmarried people, for the purpose of dealing with the issue of “*single people affecting societal harmony*”.⁶⁶⁶

However, the interventionist behavior of the state into peoples' personal lives has also caused resentment. “*It's too ridiculous! The official media calls out to help singles find partners.*

⁶⁶³ The *All-China Women's Federation* (中国妇女联合会), founded by the Communist Party of China in 1949, is a national-level women's organization dedicated to “equality between men and women” and “defending women's rights”. To achieve women's liberation was once a key slogan of the Chinese revolution, and leaders of the Women's Federation once played an important role in the campaign for gender equality, especially through the promotion of literacy classes in rural areas and other projects to improve the social status of women. In recent years, the *All-China Women's Federation* has initiated high-quality research projects aimed at improving the social status of Chinese women.

⁶⁶⁴ Interview with Ms. Ti, 45 years old, in Beijing, 17 May 2017.

⁶⁶⁵ Xiong, Tingdong. (2017). *The Central Committee of the Communist Youth League will help us solve the single problem!* Available at: <http://tougao.12371.cn/gaojian.php?tid=784784> (accessed 28 January 2018).

⁶⁶⁶ Heffron, Claire. (26 September 2017). “Chinese Communist Party organises blind dates for 100 million unmarried citizens as it claims single people could affect ‘societal harmony’”. *Daily Mail*. Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/china/article-4922016/China-launches-organised-dates-100-million.html> (accessed 12 March 2018).

*Marriage is clearly a personal life, as my personal business. I think it is an offense to me.”*⁶⁶⁷

Workplace influences

In the era of the planned economy prior to 1978, the Chinese state incorporated all individuals into the work unit as a whole, with the collective acting as a parent to its members, distributing social functions and services which evolved into a diversified complex of functions.⁶⁶⁸ Today, after 40 years of reform and economic liberalization, marital problems are considered to be personal private issues that the work unit should not interfere with any more.⁶⁶⁹ The 1980 China Marriage Law legislates “*freedom of marriage*” and forbids “*Marriage upon arbitrary decision by any third party, and any other acts of interference in the freedom of marriage shall be prohibited.*”⁶⁷⁰ (Article 3). However, being single at the later age is considered to be irresponsible, and subject to social disapproval. In the workplace, especially for those working in state-owned enterprises or organizations, being a single woman over the age of 30 is perceived as an aberrant phenomenon that does not conform to the spirit of collectivism.⁶⁷¹ Some employers choose to organize parties to provide occasions for singles to meet, even including some dance parties and other matchmaking activities.⁶⁷²

Today, single unmarried people in some collective work units are still presented as a problem that needs to be solved. One of the most visible signs of these tensions is gossip in the workplace, which can be hostile and reflect extreme levels of rivalry and power struggle

⁶⁶⁷ Interview with Ms. Zi, 30 years old, in Shanghai, 20 May 2017.

⁶⁶⁸ Tang, Beibei., Tomba, Luigi., & Breitung, Werner. (2011). “The work-unit is dead. Long live the work-unit! Spatial segregation and privilege in a work-unit housing compound in Guangzhou”. *Geographische Zeitschrift*, 99 (1): 36-49.

⁶⁶⁹ Engel, 1984.

⁶⁷⁰ Marriage Law of People’s Republic of China. (1981). Adopted at the Third Session of the Fifth National People’s Congress and promulgated by Order No. 9 of the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress on September 10, 1980, effective as of January 1, 1981.

⁶⁷¹ Ding, Min., & Xu, Jie. (2015). *The Chinese Way*. Routledge, New York.

⁶⁷² Zhang & Sun, 2014, 129.

among colleagues, as well as between superiors and subordinates. Several interviewees noted negative experience in the workplace because of their single status:

Now I am the only single women above 30 in my workplace. Thus, I have an unusual existence. My direct leader believed that it was his responsibility to help me- perhaps he thinks I am a destabilizing factor. He needs to submit work plans annually, which include the marriage issues of staff. He even arranged blind dates for me many times. At the beginning, I followed him; after all, he is my senior. Now, I choose to directly refuse any of his arrangements. In our organization, some female colleagues have begun considering having a second child, and I become more and more a unique figure among them. One time, he joked at me at the collective meeting that the first major task for him is to help me find a partner; otherwise, he is incompetent as a leader. I feel uncomfortable and embarrassed.⁶⁷³

Another interview also noted her embarrassment at her single status being discussed at work. She does not want her single status to create too much attention, and any excessive concern is uncomfortable and somewhat disrespectful to her. However:

I remember that one time at the general staff meeting in our university, the dean made a public statement that “we should be concerned more about marriage issue for unmarried ‘leftover women’”. Immediately, there was a burst of laughter. Discussing the marriage problems of single employees in public meeting caused snickering. At that moment, I realized that singles had become a public entertainment; we are ridiculed instead of receiving sincere concern. In my opinion, it was not right to talk about private marriage issues in public. How can marriage problems become a topic of group discussion instead of a personal issue!

⁶⁷³ Interview with Ms. W, 34 years old, in Suzhou, 4 June 2017.

*The leaders only consider a collective consciousness but ignore individual rights, which is really an insult.*⁶⁷⁴

Family influences

In a collectivist society, the family is the most important group that influences the behavior and decision-making of individuals.⁶⁷⁵ Before becoming engaged, in China it is necessary to meet the parents of both parties to obtain approval.⁶⁷⁶ Some interviewees discussed their families' involvement in previous relationships:

*When I was in my 20s, I had a boyfriend. However, he lived in the outer suburbs and his family conditions were average. My parents were not very satisfied. Therefore, we broke up. Later, I have never encountered a suitable one again. I am not sure if my parents regret the intervention.*⁶⁷⁷

Collectivist awareness is also highly salient within the family, and emphasizes family interests and goals over individual aspirations.⁶⁷⁸ One interviewee described:

My mother often complains that, 'all of your peers are married, and only you are single'. I feel very strange. Do I have to marry when someone else gets married? Why do I have to be the same as others? However, if it does not meet the collective standards, I am a different kind of human. My own mother said that I am not

⁶⁷⁴ Interview with Ms. Ni, 44 years old, in Shanghai, 21 June 2017.

⁶⁷⁵ Fasiki, Hamza El. (June 2013). "The Family Business in Collectivist Societies: Traits and Implications". *Tharawat*, 18: 20-23.

⁶⁷⁶ Anonymous. (12 November 2015). "Marriage in Current Collectivist and Individualist Cultures". *Copyrightland*. Available at: <http://www.copyrightland.net/our-sexuality/marriage-in-current-collectivist-and-individualist-cultures.htm> (accessed 24 August 2018).

⁶⁷⁷ Interview with Ms. S, 48 years old, in Beijing, 2 May 2017.

⁶⁷⁸ Bejanyan, Kathrine., Marshall, Tara C., & Ferenczi, Nelli. (2015). "Associations of Collectivism with Relationship Commitment, Passion, and Mate Preferences: Opposing Roles of Parental Influence and Family Allocentrism". *PLoS ONE*. 10. 2. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0117374> (accessed 15 December 2018).

*normal, let alone outsiders.*⁶⁷⁹

Overall, single women in China are collectively pushed by their families, work units and broader society to get married, which provides powerful evidence that China is still a country with a strongly collectivist culture. While Chinese people enjoy interests and benefits from collectivist outlook; unfortunately however such beliefs can also be transformed into collective violence against those who are seen to act or behave contrary to cultural traditions, including single women. In short then, Chinese collectivist culture justifies violence against single women.

6.1.4 Summary and discussion

In this section, cultural violence against Chinese single women was discussed through explaining the aspects of traditional patriarchal culture, family and marriage culture, collectivist culture and filial piety culture, as well as the conflicts created with the status of single women. Under these traditional Chinese constructs, single women in contemporary China are seen as existing out of place, and in opposition to traditional cultural norms.

Taking from Johan Galtung's theory of cultural violence, this section serves to explain the social and cultural contexts of China, and attempts to suggest an understanding of how Chinese family, marriage, generational and collectivist attitudes result in the negative treatment of Chinese single women. These aspects of culture can and are used to legitimize or justify violence in its direct or structural form against single women in contemporary China. Despite this context, the influence of traditional culture on cultural violence against Chinese single women has received little attention to date. In the following sections, structural and direct violence suffered by contemporary Chinese single women is discussed further, through

⁶⁷⁹ Interview with Ms. Z, 30 years old, in Beijing, 26 April 2017.

accounts generated from in-depth interviews.

Table 4 below summarizes the cultural violence against Chinese single women in contemporary China, as outlined in the current section.

Table 4 Aspects of cultural violence against Chinese single women in contemporary China

Cultural Aspects	Cultural characteristics	Challenge created by Chinese single women	Culture violence against Chinese single women
Aspect 1: Traditional patriarchal culture	In patriarchal culture, women are as subordinate to men, in family and the workplace.	<i>However</i> , single women can usually remain independent and are free from the traditional patriarchal framework.	Traditional patriarchal culture legitimates violence against Chinese single women.
Aspect 2: Family forms and marriage culture	Marriage is a ‘must’ in Chinese tradition culture; marriage as a standard to measure success and failure of a woman.	<i>However</i> , single women, through existing outside marriage culture, are seen to overturn traditional family norms.	Traditional family forms and marriage culture legitimates violence against Chinese single women.
Aspect 3: Collectivist culture	A Chinese person, who does not follow national collectivist rules and norms, may be attacked and marginalized in society.	<i>Nevertheless</i> , being single does not conform to the spirit of collectivism, which affects social harmony and subvert tradition.	Collective culture justifies violence against Chinese single women.
Aspect 4: Filial piety (Xiao) culture	Filial piety culture becomes a tool to force single women to marry enforced mainly within families, supported by pressure from parents, relatives, friends and colleagues.	<i>Nevertheless</i> , single women have an ability to disobey such cultural expectations.	Filial piety (Xiao) culture justifies violence against Chinese single women.

6.2 Single women's experiences of structural violence in contemporary China

Structural violence against Chinese single women is manifested in varying combinations in the economic, political and social spheres. In this chapter, research findings are presented into four aspects of structural violence affecting single women in contemporary China. These findings, generated from in-depth interviews with female interviewees across China, relate to four specific aspects, namely: *employment discrimination; policy restrictions on purchasing housing and reproductive rights; societal discrimination and harassment in daily life; and personal inability to exercise agency.*

6.2.1 Employment discrimination and Chinese single women

In China, the ideology that different genders should have equal employment rights and opportunities in employment that are constantly reinforced through official government propaganda, with common slogans such as Mao Zedong's "*Holding up half the sky*" and "*achieving equality between men and women, pursuing harmonious development, and creating a better tomorrow*".⁶⁸⁰ However, in practice, institutions make use of various means to marginalize those who are in a weak position in society, and set obstacles to limit their social status and access to rights, which constitutes a form of structural violence.⁶⁸¹

Gender discrimination in employment is a major issue discussed in Chinese legal, policy and academic circles; however single women are often overlooked and not treated seriously as a vulnerable subgroup.⁶⁸² To keep operations dynamic in the workplace, business culture in China encourages competition between workers, and thus there are always some individuals

⁶⁸⁰ "*Holding up half the sky* (妇女能顶半边天)" and "*Achieving Equality between men and women, pursuing harmonious development, and creating a better tomorrow* (男女平等, 和谐发展, 共创美好明天)".

⁶⁸¹ Farmer, Paul. (1996). "On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below". *Daedalus*, 125 (1): 61-283.

⁶⁸² Huang, 2017.

or groups vulnerable to being marginalized as victims.⁶⁸³ Single women appear to have no visible differences in the distribution of rights and resources with other women; however, relative to married women, single women in China have to face many hidden barriers in employment. These include difficulties in the process of *job seeking*; *working conditions*; and *training or promoting opportunities*, each of which is discussed further below.

Job recruitment

China is a country with an enormous population, and therefore labor market competition for certain positions can be particularly intense. In the current economic transition period in China, this has also resulted in a redundant labor force in urban areas.⁶⁸⁴ In 2017, there were approximately 9.7 million unemployed people in urban China.⁶⁸⁵ In addition, enterprises continually pursue a low-cost, high-output labor supply to achieve ongoing profits and development. As a result, during the recruitment process employers consider various factors, many discriminatory, when selecting new employees.

Chinese job ads usually require a candidate to submit their CV containing information about the worker's age, gender, and marital background when applying for an initial interview, along with an attached photo.⁶⁸⁶ In the job seeking process, marriage and childbearing are key considerations made by HR Departments for female applications, in addition to academic qualifications and work experience.⁶⁸⁷ As a result, women often suffer from significant discrimination compared to male candidates when looking for employment opportunities.

⁶⁸³ Li, 2016, 13-20.

⁶⁸⁴ Lam, W. Raphael., Liu, Xiaoguang., & Schipke, Alfred. (2015). *China's Labor Market in the "New Normal"*. IMF Working Paper. WP/15/151. International Monetary Fund, Asia and Pacific Department, 11-12; Li, Haizheng., & Zax, Jeffrey. (2011). *Economic Transition and the Labor Market in China*. University of Colorado, Boulder, CO.

⁶⁸⁵ 2017 China Labor Statistics Yearbook (《中国劳动统计年鉴-2017》).

⁶⁸⁶ Webster, Timothy. (2011). "Ambivalence & Activism: Employment Discrimination in China". *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*, 44: 643.

⁶⁸⁷ Kuhn, Peter., & Shen, Kailing. (2012). "Gender Discrimination in Job Ads: Evidence from China". *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 128 (1): 287-336.

Female candidates of marriageable age are subject to more questioning and scrutiny, as hiring an unmarried female employee is considered to increase business operational costs due to maternity leave once a woman gives birth.⁶⁸⁸ Compared with married female job seekers who have completed their families, Chinese single women are in a disadvantaged situation and face unexpected challenges in seeking employment.

Younger women in their 20s in China have the advantages of finding jobs easier; however many such positions are temporary or short term assignment roles. As female employees grow older, many women also risk losing their jobs or receive demotions if they choose to give birth or pay more attention to child rearing after having children.⁶⁸⁹

Ms. Zi (30 years old) talked about her employment worries as follows: *I know very clearly that my boss would like to hire young single girls without family burden to come to the company for working. Now I am already 30 years old, I have to think about where my future would be, otherwise I could become a loser soon. On the one hand, I am afraid of that I could be eliminated by the labor market due to my increased age, on the other hand, I have to bear extreme pressure from my family who are pushing me to get married soon.*⁶⁹⁰

Ms. E (31 years old), comes from a small town of Guangxi Province, and is now working in Shenzhen because she believes that big cities provide more opportunities to career-minded people compared to those in her own hometown. To her, holding a Master's degree and having excellent academic achievements from a renowned Chinese university means that her ambition needs space for professional achievement. However, reality is not always as people

⁶⁸⁸ Huang, 2017.

⁶⁸⁹ Granrose, Cheryl S. (2005). *Employment of Women in Chinese Cultures: Half the Sky*. Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham and Camberley, UK. 18.

⁶⁹⁰ Interview with Ms. Zi, 30 years old, in Shanghai, 20 May 2017.

expect. Recently, she has begun seeking a new job to earn a higher salary:

My resume has been submitted to a famous enterprise via an employment recruitment company that has a high recommendation success rate. Unfortunately, I get replies very soon that I have been rejected. The introducer told me that the reason is obvious that all unmarried women, about 30 years old, are not hired. It is not the employment discrimination against me alone but targeting the entire group of unmarried women who have not had children.⁶⁹¹

Another interviewee, Ms. O (31 years old), also described her suffering as a single woman when looking for a job:

I never thought before single women were disadvantaged in the job market until I turned 30. In the eyes of HR, single women around the age of 30 are in an unstable period, they will most probably marry soon, give birth and take maternity leave, and would delay their career and increase costs for the enterprise. Recently, I did encounter a bad experience when seeking job-hopping due to my age and single status. I am very upset, and I do not know what to do.⁶⁹²

Ms. Ti (45 years old) also related her stories in seeking employment. She chose to submit her job application without mentioning that she is an unmarried woman. In this way, she could easier obtain an interview invitation to show her abilities and competence to HR, so that her disadvantage for being single would be overlooked. However, she overestimated the cruelty of reality:

⁶⁹¹ Interview with Ms. E, 31 years old, in Shenzhen, 8 July 2017.

⁶⁹² Interview with Ms. O, 31 years old, in Xi'an, 15 August 2017.

I remember that in an interview, HR was very satisfied with my academic attainments and previous work experience. Unfortunately, when I thought everything would come to an end, who knows, the atmosphere changed suddenly. HR asked me about my family and of course gets to know that I am unmarried; I observed that his facial expression changed, his smile disappeared. I promised the HR that I would not marry soon and there would be no problem for me to work overtime or even conduct business travel frequently. All my explanations became weak and powerless. Of course, I failed to obtain this job opportunity.⁶⁹³

Ms. A (35 years old) is already a successful entrepreneur running her own business in Shanghai, after consistent work effort for approximately 10 years. Because of this, she considers herself very lucky compared with other single women over 30 who suffer from employment barriers. As a boss, she has many opportunities to recruit new staff. However, even to her, it is unavoidable that unmarried female job seekers are also seen in a disadvantaged position:

Although I myself am a single woman, running my own company, when I recruit staff, I also must be very careful of female applicants. The workplace is indeed unfair to women. However, doing business is not running a charity. To make profits is always the first issue beyond anything else. Although I understand the difficult situation of female employees, I cannot tolerate anything that makes my company lose profits.⁶⁹⁴

As a fast-growing country and economy, the profit incentive is undoubtedly the most important concern to employers and business in China.⁶⁹⁵ In contrast, employees are mainly

⁶⁹³ Interview with Ms. Ti, 45 years old, in Beijing, 17 May 2017.

⁶⁹⁴ Interview with Ms. A, 35 years old, in Shanghai, 1 June 2017.

⁶⁹⁵ Kuhn & Shen, 2012.

concerned with their incomes and personal development.⁶⁹⁶ Currently, there are no specific labor laws that expressly protect unmarried women from discrimination during the recruitment process.⁶⁹⁷ Consequently, without robust legal protections, any vulnerable worker group such as single women can become victims in a competitive employment situation.⁶⁹⁸ Even though some labor protection laws are available to prevent labor hire discrimination, whether these can be applied is another matter. Such barriers against single women seeking a job in urban China are therefore unavoidable in the short term. Structural violence means oppressive institutions and social discrimination that affect a certain population. In this sense, discrimination creates additional barriers for single women in the employment market, who are not treated as normal applicants during the process of applying for jobs.

Unfair work treatment

Discriminatory practices in the workplace are not only personal, but also institutional.⁶⁹⁹ When after being hired and receiving employment, there are additional difficulties single women have to face within the workplace. Without domestic family duties, single women are typically considered to have more free time than married women to invest in the workplace and are therefore most likely to be nominated for overtime work, or assigned additional workplace tasks.⁷⁰⁰ This was reflected in the responses of some interviewees:

As a single employee, my boss and coworkers believe that I have an obligation to work overtime, because I do not have a household burden. In their eyes, single women do not belong to the complete system of the state; therefore, single people

⁶⁹⁶ Shen, Jie. (2007). *Labour Disputes and their Resolution in China*. Chandos Publishing, Oxford, UK. 41.

⁶⁹⁷ Huang, 2017.

⁶⁹⁸ Zhai, Yujuan., & Li, Han. (2007). "The Situation and New Legislation of China Labor Dispute". *Willamette Journal of International Law and Dispute Resolution*, 15 (1): 111-131.

⁶⁹⁹ DePaulo, Bella. (2013). "Best Story I've Ever Read on Singlism in the Workplace, Journalist describes the single girl's second shift." *Psychology Today*. Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/living-single/201306/best-story-i-ve-ever-read-singlism-in-the-workplace> (accessed 7 December 2018).

⁷⁰⁰ Zhenai Net., & Zhilian Recruitment. (November 2017). *2017 Workplace Singles Love and Marriage Demand Report*. Available at: <https://finance.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnK5Irp> (accessed 10 September 2018).

*are always treated differently from those married employees. I often work overtime in the evening and even come to the workplace on holidays; the reason is that employers assume that unmarried women do not need shared time for other family duties.*⁷⁰¹

Unfortunately, in most instances employees working overtime cannot obtain any extra payment in lieu of their efforts.⁷⁰² For example, many Chinese supplier firms are characterized by extremely unsafe and poor conditions, and force workers to work overtime without extra pay.⁷⁰³ In addition, a few enterprises compensate their employees for their overtime work through shift exchange, or other unofficial measures in order to reduce overtime pay. However, without clear standards such agreements cannot be enforced fairly.⁷⁰⁴ Therefore, labor disputes have continually increased during the economic transition period in contemporary China, with particular impact on single women employees:⁷⁰⁵

I had a period of very negative experience when I was working in an advertisement company. Because I was unmarried, almost each weekend I had to come to my office to work without bonus pay. I did not have any free time for my hobbies. There is no legal recourse working in a private company, thus I knew I could not complain unless I quit. Finally, I gave up the job and shifted to another

⁷⁰¹ Interview with Ms. Ni, 44 years old, in Shanghai, 21 June 2017.

⁷⁰² Cao, Ruoyao. (2010). "Discussion on several issues of "overtime pay." *Market Modernization*, 18: 101.

⁷⁰³ Verité Research Organization. (2004). *Excessive Overtime in Chinese Supplier Factories. Causes, Impacts, and Recommendations for Action*. 1-30. Available at: https://www.verite.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Excessive_Overtime_in_Chinese_Factories.pdf (accessed at 6 May 2019).

⁷⁰⁴ Zeng, Xiangquan., Lu, Liang., & Idris, Sa'ad Umar. (2005). "Working time in transition: The dual task of standardization and flexibilization in China". *Conditions of Work and Employment Series No. 11*. International Labor Office, Geneva, Switzerland. 16-17.

⁷⁰⁵ Brown, Ron. (2007). "Rule of Law in China: Chinese Law and Business China Labour Dispute Resolution." The Foundation for Law, Justice and Society and The Centre for Socio-Legal Studies, University of Oxford, UK. Available at: https://www.fljs.org/sites/www.fljs.org/files/publications/FLJ%20BS%20Brown%20pb_d.pdf (accessed 18 May 2019).

*company where the manager could respect me in the same way as other married women.*⁷⁰⁶

Single women are perceived as having more time to dedicate to unpaid work in the workplace, to the point that such sacrifice seems to already become taken for granted.⁷⁰⁷ This was reflected in many examples cited by research participants in this study:

*Personally, I have been repeatedly referred to as a “firefighter” in my non-working time, and whenever there are some dangerous jobs with a heavy workload, I become the first person to be called by my superior. The reason is that married employees have many commitments at home they cannot get away from, and they have to take care of their children. It seems that they think that single people do not need to do any kind of housework. This is very annoying, but it is already become an unspoken rule in the workplace.*⁷⁰⁸

Another interviewee, Ms. H (38 years old) described the same negative experience in the workplace:

*As a single woman, I have experienced too many negative moments. My colleagues often remind me that I am single woman anyway, and I should have time to do more in the workplace. As a single person, other colleagues despise me. Previously I felt very uncomfortable, and now I try to not to be influenced by that, because I know it is a structural problem that would be difficult to change.*⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁶ Interview with Ms. Ti, 45 years old, in Beijing, 17 May 2017.

⁷⁰⁷ Brown, Ann. (2013). “Overtime The Norm? How Single Women May Be Discriminated Against At Work”. *Madame Noire*. Available at: <https://madamenoire.com/284586/overtime-the-norm-how-single-women-may-be-discriminated-against-at-work/> (accessed 7 December 2018).

⁷⁰⁸ Interview with Ms. Yi, 32 years old, in Wuxi, 25 June 2017.

⁷⁰⁹ Interview with Ms. H, 38 years old, in Shanghai, 25 May 2017.

Thus, these interviewees are subjected to certain kinds of discrimination in the workplace due to being single. Structural violence is concerned that the unfair distribution of political rights or economic interests creates inequalities in social, political and economic structures.⁷¹⁰ In terms of working hours, many single women in the workplace are not treated as equal to other married women. They suffer from structural disadvantage during their employment, such as working overtime without payment.

Disadvantage in training and promotion opportunities

Marriage, as the foundation of the family and society, plays a pivotal role in maintaining social stability in China.⁷¹¹ On the contrary, unmarried women are considered to be less responsible and unstable compared to married women.⁷¹² Additionally, unmarried women are in a weaker position in the workplace, and often have disadvantages in obtaining training or promotion, no matter how excellent they are in their professional duties. This was emphasized by many participants interviewed during the research project:

*In the workplace, some colleagues consider me like a monster due to remaining single for a long time and often attack me. They think that an unmarried person is flawed. Therefore, I have less close friends, most of time I talk to myself, and I would not like to cooperate with other colleagues - instead I do things alone so that I can feel better. In this way, I cannot build good interrelationships thus I lost many promotion opportunities. Fortunately, I work in a state-owned company, in which I can't be easily dismissed.*⁷¹³

For the interviewee above, it seems that this rejection has become a vicious circle. Because of

⁷¹⁰ Ho, 2007, 3.

⁷¹¹ Xie, 2017, 104-107.

⁷¹² Huang, 2017, 22.

⁷¹³ Interview with Ms. Q, 41 years old, in Zhenjiang, 11 June 2017.

her single status, Ms. Q was attacked by her colleagues and she gradually found herself marginalized by her peers. As a result, she was unable to establish good relationships with others and therefore lost many opportunities for training or promotion. In the workplace, managers pay more attention on whether the employee is good at dealing with ‘Guanxi’ (personal relationships with other people), rather than objective work abilities.

Ms. D also described her unhappiness at work. In the workplace, she often needs to do some of the office chores that waste time and energy. However, for some key tasks, including training, she is often excluded:

*My unit leader thinks that the first thing for me is to find a boyfriend to get married, and then I could become a competent adult in charge of important tasks. Some colleagues consider me to be a kid, who does not need much productive resources; this affects the distribution of benefits in the company.*⁷¹⁴

Similarly, Ms. Yi was upset at losing a funding opportunity for training due to her single status. In her opinion, the world is full of malicious projections onto unmarried women, which affects her and other women. Losing the opportunity for training also means the opportunity to be promoted in the future will be hindered:

In the past year, there was a funding quota opportunity for pursuing a PhD in our hospital. Unfortunately, I failed to compete with another male candidate because I was unmarried woman, even if I am highly qualified in the position. The excuse is that ‘a woman with a Doctorate degree would be disadvantaged to find a partner to get married. Women do not need a higher academic record at all’. During the

⁷¹⁴ Interview with Ms. D, 33 years old, in Lanzhou, 28 June 2017.

*workplace competition, I am often in a weak position due to my single status.*⁷¹⁵

Thus, the cited evidence by the interviewees shows that adverse discrimination against single women in the workplace continues to exist. The promotion opportunities are not entirely dependent on the ability to work but consider more the relationship with seniors, as well as subjective biases based on a candidate's personal background, including marriage status. In short, Chinese single women are at a disadvantage in the workplace.

Summary

In this section, three aspects of single women employment disadvantage have been identified and discussed. Firstly, single women face specific discrimination and misgivings from HR Departments when looking for a job. The primary concern of inequality between men and women in the employment recruitment is that employers care about the cost of women taking maternity leave, as the status of being single is only considered a temporary and transitional stage for an adult woman. Secondly, compared to married women, single women are more naturally expected to commit to working overtime and doing more unpaid tasks in the workplace. Finally, single women, due to assumptions and discrimination based on their single status, may also lose out on some promotion and training opportunities.

As has long been widely recognized and noted, women are more likely to encounter a “glass ceiling” in the workplace preventing upwards advancement.⁷¹⁶ In addition, single women encounter unique obstacles that form a new category of “*discrimination that distinguishes between married and unmarried single women*”.⁷¹⁷ Unfortunately, this remains largely invisible and unaddressed. Expanding on Galtung's theory on structural violence, this

⁷¹⁵ Interview with Ms. Yi, 32 years old, in Wuxi, 25 June 2017.

⁷¹⁶ Johns, Merida L. (2013). “Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Structural, Cultural, and Organizational Barriers Preventing Women from Achieving Senior and Executive Positions”. *Perspectives of Health Information Management*. 10. 1e.

⁷¹⁷ Huang, 2017, 19.

research posits that: if a single woman is humiliated by the surrounding people, it is personal violence, but if one million single women are discriminated by the public, it is structural violence. Similarly, when a single woman is discriminated in labor market when looking for a job or position promotion because she is single, it is individual failure, but when most of those do, it is structural violence.

Despite the challenges cited, most of my informants currently have a stable job with a considerable salary, and have sufficient educational qualifications to survive in the job market competition with married women. This factor can perhaps be explained by the fact that single women have to be much more competitive and make more personal sacrifices compared to married women in order to obtain a secure work position in the Chinese workplace. In other words, for many women being highly educated with strong workplace skills is only sufficient to overcome structural disadvantages in the workplace of being single women.⁷¹⁸ Nonetheless, despite their education and work skills, this is not sufficient to fight all prejudice even hostility against them due to remain single above 30.

6.2.2 Impact of Government policy restrictions on single women

There is universal consensus in China that the family is an indispensable part of social life, linking members through marriage and blood relations.⁷¹⁹ As a result, the formulation of national policies often takes the family as a primary social unit.⁷²⁰ This assumption however also results in Chinese single women being excluded from certain government policies.⁷²¹ In this section, three thematic aspects of policy restrictions are examined: *housing policy*;

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid*, 55.

⁷¹⁹ Sheng, Xuewen. (2004). "Chinese Families". Bert N. Adams., & Jan Trost (eds.). *Handbook of World Families*. SAGE Publications, New York. 99-128. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412975957.n5>

⁷²⁰ Lu, Xueyi. (2011). *Social Structure of Contemporary China*. Social Sciences Academic Press, Beijing. 131.

⁷²¹ Wang, Weiwei. (2016). "A single record of a young woman". *South Wind Window*, Guangzhou, China, 1: 66-70.

reproductive rights for Chinese single women; and worries about old-age care; which were identified from in-depth interviews.

Housing policy restrictions

The housing market has become one of the major industries driving the economic boom in contemporary China.⁷²² Marriage can drive the sale of real estate, as separate housing is traditionally required for couples in China before getting married.⁷²³ As the largest expenditure of family life and the mainstay of the national economy, the state has introduced various policies that disadvantage single persons seeking to purchase housing. Mortgage loans from banks can be used to purchase houses, but for those who are already married, they can provide proof of work and income of both spouses, so that the income of two persons is added together. The increased ability to repay thus increases the successful probability of applying bank loans.⁷²⁴ However, commercial loans from banks to single buyers have higher interest rates than those issued to married couples, and so the difficulty for single people in applying for loans is increasing.⁷²⁵ Banks consider that due to repayment risks, it is easier for a married family to repay than a single person, as a married couple typically has more stable work and income.

Furthermore, in most Chinese cities, applications from single persons for “*affordable housing*”⁷²⁶ are strictly restricted or even excluded, because state policy stresses that the

⁷²² Koss, Richard., & Shi, Xinrui. (2018). *Stabilizing China's Housing Market*. IMF Working Paper. 4-5.

⁷²³ Zhang, Bo., Wrenn, Douglas H., & Yi, Junjian. (2017). *House Prices and Marriage: A Duration Model Analysis*. Pennsylvania State University, University Park, USA.

⁷²⁴ Xue, Yingxiao. (2017). “The impact of falling house prices on personal housing credit of commercial banks in China”. *Journal of Economic and Trade Practices*, Hangzhou City, China, 17: 54-55.

⁷²⁵ “Beijing single would be more helpless, with the rise in housing prices, you may not be able to grant a mortgage”. Jin Zhao Liao Fang. (30 July 2018). *Article of Baidu*. Available at: www.baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1607411151308124145&wfr=spider&for=pc. (accessed 22 December 2018).

⁷²⁶ Affordable housing (经济适用房) refers to housing constructed according to China's national economically-affordable housing construction plan. The plan is issued by the state, and the land use is generally implemented in the form of administrative allocations. The purchaser is exempted from land transfer fees, and various other property transfer fees are halved. The sale price is also subject to a government-guided price. Affordable housing has three distinctive features relative to commercial housing: economy, security, and practicality. It is commercial housing with a level of social security. (经济适用房是指根据国家经济适用住房建设

purchase of affordable housing should be family-based. This in turn ensures that singles cannot easily buy affordable housing. Currently, Shanghai's housing purchase policies are the most stringent in China.⁷²⁷ Shanghai property market slumped in October 2010, when the Shanghai regional government announced policies to curb housing price rises.⁷²⁸ Current restrictions include provisions that single persons from other provinces and cities without 'Shanghai Hukou status'⁷²⁹ are not eligible to buy an apartment in the city, and that local singles are limited to owning one property.⁷³⁰

Ms. J⁷³¹, 32 years old, has been living for nine years in Shanghai. Without a stable fixed residence, she has to move frequently within the city, including one year when she moved four times. Until today, she does not have a local *Hukou* residency status in Shanghai. Thus, she is excluded from the list of approved housing purchasers according to state policy. She is excluded from having a stable living residence in Shanghai until housing policies for non-residents are loosened.

Single-people with housing difficulties require relief through the public low-cost housing system to provide housing security. However, the minimum age limit for single persons applying for affordable housing is 35 years, and requires a minimum 5 years payment of social security contributions.⁷³² Ms J. complained that: "*The government should change its*

计划安排建设的住宅。由国家统一下达计划，用地一般实行行政划拨的方式，免收土地出让金，对各种经批准的收费实行减半征收，出售价格实行政府指导价。经济适用房相对于商品房具有 3 个显著特征：经济性、保障性、实用性。是具有社会保障性质的商品住宅）。

⁷²⁷ Zhou, Shibo., & Xue, Yimin. (2017). *Shanghai Secondary Housing Purchases Restriction Analysis*. 2017 International Conference on Financial Management, Education and Social Science (FMES, 2017). 67-72.

⁷²⁸ Yang, Huan. (2018). *An Analysis of Restrictions on Housing Purchases in China*. PhD Thesis of the Department of Economics, University of Ottawa, Canada. 12.

⁷²⁹ "The migrants who make up a great portion of urban China's low-wage labor force and burgeoning population face unique challenges, most are legally prevented from ever gaining full legal status in their destinations, based on the status they hold within China's hukou system of household registration." Johnson, Leif. (March 2017). "Bordering Shanghai: China's hukou system and processes of urban bordering". *Geoforum*, 80: 93-102.

⁷³⁰ Sun, Ruizhuo. (May 2010). "It is timely to curb the excessive rise in housing prices". *Shanghai Real Estate*, 5: 61.

⁷³¹ Interview with Ms. J, 32 years old, in Shanghai, 24 May 2017.

⁷³² Hua, Lv. (2019). "How to apply for affordable housing in Beijing?" Available at:

mindset. In addition to planning and launching various service initiatives based on ‘marriage’, it should improve the services for the single population”.

Ms. A (35 years old) has achieved financial freedom through operating her own successful business in Shanghai. Unfortunately however, due to her single status and lack of Shanghai *Hukou* residence, she has no ability to invest money in real estate. She explained:

I own a very small apartment, however, because of my single status and without a Shanghai Hukou, there is no possibility for me to purchase more housing. In order to buy a house in Shanghai, a contact told me that as long as you have enough money, they could help arrange a marriage license. I refused. I did not understand why people would rather accept fraudulent means such as using a fake marriage. The government limits the conditions of single buyers, such as Hukou registration, years of participation in social insurance, and other aspects of restrictions.⁷³³

Currently, the government’s policy seems to be based on the assumption that without the need for marriage, there is no need to buy a house. Thus, buying a house is not seen as a necessity for single persons, who are classed as a group of people who can be sacrificed and neglected in the China housing market.

Thus many single women, some of whom have migrated from other regions and lack the ability to purchase their own housing without a local *Hukou*, are disadvantaged from investing in real estate without a marriage certificate. This restriction can be partially explained as a marriage incentive, which covertly encourages people to choose the path of married life. In

<https://www.66law.cn/laws/619015.aspx> (accessed 18 December 2019).

⁷³³ Interview with Ms. A, 35 years old, in Shanghai, 31 May 2017.

this respect, there is no difference between single men and single women in China, as both migrant men and women in big urban cities face the restrictions of *Hukou* system.⁷³⁴ However in China, women usually earn a lower income than men, and are less capable of affording to buy property on their own. According to the statistics data by ‘Zhaopin Limited’⁷³⁵ in 2018, Chinese women earned on average 22 percent less than men.⁷³⁶

Furthermore, given the huge expense of housing, many Chinese parents often financially support their children to some extent.⁷³⁷ However, as parents usually consider that daughters will marry eventually⁷³⁸, they prefer to financially support their sons over their daughters⁷³⁹. In addition, single women financially capable of purchasing their own housing are also regarded by the public as being too ‘strong’, and consequently lose competitiveness in the marriage market. This attitude derives from the fact that economically independent women usually have the motivation and ability to spend greater carefully selecting their future husbands in the marriage market.⁷⁴⁰

Reproductive restrictions on single women

After the 1970s, reproductive rights were first introduced to Chinese public policy through international conferences and Conventions, and were recognized as one of the most basic

⁷³⁴ Wu, Weiping. (September 2002). “Migration Housing in Urban China. Choices and Constraints”. *Urban Affairs Review*, 38 (1): 90-119.

⁷³⁵ Zhilian Limited/智联招聘有限公司, is a leading career platform in China focused on connecting users with relevant job opportunities.

⁷³⁶ CISION. (March 2018). *Zhaopin: Women Earn 22% Less than Men in China*. Available at: <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/zhaopin-women-earn-22-less-than-men-in-china-300608921.html> (accessed May 18 2019).

⁷³⁷ Li, Bingqin., & Shin, Hyun Bang. (2013). “Intergenerational Housing Support between Retired Old Parents and their Children in Urban China”. *Journal of Urban Studies*, 50 (16): 3225-3242.

⁷³⁸ Sha, Heila. (2017). “Care and Ageing in North-West China”. *Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia*. LIT Verlag, Hamburg Germany. 198.

⁷³⁹ Zhang, Chengsi., An, Guojun., & Yu, Xin. (July-August 2012). “What Drives China’s House Prices: Marriage or Money?” 2012 Institute of World Economics and Politics. *China & World Economy*, 20 (4): 19-36.

⁷⁴⁰ Sun, Tingting. (2015). Leftover Female: The Reality of Symbolic Construction. *China Academic Journal Electronic Publishing House*. Masterpieces Review. Yunnan University of Finance and Economics. Kunming City, China. p.18.

human rights. The World Population Plan of Action, issued by the United Nations in 1974, defined the right to birth as:

*All couples and individuals have the right to freely and responsibly determine the number and spacing of their children and the access to information, education and methods for this purpose; Individuals should consider the needs of their current children and future children and their responsibilities to society when exercising their responsibility for this right.*⁷⁴¹

Chinese law protects women's reproductive rights, and the subject of reproductive rights does not distinguish between married or unmarried individuals. In 2005, Article 51 of the revised China Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests stipulated that: "*Women have the right to have children in accordance with relevant state regulations, and there is also freedom to give birth.*"⁷⁴² Article 25 of the Marriage Law also states: "*Children born out of wedlock have the same rights as children born in wedlock, and no one may harm or discriminate.*"⁷⁴³ Furthermore, Article 17 of China's Population and Family Planning Act states that: "*citizens have children's births right*".⁷⁴⁴

Despite this, institutionally, the formulation of national policies towards reproductive services is fundamentally based on family units, and as such the inherent rights of single persons are generally ignored.⁷⁴⁵ Currently, single women in China expecting a baby would suffer from double damage - both from government policy and in moral judgement from society. Current

⁷⁴¹ Miró, Carmen A. (December 1977). "The World Population Plan of Action: A Political Instrument Whose Potential Has Not Been Realized". *Population and Development Review*, 3 (4): 421-442.

⁷⁴² Qi, Guang. (2005). "Legal Philosophy of Single Female Birth Right Debate". *Journal of Medicine and Society*. 6: 28-33.

⁷⁴³ Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China (2001 Revision). (中华人民共和国婚姻法(2001 修正)).《婚姻法》第二十五条非婚生子女享有与婚生子女同等的权利,任何人不得加以危害和歧视)。

⁷⁴⁴ The People's Republic of China Population and Family Planning Law (2015 Revision). (中华人民共和国人口与计划生育法(2015 修正))。第十七条公民有生育的权利,也有依法实行计划生育的义务,夫妻双方在实行计划生育中负有共同的责任)。

⁷⁴⁵ Wang, 2016, 70.

social welfare policy systems in China lack a support system for unwed mothers, while discriminatory government requirements partially deprive certain rights from such women and their children.

Under the current family planning policy in China, every child must have a birth certificate (i.e. a family planning service card), with one of the prerequisites for obtaining a birth certificate being a marriage certificate.⁷⁴⁶ Therefore, births occurring outside of marriage do not meet national family planning requirements, and are considered as illegal reproduction.⁷⁴⁷ In addition, to access maternity leave a mother also needs to provide a legal birth certificate; thus an unmarried woman who wants to give birth is forced to resign.⁷⁴⁸ As a result, if an unmarried mother gives birth to a child out of wedlock beyond state requirements, they are required to pay social support fees themselves, without state support.⁷⁴⁹

Some single women in China also expect to delay giving birth and freeze some of their eggs, in order to advance their careers before children. However, “frozen eggs” belong to the category of assisted reproductive technology, and in China women seeking to do this must be holders of the “three certificates” (that is, holding an official marriage certificate; ID card; and ‘Birth permit certificate’⁷⁵⁰). A few hospitals in China allow women to freeze their eggs; however the three certificates must be provided when using frozen eggs, and applicants are required to be under one of two restrictions namely: infertility; or cancer patients undergoing

⁷⁴⁶ Yang, Xiaoyan. (2014). “Female workers who are born unmarried shall enjoy maternity insurance benefits”. *Journal of Liaoning Administration College*, 5: 50-52.

⁷⁴⁷ Branigan, Tania. (20 January 2014). “For Chinese women, unmarried motherhood remains the final taboo”. *The Guardian*. 2014. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/20/china-unmarried-motherhood-remains-final-taboo> (accessed 22 December 2018).

⁷⁴⁸ Zhao, Jiuhui. (2014). *Analysis of the defects and perfection of the protection system for children born out of wedlock in China*. Master’s Thesis. Liupanshui Teachers College, Liupanshui, China.

⁷⁴⁹ Anonymous author. (20 June 2013). “Stigma of single moms in China”. *Global Times*. Available at: <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/790393.shtml#.Utkb6RbGLoY> (accessed 22 December 2018).

⁷⁵⁰ *Permit of giving birth* is, the necessary preparation procedures required by the Chinese state before a couple seeks to have children. The necessary procedures for the birth of a child should be applied for before the expected date of birth, because several things such as hospitalization and discharge require a birth permit. It is generally recommended to apply for a birth permit at around the first trimester (three months) of pregnancy.

chemotherapy. Similar restrictions are not applied to men if they want to freeze their sperm, who are allowed to freeze their sperm as a form of “fertility insurance” but without any oversight of their marital status or general health.⁷⁵¹ Thus, in China single women have no legal rights to give birth through reproductive technology before establishing a stable and legal marriage relationship.

Traditionally, if an unwed Chinese woman gave birth to a child, her behavior is considered exceptional, with many also believing that such an unmarried woman has serious personal problems, such as mental illness or unstable male-female relationships.⁷⁵² Therefore, an unmarried woman giving birth in China would be taking a brave moral position against public opinion. Her child could become a “*black child*”⁷⁵³ who could not obtain legal residence registration and require high social support payments from the mother.⁷⁵⁴ The single mother and her family would also have to endure social pressure, gossip and social censure by the surrounding community. Therefore, through social, cultural and government policy restrictions single women are in fact denied of their fundamental right to giving birth, although some of them have a strong desire to have children. One interviewee explained:

Because I am 35 years old, close to 36 years old, I will miss the best childbearing age. Unfortunately, the other part of my family (a husband) has not appeared in my life yet. However, I have strong desire to give birth and have my own child. I have worked for many years, with enough savings, own my own apartment, and have a stable substantial income. I am thinking about being a single mother. I

⁷⁵¹ Anonymous author. (2 August 2017). “Single Chinese women want to freeze their eggs and enjoy life”. *BBC News*. Available at: www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-40183587 (accessed 22 December 2018).

⁷⁵² Cao, Yang. (2008). *An ethical perspective on the phenomenon of unmarried mothers in China today*. Master’s Thesis. Hunan Normal University, Changsha City, China.

⁷⁵³ “Black child/黑孩子” is a term used in China. It refers to those children who were born outside of the only child policy, or are usually not registered in the National Household Registration System. In other words, these black children are illegal and not recognized by law.

⁷⁵⁴ Shang Fang Wen Q. (27 November 2015). “There are as many as 200 million single men and women in China: they are discriminated everywhere and can’t live”. *China News Weekly*.

*learned from a colleague who gave birth by medical technique in Hong Kong, so I expect to do it later. However, I do not know if I can withstand the social views.*⁷⁵⁵

In short, the rights of giving birth of single women are restricted in China, which lead to some single women fail to fulfill their family choices and aspirations. Women cannot control their own bodily autonomy due to government policy restrictions for reproductive rights, which undermine individual expectations and desires for having a family. According to the structural violence theory, this can create or exacerbate existing unequal life chances.⁷⁵⁶ Accordingly, single women in contemporary China suffer from unequal life opportunities, which include the potential to give birth legally as an unmarried mother.

Elderly care issues

Traditionally, elderly people in China needed to be taken care of by their own children.⁷⁵⁷ Aging care issues are a serious issue that everybody has to face as they grow older. In China today, if an old person were alone in the hospital he or she would encounter many barriers. This includes certain hospital rules and regulations, for example an individual cannot give permission for one's own surgeries.⁷⁵⁸ Without close family members to accompany them, an elderly person cannot be treated well in hospital. Even if an elderly person wishes to enter a nursing home, such a decision requires signed approval from their children.

As the workforce ages China is rapidly becoming an aging society. By 2050, the population aged 65 years and over is estimated to increase to approximately 400 million.⁷⁵⁹ The cohort

⁷⁵⁵ Interview with Ms. F, 35 years old, in Shenzhen, 5 July 2017.

⁷⁵⁶ Galtung, 1969, 171-185.

⁷⁵⁷ Hatton, Celia. (21 December 2015). "Who will take care of China's elderly people?" *BBC News*. Available at: www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35155548 (accessed 22 December 2018).

⁷⁵⁸ Shao, Jiang. (May 2008). "Legislative thinking on the "family signature" system". *Medicine and Philosophy (Humanities and Social Medicine Edition)*. 29. 5. (356): 42-45.

⁷⁵⁹ 2018 China Demographic Yearbook. Available at: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2018/indexeh.htm>. (accessed 20 January 2019)

of single women today aged between 30 and 40 will contribute to this future population of elderly citizens. Therefore, single women need to prepare for their later years now if they choose to remain single. One interviewee recounted:

*Last year, I was sick with gallstones. I thought about this ageing care problem while lying in the hospital. When I become older, my parents should have passed away. I only hope that after 20 years, the nursing homes can be perfect in China so that there would be no worries for our twilight years. Now, I only have to work hard in order to save more money. Other people always mention the kind of stories about old people who died and for 10 days, nobody noticed. Sometimes I feel worried about my future, but I think again that the stories are perhaps used to push singles to get married and have children.*⁷⁶⁰

In the current Chinese environment, old single women without children will not be looked after. The narrative of Ms. S above shows her worries about how to manage single life during sickness or weakness, which is a common concern for older single women themselves to take it into serious consideration.

Structural violence also manifests in forms of declining social support and even unsupportable policies, towards childless, single older persons.⁷⁶¹ At present, China's laws and institutions have not sufficiently prepared the aged care industry for single elderly people. With the advent of an aging society, the market potential is huge, however Chinese society as a whole has failed to take into account the care needs of single elderly persons.⁷⁶² This is despite the

⁷⁶⁰ Interview with Ms. S, 48 years old, in Beijing, 2 May 2017.

⁷⁶¹ Montesanti, Stephanie Rose., & Thurston, Wilfreda E. (December 2015). "Mapping the role of structural and interpersonal violence in the lives of women: Implications for public health interventions and policy". *BMC Women's Health*, 15 (1): 100.

Available at: <https://bmcmwomenshealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12905-015-0256-4> (accessed 11 November 2018).

⁷⁶² Lemtur, Sanglipong. (2018). "Challenges for Elderly Care in China: A Review of Literature". Working Paper,

country experiencing a dramatic rise in nursing homes for the elderly.⁷⁶³

As of 2017, there are more than 144,600 nursing institutions in China.⁷⁶⁴ However, most nursing home models only fit the needs of better-off Chinese families.⁷⁶⁵ A standard nursing home costs about 5,000 Yuan (roughly 650 Euro) per month in urban China.⁷⁶⁶ This future expense places additional burdens on Chinese single women, including access to appropriate care when facing the challenges of old age. Such pressures could also become an additional means to push single women to get married to avoid poor nursing care options for old singles, or alternatively, to focus on becoming rich and self sufficient before old age.

6.2.3 Societal and economic discrimination affecting Chinese single women

On a financial level, it is actually not economically beneficial to live as a single person in China. At a base level, living alone costs more than living with others, as singles usually have to pay much more for housing and services than for married couples.⁷⁶⁷ A number of interviewees noted the economic challenges they faced living as a single person:

*Being single does not save money, instead I alone pay almost a couple's cost. No one shares the cost with me. When I do business trips and settle in a hotel, a single room costs 200 Yuan, but it costs 250 Yuan for a double room. Therefore, being single is not an economic matter.*⁷⁶⁸

Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), Delhi, India. Available at: <https://www.icsin.org/uploads/2018/02/06/95fb8899e2c896effa47a88c0c42c572.pdf> (accessed 11 December 2018).

⁷⁶³ Chu, Leung-Wing., & Chi, Iris. (2008). "Nursing Homes in China". *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association*, 9: 237-243.

⁷⁶⁴ Zhou, Xin. (22 February 2018). "China's nursing homes more than triples in past five years". *Xinhua News*. Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-02/22/c_136991456.htm (accessed 8 July 2019).

⁷⁶⁵ Lemtur, 2018, 12-13.

⁷⁶⁶ Sun Moon Star Nursing Home in Jing'an District of Shanghai. (February 2019). *Public welfare homes for the elderly*. Available at: <http://www.021ja.com/jingan20150708147.html> (accessed 8 August 2019).

⁷⁶⁷ Raymo, James M. (January-June 2015). "Living alone in Japan: Relationships with happiness and health". *Demographic Research*, 32: 1267-1298.

⁷⁶⁸ Interview with Ms. Ni, 44 years old, in Shanghai, 21 June 2017.

*In the market, there are often commercial promotions. For example, to buy two ice creams you pay the second with a half price. I am alone going shopping; there is no way to enjoy the second half price of goods. This society does not have much goodwill toward singles. However, I cannot marry casually just for paying lower prices.*⁷⁶⁹

China's marriage economy and promotions for mothers and children are widely available in Chinese society. However, single groups are usually excluded from the normal economic structures. The reasons for this could include that single women live against the basic social rules, and so are marginalized and isolated by the major structural systems in Chinese society. Single women are thus excluded from mainstream society. This can be explained by the understanding that marriage, family and giving birth are considered to be the essential needs of human beings in contemporary China.

The safety and security of a woman living alone is also an issue of serious concern, which was cited by a number of women interviewed for this research. *"I could not go home too late, otherwise it is not safe. Therefore, when I look for a job, a good company location is an important condition."*⁷⁷⁰ Women living alone suffer from various unexpected troubles in their lives but receive less timely support, and also need to think about more safety considerations living as a single person. Interviewees cited particular safety concerns, which affect their everyday life and personal decisions:

Two weeks ago, my laptop could not link to the internet. I contacted the Internet Company for help; they said that a repair person could come to my home soon. However, for security reasons, I asked another friend to come to accompany me.

⁷⁶⁹ Interview with Ms. F, 35 years old, in Shenzhen, 5 July 2017.

⁷⁷⁰ Interview with Ms. Z, 30 years old, in Beijing, 26 April 2017.

*In this way, I feel safe.*⁷⁷¹

*One night last winter, the heating system did not work well. However, it was too late to call someone to repair it. On that night, I felt very helpless.*⁷⁷²

Ms. I has owned her own apartment for the past two years. Nevertheless, she suffers from some certain embarrassments and misunderstandings:

*Even if there are many professional service companies such as moving companies, when purchasing furniture and moving house I cannot do everything on my own. I still need help for carry something heavy, or assembling furniture products. Some people feel very strange to see that I am a single woman doing these things alone. Of course, when I invite male colleagues to help me, I have to try to prevent him from misunderstanding that I want to date him.*⁷⁷³

Therefore, it seems that single women inevitably experience more trouble than married women in daily life. For these reasons, single women hope to see a more single-friendly society in the near future, that facilitates understanding and supports their single lives.

Single women are also considered to be less reliable in other settings, including when seeking to undertake international travel. When applying for an overseas visa, Chinese single women typically face more doubts regarding their motivations than married women in a stable relationship. Research participants cited the following experiences:

⁷⁷¹ Interview with Ms. Ni, 44 years old, in Shanghai, 21 June 2017.

⁷⁷² Interview with Ms. H, 38 years old, in Shanghai, 25 May 2017.

⁷⁷³ Interview with Ms. I, 32 years old, in Shanghai, 2 June 2017.

*To apply for a visa is really a difficult process. It is not friendly for single women; they always doubt my purpose to travel abroad.*⁷⁷⁴

*I planned to participate in a group trip alone last year, but the tour group only accepted a two-person application. One person is required to pay double price. When going abroad to handle a visa, travel agents always tell me that if there is no accompanying partner, the possibility of being rejected is very high. Indeed, my visa application was rejected due to not having 'strong ties'.*⁷⁷⁵

As single women, whose binding ties (partner or children) are not strong, there is stronger suspicion by foreign countries that single women will seek to stay overseas. It further proves that single women are discriminated against everywhere, sometimes very obviously. When a single woman is frequently questioned in Embassies when applying for overseas visas because she is single, it is individual issue; but when most single women experience the same, then it is a structural issue.

Women interviewed for this project narrated their daily frustrations and inconveniences experienced due to being single, which shows that it is not easy growing old or living alone as a single woman in China. Single women have to deal with systematic troubles, which may seem trivial. However, they also reflect structural indifference, discrimination and other barriers caused by society's misunderstanding and hostility to single women.

⁷⁷⁴ Interview with Ms. Ai, 35 years old, in Jinan, 11 August 2017.

⁷⁷⁵ Interview with Ms. M, 33 years old, in Shenzhen, 1 July 2017.

6.2.4 Single women's inability to exercise agency

Structural violence is considered to be a form of oppression that reduces quality of life and diminishes human potential.⁷⁷⁶ *"The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances"*.⁷⁷⁷ Weaker groups are more likely to suffer from violence, and are more likely to have their suffering overlooked in silence.⁷⁷⁸ Agency refers to *"an individual's (or group's) ability to make effective choices and to transform those choices into desired outcomes."*⁷⁷⁹ The interviewees expressed that they currently lack of ability to exercise the power of agency in their daily lives. In China, single women are not seen as a normalized social group, and are affected by structural violence. Single women suffer from discrimination that is also a manifestation of the patriarchal structural oppression of women, as many structural inequities are intangible, longstanding and a part of social order, and as natural as the air around us.⁷⁸⁰

Structural violence also influences the lives of marginalized Chinese single women in less visible ways. However, most single women choose to keep silent or smile awkwardly, to avoid further social confrontation: *"I do not think it is a right way to quarrel with others. Most of time I show my respect to others, but I could not get respect from others. Unmarried women lose freedom and self-respect, which makes me feel upset."*⁷⁸¹ In general, single women react passively to the negative opinions and improper actions from other people who are opposed their single status. This is because all attempts to change the traditional views and mindsets would be quickly repressed. *"Once I rebut, the other party most likely educates me by using*

⁷⁷⁶ Brock-Utne, Birgit. (5-9 August 2000). *An Analysis of peace and development studies as well as peace education from a feminist perspective*. Working Paper. Peace Education Commission and the Women and Peace Commission, 18th IPRA Conference, Tampere, Finland.

⁷⁷⁷ Galtung, 1969, 170-171.

⁷⁷⁸ Farmer, Paul. (Autumn 2009). "On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below". *Race and the Global Politics of Health Inequity*, 3 (1): 11-28.

⁷⁷⁹ World Development Report 2012. *Promoting Women's Agency*. Chapter 4. 150-192.

⁷⁸⁰ Galtung, 1969, 173.

⁷⁸¹ Interview with Ms. W, 34 years old, in Suzhou, 4 June 2017.

*Chinese culture or traditional values, etc. I am speechless.”*⁷⁸²

In spite of many single women with excellent talents and job performance, Chinese society is deeply hostile to single women, and ill will towards such women is in fact on the rise. Structural problems and beliefs can easily and naturally transform into personal problems for single women:

*I spend less time in the office of my university unless I have class one or two days a week. I try to manage my own life even with a lack of support. The attitudes from other people towards single women become a mirror; I can immediately know the person who I should respect or not. Once I find that some people are not friendly because of my single status, I keep silent and won't communicate too much with them.*⁷⁸³

The denial of single women's rights to equal employment and promotion, reproductive rights and other life expectations, as well as the hindering of political, economic and social rights, are the most destructive forms of structural violence which impair the opportunities and well-being of single women in China today. These issues perpetuate social injustice, and create an environment resistant to change, as single women lack opportunity and channels to influence and change decision-making, or the opinions held by wider society. Therefore, under the current macro environment in China, vulnerable single women are unable to stand up and fight back, actively participate in public issues, or promote structural change or positive public views of single women.

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*

⁷⁸³ Interview with Ms. Ni, 44 years old, in Shanghai, 21 June 2017.

6.2.5 Summary and discussion

In this chapter, structural violence is discussed with reference to the broader patterns of invisible violence committed against Chinese single women. Analysis explored specific areas where unjust policies continue to affect single women in contemporary China, namely unfavorable economic policy, social structures and government social and political regulations. In China, women who remain single and childless are seen to be incomplete beings, and are subject to severe value judgments. Single women are also subjected to more structural barriers in their life, with inequitable life expectations at work and in society, and an unequal division and access to resources. This discrimination affects their choices and opportunities, and reinforces the unequal status of single women as a weaker group in society which legitimizes social inequalities. Single women are also excluded from certain aspects of social support and welfare networks that cause them to lose control of their own circumstances. Such discriminatory behavior can be explained through strong societal support for marriage relationships, and coercive responses to force non-compliant individuals into relationships.

Within these structural struggles, the status and situation of single women relative to married women are easily ignored or dismissed by wider society, especially in patriarchal cultures such as China.⁷⁸⁴ Chinese single women are therefore subjected to multiple forms of structural violence that is blatant and explicit. Due to unique identity and lifestyle compared to married women, single women suffer from unequal circumstances, which results both from traditional beliefs in maintaining the social order, and resistance to change by vested societal interests. In addition, as a vulnerable population, structural violence is grounded in the real-life experiences, which derive from cultural and historical tradition of marriage being the sole destiny for women. The socio-cultural, economic, and political structural violence against

⁷⁸⁴ Huang, Jifan. (2017). *Employment Discrimination of Chinese Unmarried Women*. Master's Thesis. University of Denver, Denver, CO. 20.

Chinese women thus stems from a longstanding “*patriarchal structure perspective*”⁷⁸⁵. Under the framework of a patriarchal structure, a stigma against single women has been normalized and rationalized in China’s social context, and ultimately consolidates the dominance of male power.⁷⁸⁶ This supports Farmer’s contention that: “*structural violence takes on new forms in every era*”.⁷⁸⁷

In the past, the negative valuation of single women rarely aroused people’s questioning or reflection. Today, with rapid economic development and greater educational and employment opportunities, Chinese women are no longer reliant on men for material support. Therefore, it is an opportune time to reconsider the experiences of single women in China, and to re-adjust social structures to meet the expectations of single women.

Chinese single women not only are socially belittled systematically in ways injurious to their potential and social well-being, but also criticized by the surrounding people at an interpersonal level. Structural violence seems to be an intangible, invisible violence. However, violence against Chinese single women also could be presented in a visible way through various forms of direct violence, such as verbal violence. This is discussed further in the following section.

⁷⁸⁵ Brock-Utne, 2000.

⁷⁸⁶ Mazurana, D., & McKay, S. (2001). “Women, girls, and structural violence: A global analysis”. In: D. J. Christie, R. V. Wagner., & D. D. N. Winter (eds.). *Peace, conflict, and violence: Peace psychology for the 21st century*. Prentice Hall/Pearson Education, Upper Saddle River, NJ. 130-138.

⁷⁸⁷ Farmer, Paul. (June 2004)“An Anthropology of Structural Violence”. *Current Anthropology*, 45 (3): 315.

6.3 Experiences of direct violence against single women in contemporary China

Introduction

In previous sections, cultural and structural violence committed against Chinese single women have been discussed. Distinct from structural violence however, direct violence against Chinese single women is visible and tangible. In this study, “*direct violence against Chinese single women*” is defined as: *a situation where one party (or more), by virtue of its own power and dominant position, adopts unethical and uncivilized verbal behavior and directly imposes its will and attacks others, thereby causing psychological or mental harm to Chinese single women.*

In the following section, the results of direct violence are presented drawn from in depth-interviews with Chinese single women. These personal accounts are presented through ‘*direct violence against Chinese single women occurring in three situations*’ (see Section 6.3.1 below). In addition, ‘*three key findings of direct violence against Chinese single women*’ are analyzed further to generate a deeper understanding of how Chinese single women experience direct violence in their daily lives as a result of remain single after the age of 30.

6.3.1 Direct violence occurring in three situations

According to the narratives of the participants received from in-depth interviews, direct violence against Chinese single women can be identified and summarized into three situations. These include:

Situation I: *A push for single women to get married (催婚压力);*

Situation II: *Insulting single women during the process of blind dates (相亲遭遇)*

Situation III: *Mocking single women in casual social interactions (社交困境).*

Situation I : A push for single women to get married (催婚压力)

Despite the rising number of single unmarried women in recent years, marriage is still seen as a “must” in China today.⁷⁸⁸ As a result, unmarried Chinese women aged over 30 are socially pressured to marry by society, and receive extreme pressure from their families and acquaintances to do so.⁷⁸⁹ All research participants reported that they had received largely negative experiences of being pushed to get married from parents and relatives, friends or work colleagues, and company leaders, and even from strangers.

According to participant feedback, Chinese single women are facing very direct negative experiences of verbal violence, which in its impact is not inferior to direct physical violence. In their daily lives, single women are regularly attacked due to their single status in ways that range from verbal abuse, humiliation, ridicule and disdain, to other forms of language violence. This contempt makes them suffer from psychological trauma or depression to varying degrees.⁷⁹⁰ Three interviewees (*Ms. Z - 30 years old; Ms. D - 33 years old; and Ms. M - 33 years old*)⁷⁹¹ even confessed that they once required psychological help due to the immense pressure to get married received from their families, and the continual attacks on their single status by others.

To push single women to get married is not a short-term act, but rather a frequent behavior with various long-term strategies and effects, and which can occur on any occasion in the daily lives of single women. Ms. P (30 years old) described her negative experiences and feelings on being pressured to get married. Her hometown is a small city in a southern region of China, and she completed her university education in Beijing five years ago. After

⁷⁸⁸ To, Sandy. (2013). “Understanding Shengnu “Leftover women”: the phenomenon of late marriage among Chinese professional woman”. *Symbolic Interaction*, 36 (1): 1-20.

⁷⁸⁹ Sun, 2012; Ji, Yingchun. (July 2015). “Between Tradition and Modernity: ‘Leftover’ Women in Shanghai”. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77 (5): 1-17.

⁷⁹⁰ Ma, Xin. (2013). “Analysis of the life pressure of ‘leftover women’.” *Journal of Shenzhou Culture*, 29: 39.

⁷⁹¹ Ms. Z, 30 years old, interviewed 26 April 2017, in Beijing; Ms. D, 33 years old, interviewed 28 June 2017 in Lanzhou; Ms. M, 33 years old, interviewed 1 July 2017 in Shenzhen.

graduating with a Master's degree, she chose to stay in Beijing to fulfill her career objectives. Currently, she lives alone and works as a software engineer with a high salary in a high-tech enterprise. Her parents still live in her hometown. Despite the long distance, her mother constantly expresses aggressive behavior from afar, to try to coerce her to end her single status and get married as soon as possible:

For me, what makes me feel most uncomfortable is that my mother always consciously or unconsciously switches the conversation between us to the issue of my single status. Once we are chatting by telephone, no matter what I am talking about, the conversation eventually goes the way my mother wants, as if all the problems in my life would be easily solved if I could have a stable boyfriend and get married. This makes me gradually lose enjoyment in communicating with my parents. Although I would not contest my parents' views, I subconsciously begin to reduce the number of times communicating with them. In the past, I called my parents every day, but gradually I only call them once per week. My parents repeatedly tell me that they feel uneasy day and night because their only daughter becomes a 'leftover woman', which has greatly increased my psychological burden. In this way, I always feel great anxiety.⁷⁹²

From the experience of Ms. P, it can be seen that parental actions pressuring her to get married greatly affect her spirit and disturb the rhythm of her normal life. Her experience is not isolated, but represents a common problem faced by the majority of single women, who have to face direct pressure to get married from their family.⁷⁹³ In 2016, the "Report on the Status of China's Forced Marriage" issued by the "Work Committee Health and Sports Development Center of China Care for the Next Generation" showed that nearly 80 percent of single

⁷⁹² Interview with Ms. P, 30 years old, in Beijing, 17 September 2017.

⁷⁹³ Ji, 2015, 8; Ma, 2013, 39.

respondents had been forced to marry by their parents.⁷⁹⁴ When undertaking in-depth interviews, I asked participants the opinion of their parents concerning their status as unmarried women.

All interviewees reported that they had, or were having significant parental pressure or serious blame, and experienced constant pressure to get married, which made them feel angry, depressed, and helpless. The actions of marriage coercion can easily escalate to forms of verbal violence, which are more likely to be performing by single women's closest contacts - parents, relatives, colleagues, and friends. Verbal violence can therefore occur anytime during conversation with people, either in private or public. The strategies used for marriage coercion can be summarized into three major themes, including:

Theme a: Devaluation (the older a single woman is, the less valuable she is)

Theme b: Sympathy (to be single is to be miserable and lonely); and

Theme c: Shame (to be a single woman is shameful).

Theme a: Devaluation (The older a single woman is, the less valuable she is)

The concept of singleness as a devalued state is the most common strategy employed to compel single women to get married. Even in the 21st century, there has been limited change in contemporary China regarding the purpose of marriage for familial succession, and the common understanding that the best reproductive age for Chinese women is between 23 and 30 years old.⁷⁹⁵ Traditionally, the ability to have children has been the key consideration for Chinese woman to enter marriage. As the average marriage age continues to rise, the fertility of women is also gradually declining, and women over the age of 30 are considered to have

⁷⁹⁴ Li, Lulu. (February 2017). "Forced marriage and anti-compelling: 'War' is not a solution". *China Women's Daily*. Gender Research Project, Chinese University of Hong Kong. B01.

⁷⁹⁵ Palmer, Michael. (September 2007). "Transforming Family Law in Post-Deng China: Marriage, Divorce and Reproduction". *The China Quarterly*, 191: 675-695; Wang, Dian. (1985). "Implementing a system in which both men and women can pass on to the ancestors". *Gansu Social Science*. 2108-2113; Xu, Yang. (2016). "The best period of female childbirth". *Practical Journal of Gynecology*. 242-244.

higher childbirth risks compared to than younger women.⁷⁹⁶ Female fertility is also much shorter than that of men; with the added bias that the older a woman is, the less likely it is for men who seek to carry on the ancestral line to marry them.⁷⁹⁷ In addition, for most Chinese women, the age of 30 is a watershed, as prejudiced social views continue to hold that physically attractive younger women are more likely to encounter good partners.⁷⁹⁸ Therefore, there is a widespread view in Chinese society single women over the age of 30 are worth less as marriage partners.

Ms. Z (30 years old) originates from a small town in Hebei Province. She received an Economics degree overseas. After graduating with a Master's degree, she chose to work in Beijing, and now rents a small room in a shared apartment. She is satisfied with her current life alone, as she has enough time to enjoy her hobbies, such as learning to play piano and reading books. Her parents live in her hometown. She described her negative experiences of being pressured to get married:

My parents often try to persuade to me, 'you're already 30 years old, and you can only be low-bargained in the marriage market if you do not get married soon.'
*They constantly call me to pressure me. Although they do not live in Beijing, they always have channels for finding unmarried male candidates through their social circles to introduce me for blind dates in Beijing.*⁷⁹⁹

In this way, Ms. Z has to obey her parents to attend each blind date they arrange, however, she believes that her parents are insulting her by using the increasing age of unmarried women to

⁷⁹⁶ Zhang, Yinfeng., & Hou, Jiawei. (2016). "Actual and ideal reproductive age in China: 1994-2012". *Journal of Population and Development*, 2: 2-11.

⁷⁹⁷ Hu, Xuanyi. (19March 2013). "Evolutionary Psychology: Why do Parents force marriage?" *Guang Ming Daily*.

⁷⁹⁸ Shi, Liping. (2010). *Research on the concept of mate selection of highly educated women under the pressure of traditional marriage space*. Master Thesis. Fudan University, Shanghai, China.

⁷⁹⁹ Interview with Ms. Z, 30 years old, in Beijing, 26 April 2017.

devalue her as an individual and potential partner. She cannot object to her parents, even though she sometimes suspects that perhaps it is her own fault remaining single, which brings a lot of trouble to her parents.

Ms. O, 31 years old, comes from Xi'an. Currently, she lives at home with her parents. She is highly educated with a Master's degree, and has a stable job with a reasonable income. However, her excellent background does not advantage her in finding a partner. Instead, she missed many opportunities because few unmarried young men can match her status, and also believes that her identity as a single woman over 30 has brought her many troubles:

Not only from my relatives, but even my colleagues have made a variety of negative critical remarks against me. Those married peers the same age as me constantly urge me to get married soon. I often feel very embarrassed. I live in Xi'an in Shaanxi Province, which cannot compare with the big cities of Beijing or Shanghai for a tolerant environment. The local people here hold strong beliefs that women must be married at the appropriate age and that a woman a certain age who is still not married is a big problem. Even some better-intentioned people once advised me: 'a woman after 25 starts to become older'. In their opinions, women aged over 30 stands a lesser chance of being married out to an excellent person, and can only marry those men who are divorced, low-educated, or with poor financial background, who are low quality.⁸⁰⁰

Ms. O was unable to accept the peoples' comments about her depreciated status as an older single woman. She was angry with negative comments about unmarried women over the age of 30, and admired those women who live in big cities, perhaps in a tolerant environment where people can enjoy different lifestyles. However there are very few unmarried women in

⁸⁰⁰ Interview with Ms. O, 31 years old, in Xi'an, 15 August 2017.

her city. Consequently, she stands out more than a single woman in a first-tier city, and is therefore less likely to be respected by conservative-minded people.⁸⁰¹

Ms. E (31 years old) currently works in Shenzhen in a hospital. Her hometown is a small county in Guangxi Province, which takes her five hours to get to by train. She is highly educated and has a well-paid stable job. However, she also suffers from verbal violence due to her status as a single woman aged over 30, and she cannot stand that her parents hold narrow views about her single life:

*My parents often remind me: 'if you do not rush to get married, you will drop in price in the marriage market'. Unmarried women are not tolerated in the small county in Guangxi - that is why I chose to come to Shenzhen to pursue my career. I had undergone blind dating many times, but none has succeeded. Then, since I turned 30, I have become a big problem in my family. All of my relatives join in pressuring me to get married as my parents do.*⁸⁰²

Thus, as she grows older, Ms. E could not bear the pressure. She was sad about her family's negative comments about her. In her opinion, if she is married now, she could not invest more time in her career, which is not yet what she expects to achieve in her life.

Ms. D (33 years old) also described her experiences of marriage pressure. She works as lecturer in a university. Since her graduation from university, her mother has been using all kinds of tactics such as crying repeatedly or threatening suicide, and even her friends and relatives join her mother in belittling her. Although her father is not as extreme as her mother, he sometimes applies moral condemnations to her. Her mental pressure is intense, and

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰² Interview with Ms. E, 31 years old, in Shenzhen, 8 July 2017.

previously caused her serious psychological problems. Until today, she has not completely recovered from depression:

*Whenever my mother attends a wedding ceremony and returns home, especially a couple younger than me, she definitely humiliates me a lot. Verbal humiliation is the most common method my mother uses. She often applies emotional blackmail against me: 'I am worried about your life a lot that makes me sleep badly; I got this because of your single status.' 'You are getting older and older, and you have to marry soon. The earlier you get married, the better your baby will be.'*⁸⁰³

Consequently, Ms. D suffers from an extreme pressure from her family. Her mother and she often quarrel with each other. She cannot stand her mother's behavior and actions, particularly when her mother demeans her continually about her age and getting married. Her mother repeatedly uses a variety of tricks to persuade her to marry, which has affected the harmony of her family and causes great psychological pressure to her. In particular, filial piety culture emboldens her mother to perform direct verbal violence against her through devaluing her age, so that she can marry soon and thus meet the expectations of her parents: *'You are irresponsible to your parents'; 'you know that there are three ways to be unfilial'⁸⁰⁴, the worst is to not produce offspring'*. Ms. D is now 33 years old. Her parents pressure her less than they used to. However, they still occasionally remind her that she is getting older and therefore it is more difficult to get married. She has tried many times to communicate well with her parents about her feelings, but usually their discussions end in an argument.

Summary

In the responses above, interviewees expressed their pain felt from being pressured to get

⁸⁰³ Interview with Ms. D, 33 years old, in Lanzhou, 28 June 2017.

⁸⁰⁴ The Chinese saying, 不孝有三，无后为大/states, "There are three unfilial things, not to have a child is the first one."

married by their families. Under these situations, devaluing single women through direct verbal violence is frequently used to make these women feel a sense of crisis, and that as unmarried women, their worth depreciates with their increased age. In this way, families hope to force unmarried daughters to take actions to find a mate, and to get married soon. However, such prejudicial words to devalue single women aged over 30 cause significant harm to these interviewees. Unfortunately however it seems that no one perceives this as violence, except for single women themselves.

Theme b: Sympathy (to be single is to be miserable and lonely)

A second strategy employed to push single women to get married is to feign sympathy, as being single is seen as something pitiful. This strategy is often employed if the devaluing behaviors have no effect, or is performed simultaneously with other strategies. The basis for sympathy arguments is that public opinion considers being a single woman must be very miserable, and is a state accompanied by loneliness.⁸⁰⁵

Single women are also assumed to face physical and financial uncertainty living alone in an insecure society.⁸⁰⁶ As discussed in Chapter 4, in China today there is no comprehensive pension care system; thus, elder care is a key issue everybody has to face and consider in advance. There are additional concerns for unmarried women without children, as typically children care for their elderly parents which is considered the optimal situation in Chinese traditional culture.⁸⁰⁷ Thus, lonely single women are considered to be setting themselves up for miserable and insecure lives, which people seek to address under the framework of sympathy arguments. For example, one interviewee complained: “*My parents always tell me,*

⁸⁰⁵ Burnley, Cynthia S., & Kurth, Suzanne B. (1992). “Never Married Women: Alone and Lonely?” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 18 (2): 57-83.

⁸⁰⁶ Gordon, Phyllis A. (January 2003). “The Decision to Remain Single: Implications for Women across Cultures”. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 25 (1): 33-40.

⁸⁰⁷ Lei, Xiaoyan., Strauss, John., Tian, Meng., & Zhao, Yaohui. (2015). “Living arrangements of the elderly in China: evidence from the CHARLS national baseline”. *Journal of China Economic*, 8 (3): 191-214.

'women should be virtuous, and as long as a woman gets married, then she can enjoy a better life than being alone'''.⁸⁰⁸

Ms. Si (31 years old) lives and works in a small city in Shandong Province. She finished her university education in another city five years ago, and afterwards returned to her hometown. Currently, she is a civil servant working in a local government agency. Most of her classmates and friends are married, and some of them even have a second child:

My mother listens to others gossip and constantly pushes me to get married: 'you have to consider how difficult life being single for an old person without marriage, it would be very miserable'. My grandmother is also worried a lot about my marriage status, and she very seriously judges me, saying 'Being single is very poor, that kind of life is worthless.' Moreover, one of my female colleagues working in the same office, a little younger than me, just got married at the beginning of this year. She often reproaches me with a mocking tone from time to time, saying 'do you have blind dates recently', or 'are you lonely at home? You are very poor without a partner!'⁸⁰⁹

For single women like Ms. Si, people often aggravate and upset them with intrusive questions based on false concern. Certainly, Ms. Si was angry at these comments showing sympathy for her single status, and the relationships between her and her mother and grandmother have become less close than before. The emotional interference of her family brings her the greatest pressure. In the workplace, there is also increased pressure she has to endure, mainly from coworkers of the same age who demean her by showing off their own marriage, which also makes her very uncomfortable. For her, living in a small city, the concepts and values

⁸⁰⁸ Interview with Ms. Z, 30 years old, in Beijing, 26 April 2017.

⁸⁰⁹ Interview with Ms. Si, 31 years old, in Zibo, 6 August 2017.

people live with are still very traditional and conservative.

Despite recent rapid economic transformation, thousands of years of accumulated patriarchal heritage are hard to shed, and single women in China are still victims of gender norms. In a traditional view, unmarried adult life alone is very distressing, and thus direct verbal violence against single women is culturally legitimized as a way to help single women avoid a lonely fate. In this way, people superficially express sympathy for single women, but as a tactic to push them to get married or to make fun of their situation.

Ms. M (33 years old) has worked in Shenzhen for three years. She greatly enjoys her single life there, and comes from a small town in Shandong province. She previously studied and worked for three years in Beijing. Due to a job shift, she moved to Shenzhen and loves the open and tolerant atmosphere there. Nevertheless, she also feels the same pressure to get married due to remaining single:

Due to my father's early death, only my mother lives alone in my hometown. I once said 'I most likely would never get married in this lifetime, I prefer to live alone'. My mother scolded me badly, warning: 'If you were not married, no one would take care of you once you get older, at that time it will be too late for you to feel regret.' I answered to her: 'I would go to a nursing home when I am over 80 years old'.⁸¹⁰

In the eyes of the public, single women are pitiful, and so others feel empowered to laugh at them occasionally. Women who remain single for a long time are also considered to have problems, as only marriage can protect human life.⁸¹¹ At present, Ms. M feels better for

⁸¹⁰ Interview with Ms. M, 33 years old, in Shenzhen, 1 July 2017.

⁸¹¹ Robards, James. (December 2012). "Marital status, health and mortality". *Maturitas*, 73 (4): 295-299.

having the opportunity to live and work in a first-tier city. Shenzhen is a more tolerant environment compared to her hometown. However, unexpected embarrassing situations still occasionally occur. No matter how far she lives from her hometown, the pressure from her mother or close relatives do not disappear; as she is the only daughter to her mother.

In addition to sympathy arguments, the mother of Ms. D (33 years old) also uses guilt trips and threats as an important strategy to push her daughter to get married:

My mother often scares me, saying 'nobody will take care of you when you are old if you do not have any kids. Society is not perfect; please do not expect others or the pension system, which does not provide enough, to support you'. She also says, 'if you do not listen to me in this way, I will not leave any wealth to you after my death'. I tell her that I do not need any wealth from her, because I can feed myself.⁸¹²

In traditional Chinese society, married life is considered to bring people happiness, expand personal networks and bring prosperity via the cooperation of both families of a couple.⁸¹³ In the eyes of her mother therefore, Ms. D is at an absolute disadvantage. On the one hand, such verbal insults are a practical display of parents' power over their children. On the other hand, marriage is a duty in Chinese culture, which supports and strengthens the belief of her mother that she is doing a right thing in pushing her daughter to get married.

Ms. Y (35 years old) owns her own apartment in Tianjin. She lives alone and is satisfied with her unmarried status, and does not want to have children. She has no plans to get married. Nevertheless, she often suffers from insults from her colleagues that annoy and upsets her:

⁸¹² Interview with Ms. D, 33 years old, in Lanzhou, 28 June 2017.

⁸¹³ Sheng, 2004.

*I feel very uncomfortable at some people's comments about women being alone. They do not need to show their two-faced sympathy in front of me. I enjoy my single life. However, some people often remind me unprompted that being unmarried is not good, which to me is ridiculous. I am responsible for my own life, and I find sympathy to be disgusting. There are also unmarried male employees who receive less pressure to marry than single women do.*⁸¹⁴

Ms. K (42 years old) lives alone in her own small apartment that she mortgaged one year ago. She works hard. However, despite her success, she regularly encounters sympathy and pity due to being single:

*For each time someone gets to know that I am single, they then start to look for any single men to match me with. I feel very uncomfortable! Some people also express their compassion and pity. For example, when having a dinner with a group of people, they would say, 'please eat more, don't go home without anyone to accompany you, what will you do at home alone?' It feels so awkward! I am speechless.*⁸¹⁵

Ms. K believes that single women have been particularly marginalized in Chinese society. To live alone in a determinedly single state is considered abnormal in the eyes of married people. As a result, expressions of excessive care is not perceived as a kind of respect, as both Ms. Y and Ms. K emphasized in their rejection of sympathy from others. However, compared to their married peers, their lower status as single women means they do not feel free to speak up about their own discomfort.

⁸¹⁴ Interview with Ms. Y, 35 years old, in Tianjin, 14 April 2017.

⁸¹⁵ Interview with Ms. K, 42 years old, in Guangzhou, 22 July 2017.

Ms. Ti, 45 years old, is a local Beijing resident. She owns her own apartment and has always lived alone. When she was younger, she experienced many extremely negative experiences of people mistreating her because she was single. To this day, she feels that her past life was a nightmare. Although she has few friends, she is very satisfied with her self-sufficient life, and is not willing to experience additional social pressure again:

When I was in my 30s, I suffered a lot because of my single status. In addition to my family, some of my married colleagues laughed at me frequently. Some female colleagues came close to me and told me repeatedly, 'if you do not get married soon, how will you cope when you are old. You are pathetic!' After that, they showed off their own marriages. It is an insult to human dignity; however, I was accustomed to be silent, because most people hold the same opinion as them. Until today, I could not forget their sneering expressions.⁸¹⁶

Although people pretended to be sympathetic; Ms. Ti clearly felt that she was belittled by others, and so she described such experiences as nightmares. Nevertheless, 'to be single is to be miserable and lonely' has become a common truism in Chinese society, and affectations of sympathy are widely used to make unmarried Chinese single women feel a sense of concern and crisis, and then take action to get married. In short, strategies to express sympathy and concern for single women can be explained China's social structure being based on a marriage model, which is not conducive towards tolerance for single people.

Summary

Based on the responses of interviewees and their experiences of being pushed to get married, this section reveals that showing forms of sympathy is a very common social tool used to convince, persuade and coerce single women to get married. However, this approach is

⁸¹⁶ Interview with Ti, 45 years old, in Beijing, 17 May 2017.

counterproductive in that such tactics did not obtain goodwill or compliance, but instead caused great resentment among interviewees. While it is difficult to judge the original intent of these sympathy expressions, as perhaps some contacts feel genuine sympathy for single women, for others it is a form of social ridicule. In any case, the sympathy arguments toward single women have engendered immense psychological pressure, anxiety, and hurt. Nevertheless, most interviewees find themselves powerless and silently endure such difficulties without asserting their individual dignity and self-worth.

Theme c: Shame (to be a single woman is shameful)

Shame is another key theme to push Chinese single women to get married that was repeatedly referenced by the project participants, reflecting the widely-held Chinese social belief that “being a single woman is shameful”.

Shame is usually thought of as: “*an emotion involving the self and, more precisely, a negative self-evaluation, or a painful emotion of self-judgment*”.⁸¹⁷ Shame can also derive from one’s status decreasing relative to other actors.⁸¹⁸ “*Shaming as a stigmatizing judgment, where an actor or group condemns another actor or group for failing to adhere to a shared ideal or norm*”.⁸¹⁹ As a means of control, shaming seeks to humiliate the object of shame, who are rendered inferior compared to the “normal” member of a community, with the effects being longstanding in spite of its non-physical behaviour.⁸²⁰

People generally strive to avoid humiliation and a resultant loss of reputation.⁸²¹ However, in

⁸¹⁷ Kasabova, Anita. (2017). “From Shame to Shaming: towards an Analysis of Shame Narratives”. *Open Cultural Studies*, 1: 99-112.

⁸¹⁸ Kemper, T. D. (1990). “Social relationship and emotions: A structural approach”. In T. D. Kemper (ed.) *Research Agendas in the Sociology of Emotions*. 207-237

⁸¹⁹ Nussbaum, Martha C. (2004). *Hiding from humanity: Disgust, shame, and the law*. Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ. 184-186.

⁸²⁰ Adkins, Karen. (2019). “When Shaming Is Shameful: Double Standards in Online Shame Backlashes”. *Hypatia*, 34 (1): 77.

⁸²¹ Rosenblatt, Elizabeth L. (2013). “Fear and Loathing: Shame, Shaming and Intellectual Property”. *De Paul*

Chinese daily life, shaming as an abusive technique is on the rise, which puts pressure on a victim (or victims) avoids social censure and maintains control.⁸²² Shaming can exist at a direct level, for body shaming or humiliating a girl based on her short or fat body shape.⁸²³ Alternatively, shaming can occur in response to a consequence or action such as victim blaming, when a girl is sexually assaulted but publicly criticized her for wearing revealing clothes.⁸²⁴ In this way, the victims experience blame and criticism and feel that they themselves are somehow flawed or less worthy than others in society.

American psychologist Bella DePaulo found that stigma, negative stereotypes, and behavioural discrimination against single women are very common,⁸²⁵ while in contemporary China, shaming single women across society is overt and widespread.⁸²⁶ In this study, I found that other persons regularly shamed my interviewees due to their single status. Compared to expressions of devaluation and sympathy, shaming behavior is more openly directed to hurt single women. In this tactic, verbal forms of violence are escalated to a higher degree, as shaming completely negates the worth of single women and causes them to lose face. Such expressions that a woman remaining single indefinitely is contrary to common sense, and is also abnormal, selfish, shameless, wayward, and a failure in life.⁸²⁷ Superficially, shaming unmarried women serves to push them to get married and conform to societal expectations, but it additionally destroys self-esteem and causes serious emotional harm to its victims.

Law Review, 63 (1): 1-48.

⁸²² Out of the FOG Website. (2015). *Shame & Shaming*. Available at: <https://outofthefog.website/top-100-trait-blog/2015/11/4/shame-shaming> (accessed 5 June 2019).

⁸²³ Chomet, Natalie. (2018). *Coping with Body Shaming*. The Rosen Publishing Group, New York.

⁸²⁴ Oppenheim, Maya. (23 February 2019). "Majority of men believe women more likely to be sexually assaulted if wearing revealing clothes, study suggests." Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/men-sexual-assault-clothes-women-victim-blaming-rape-a8792591.html> (accessed 10 August 2019).

⁸²⁵ DePaulo, 2013.

⁸²⁶ Xie, 2017.

⁸²⁷ Wang, Haiping., & Abbott, Douglas A. (September-October 2013). "Waiting for Mr. Right: The Meaning of Being a Single Educated Chinese Female Over 30 in Beijing and Guangzhou". *Women's Studies International Forum*, 40: 222-229; Xie, 2017, 104-107.

Ms. Z, 30 years old, is constantly criticized by her parents as well as her cousin (28 years old), who comment negatively on her single status as a shameful state. As a result, she has become very distressed and anxious:

I am particularly saddened to hear words like unmarried women being considered shameful. To be honest, I really like living alone in Beijing and being away from my family, so that I can live life in my own way. Once I get back to my parents, they hassle me about my unmarried status, which is annoying. More sadly, it is not just that my parents think it is unfortunate and shameful if one is not to get married, even my 28 year old married cousin often accuses me, saying: 'You are too selfish and only consider yourself to be comfortable. Shame on you!'

As a result, Ms. Z struggles with contradictory feelings. On the one hand, she does not want to make her parents disappointed and sad, but she also believes she is only 30 years old and does not want to enter into married life too early. However, she suffers from the shame directed at her from her family, which also occurs in her workplace. *'Some colleagues also did this in the same way. In this way, I am often not in a good mood, and that sometimes negatively impacts on me even in the workplace.'*⁸²⁸

Ms. P, 30 years old, in Beijing, also expressed her doubts and resentment at being shamed. She feels very affected that public opinion considers single women to be shameful. As she grows older, her psychological stress is increasing:

All the people around me, such as my parents, relatives, and friends, want me to end my single status as early as possible. Most of my relatives and friends even

⁸²⁸ Interview with Ms. Z, 30 years old, in Beijing, 26 April 2017.

*urge me to get married, as in their eyes to be an older unmarried woman is shameful behavior. We cannot understand each other.*⁸²⁹

Because of this, Ms. P suffers from low self-esteem and feels a sense of personal failure. She also believes she is not living up to other people's standards. To be shamed from time to time has made her feeling that something is wrong, flawed, inadequate or unworthy, which reflects the serious impact of social shaming on her general well-being.

Ms. E, 31 years old, works in Shenzhen. She is busy with her job, but like other interviewees, she cannot escape the troubles caused by her single status. The verbal insults and shaming made by her colleagues about her single status often leave her psychologically stressed:

*In the workplace, a young female colleague who was born in the 1990s married, and she has always laughed and looked down upon me. She says: 'divorced women are much better than never married, older leftover women like you'. In addition, other people once made irresponsible remarks towards me, saying: 'you are high-minded and too picky. It's shameful to not get married as you are already 31 years old.'*⁸³⁰

Ms. E believes that the intention of these shaming behaviors is to make her feel inferior to other married women. She strives to avoid public humiliation and the loss of reputation; however, she has not been able to find a peaceful state where people respect her single status. Although time may change the situation or result in Ms. E becomes more resilient to such shaming attempts, such experiences make her feel great mental harm and damage her self-confidence and happiness.

⁸²⁹ Interview with Ms. P, 30 years old, in Beijing, 17 September 2017.

⁸³⁰ Interview with Ms. E, 31 years old, in Shenzhen, 8 July 2017.

Ms. B, 31 years old, lives in a relatively conservative provincial capital. Her parents come from a small village and have less education, and most of her relatives are rural residents. Since childhood, her family was proud of her because she was an outstanding student, and later on, she received a Master's degree, allowing her to attain a stable job. However today, because she remains single, her parents feel ashamed of her:

My parents try their best to urge me to get married soon. For example, if their health were not good, they would say that, 'we are sick because you are not getting married, and that make us angry and scorned'. My mother especially pressures me to get married; she seizes each chance to belittle me as a shameful daughter. However, they cannot forcibly arrange my life as we live in a civilized society today, at least on the surface.⁸³¹

In such a manner, Ms. B feels lost and thinks that she is not competing with those married peers; despite her excellent educational and employment history and considerable salary. Her mother felt ashamed due to her single state and also seeks to tell her daughter that being single is wrong. Such family dynamics, recounted by many interviewees, shows the expansion of intergenerational differences. Many parents lack their own goals and tie all their dreams to the lives of their children. Once the child's choices do not meet the parents' wishes, parents try their best to interfere and impose their will so that their children can live according to the arrangements they envisage.

Ms. B also reflected on worsening family relationships between her parents and her, particularly due to her status as an unmarried woman over 30:

⁸³¹ Interview with Ms. B, 31 years old, in Zhengzhou, 10 August 2017.

*At home, I have to be very careful to say anything, and I must avoid touching any topic concerning marriage. For example, while watching TV, if I casually express appreciation for a handsome man; my mom would say: 'Why you don't find one in real life! You only have the chance staring at a handsome man on TV. You are already an older unmarried woman; you have less chance to have a handsome husband later. You are really nothing!'*⁸³²

For Ms. B, it seems that verbal humiliation from her mother will not end until she gets married. Moreover, parents may not realize that such verbal humiliation creates continual anxiety and humiliation for their children. Such expectations in turn derive from the continuing influence of patriarchal expectations, particularly in traditional Chinese families:

*My mother thinks that I make her lose face. Therefore, I must earn more money so that I can afford to buy an apartment on my own, and move far away from my family. In this way, I can be free of these negative experiences pushing me into marriage life and I can live better. When can I escape from the cage of family?*⁸³³

Despite repeated urging by the family, Ms. B remains single and still controls her own future. Instead, she seeks to create distance between herself and her parents and getting rid of her family that has become her greatest wish.

Ms. Zi, 30 years old, talked about her grievances and confusion caused by family expectations. She was born into a highly patriarchal family, and her parents did not support her pursuing higher education. She suffers from pressure by her parents to get married due to their traditional worldview:

⁸³² *Ibid.*

⁸³³ Interview with Ms. B, 31 years old, in Zhengzhou, 10 August 2017.

*I did not have such a good opportunity for education when I was young, and I was very envious of highly educated women, because my parents do not think girls should obtain so much education. Their expectation is that girls should do what they did at their age, therefore me remaining single makes my parents feel ashamed. If I was a boy, at least I could have more opportunities with their support. There are very few single women living in rural areas, otherwise they would definitely be more discriminated against.*⁸³⁴

For Ms. Zi, China is an unequal and completely patriarchal society in all aspects. Fortunately, she can finally work and live in the city, and does not need to continue living with her parents. To humiliate single women as shameful therefore appears to be a common social tactic to push them to get married. However, it seems that shaming could have the opposite effect than expected, as it increases women's alienation and resistance to their family's wishes.

Ms. Li, 35 years old, lives in Guangzhou with her parents. She formerly studied in Beijing for two years. Later, she followed the wishes of her parents and returned home. Currently she works as an accountant in a state owned company. Most of her friends are married, and she often feels in a bad mood due to being asked about marriage by family or acquaintances. Like other unmarried women, she feels considerable pressure to get married:

*On a hot summer night, many families were walking outdoors in order to avoid the heat. I also walked with my parents after a family dinner. They suddenly complained to me: 'we do not like to walk with you, because other people are enjoying time with their children and even grandchildren. We can find no place to hide ourselves from such shame'. Their words made me feel very sad.*⁸³⁵

⁸³⁴ Interview with Ms. Zi, 30 years old, in Shanghai, 20 May 2017.

⁸³⁵ Interview with Ms. Li, 35 years old, in Guangzhou, 24 July 2017.

As seen from Ms. Li's experience, people in a collectivist society who cannot fulfil social expectations think of themselves as a failure; accordingly some parents feel they are losing face in public because their daughter is still unmarried. For this reason, some parents try to transfer their own pressures and unhappiness on their unmarried daughters, with the hope of changing her attitude towards marriage.

Ms. Li also described other negative experiences where some colleagues and friends try to advise her and even seek to persuade her to marry soon, but she must stay silent in such situations:

*Some comments occur regularly in different occasions: 'do not expect too much. Just get married to someone, otherwise unmarried women over the age of 30 are seen be aberrant.' Or 'unmarried women are totally rubbish!'*⁸³⁶

Ms. Q, 41 years old, was born in a rural area. Later moved to the city after completing her university education. She has a stable job with an average salary level. Currently, she lives alone and enjoys various hobbies such as painting, travelling and reading. Her parents still live in their hometown, which is a small village:

In the eyes of my parents and other relatives, I am an unfaithful daughter. Their unkind words, which I have heard, make me very uncomfortable. Every time I go home to visit my parents, I am always unhappy talking with them! Because my hometown is a small place, many people's thinking follows the old way, so I am often ridiculed by others. I do not know what the status of single women is in other first-tier cities, but at least here, older unmarried women are regarded as

⁸³⁶ *Ibid.*

*shameful. And unmarried women also make their families feel ashamed.*⁸³⁷

Ms. Ti, 45 years old, is a local resident in Beijing. Shaming her single status was once a regular occurrence during an earlier period of her life. She once studied abroad for a Master's degree and then returned home. She currently lives alone in her own apartment. Until today, she cannot forget the humiliation of being insulted by others due to remaining single:

*Yes, I am never married and I was often insulted by other colleagues and even some friends. They joke at me, saying things such as 'how many boyfriends did you have when you were overseas?' In other words, they think that my private life is chaotic and that I have a shameful image in their eyes that made me feel ashamed. I am very angry at their behaviors and unwarranted assumptions.*⁸³⁸

Due to remaining single, Ms. Ti acquired a shameful image and was maliciously discredited. Such treatment is bullying, however, she cannot refute such perceptions, as society thinks that there must be some problem with older single women.

Summary

This section summarized some of the negative experiences of respondents, who are belittled and shamed for remaining single on a long term basis. Of the many actions taken to push single women to get married, social shaming seems to be the most damaging. In public perception, older, unmarried Chinese women are still seen as dishonorable and shameful. As a result, single women are under continuous pressure from family, acquaintances and broader society. The shaming behaviors therefore derive from the surrounding social order, where women are in a weaker position in the division of labor and social structures, and where

⁸³⁷ Interview with Ms. Q, 41 years old, in Zhenjiang, 11 June 2017.

⁸³⁸ Interview with Ms. Ti, 45 years old, in Beijing, 17 May 2017.

society associates and restricts women to the values of marriage and fertility. These values are further reinforced by prevailing public opinion, as witnessed through the experience of interviewees. Thus, it can be seen that the behavior of shaming unmarried older single women who deviate from the existing gender order represents a continuation of patriarchal consciousness in Chinese society.

Effects of marriage pressure on single women through devaluation, sympathy and shame

With 32 samples received from in-depth interviews, it can be clearly seen that continual social pressures on single women to get married impacts on every corner of these research informants' daily lives. All of three major strategies (devaluation, sympathy, and shame) discussed above are used to punish and coerce single women to get married in Chinese society.

These strategies on pushing women to get married can also affect individual well-being and cause severe mental distress, including depression:

My family hurts me more than others do. I was born in a very patriarchal family. Since my birth, I did not feel warmth from my family, because they expected to have a son. My family pushed me to get married, that is why I choose to work in a big city so that I can live far away from them. Two years ago, I went to see a psychiatrist several times due to serious depression. I believe I cannot obtain any support from my family before getting married.⁸³⁹

⁸³⁹ Interview with Ms. Zi, 30 years old, in Shanghai, 20 May 2017.

The frequent pressure on single women has brought about serious mental stress to many interviewees, including emotional distress and psychological conditions. In the face of pervasive verbal forms of direct violence, they feel helpless:

These uncomfortable experiences seriously affect my emotions. I often feel that I cannot concentrate on work and often suffer from insomnia.⁸⁴⁰

In the past few years, I suffered from serious depression due to my mother's bad behavior. Until today, I still often feel anxious and nervous. However, nobody cares about your mental state.⁸⁴¹

A push for single women to marry therefore seriously undermines the interests and overall well-being of single women. Not only parents but also other family members and colleagues either consciously or unconsciously employ harmful ways of speech which are abusive and arrogant, often justifying this as a last resort to educate and correct wayward behavior. However the psychological pressure from single daughter's parents is greater and the urge to marry is even more urgent.⁸⁴² Parents exacerbate an expectation, which adds to the existing pressures on single women. Parents and daughters therefore do not understand each other well, causing trouble and misunderstanding between the two parties.

Thus, overall public opinion has contributed to psychological pressure due to an excessive focus on women's marital status.⁸⁴³ The lifestyles of single women runs counter to their parents' expectations, and rebellion and conflict with their parents and internal guilt in turn causes psychological loneliness. Single daughters start to ignore their parents' demands and

⁸⁴⁰ Interview with Ms. P, 30 years old, in Beijing, 17 September 2017.

⁸⁴¹ Interview with Ms. Zi, 30 years old, in Shanghai, 20 May 2017.

⁸⁴² Hu, Xuanyi. (2013). *Evolutionary Psychology: why Parents force to get marriage?* Guang Ming Daily/2013/March/19th/The 012th edition.

⁸⁴³ Xu, Fang., & Zeng, Jing. (2018). "Research on Contemporary Marriage Views of Unmarried Women in Late Marriage". *Xinjiang Social Sciences*, 5: 149-155.

reject some arrangements from their overbearing parents. However, under the premise of being filial, they have to bear moral dilemmas. In addition, the pressure of busy work lives and distrust from married women also leaves single women with limited outlets to talk about their personal feelings, leading to social isolation and tensions with other people.

In summary, single women are urged to get married by friends, family and acquaintances through different tactics, which becomes a form of direct violence hurting their mental health and well-being. At the same time, the push for single women to get married has created a collective anxiety in wider society, in which strengthens prejudice against the acceptance of single women and hinders the diversified development of Chinese society.

Situation II : Insulting of single women during blind date matching (相亲遭遇)

In this research, interviewees discussed their participation in blind dates, which were mainly arranged by their parents (especially mothers), relatives, colleagues, or friends. Only two interviewees (Ms. F - 35 years old and Ms. J- 33 years old) had contacts with marriage agencies, and none of their parents visited parent matchmaking corner⁸⁴⁴ to find a partner for their unmarried daughters. Although blind dating is a quick and traditional means to find future partner for singles, research informants clearly expressed their opposition and annoyance to blind date matching based on their personal negative experiences. Through past blind dates, they did not obtain good results; instead, they suffered verbal humiliation resulting in damaged self-esteem and self-doubt.

Although their parents, relatives, and friends had a great desire to organize frequent blind

⁸⁴⁴ “*The parent matchmaking corners*” are usually in parks of some cities in China, where some parents display a resume of their unmarried children, including education, age, salary, job, housing and any details that could help their children to find a matched partner. For example, there is a parent matchmaking corner held at People’s Park in Shanghai, and also held at Zhongshan Park in Beijing.

dates, interviewees reported their extreme negative encounters of such arrangements. Instead of finding a suitable partner, interviewees repeatedly encountered bad behavior by male candidates during the process of blind dates. This made them feel frustrated, with some women giving up on future blind dates as a way to find a right partner. They also noted that after an unsuccessful blind date, parents or matchmakers also blamed them if they express their unhappiness with the event. Thus, verbal violence also commonly occurs during some blind dates, which cause harm to single women.

In the following section, the negative personal experiences of single women interviewees during blind date matching are presented and discussed, which together consisted of three key concerns:

- *blind dates conducted like business negotiations*
- *verbal abuse or disrespect by some male candidates during blind dates; and*
- *insults by parents or matchmakers due to unsuccessful blind dates.*

Negative experience 1: Blind dates conducted like business negotiations

In this study, the overwhelming majority of informants expressed their aversion to arranged blind dates. In their eyes, marriage should be a combination of love expressed between two individuals. However, they considered that attending a blind date is like handling a business arrangement between two strangers.

Ms. Z, 30 years old, had attended many blind dates in Beijing over the last two years that were usually arranged by her parents, and especially her mother. She is not a native resident of Beijing. For her, getting married has become a top priority and concern, although in her heart she does not want herself to get married soon. Unfortunately blind dates bring her unpleasant feelings, where she feels like she is undertaking a business transaction:

To be honest, I hate this way of organizing blind date, because each time the date was very offensive. In my opinion, two strangers sitting together to talk about marriage is disgusting. Sometimes, my date spoke like he was pickling cabbages in a market, with little concern for my privacy or feelings, and proposed intimate questions such as: 'have you got a Beijing Hukou registration; what is your income situation, housing, parents' work, and family background?' I feel insulted by many such uncomfortable blind dates. However before long, my parents would then arrange a new blind date.⁸⁴⁵

For Ms. Z such blind date behavior is very utilitarian and mercenary. However, attending blind dates has become part of her life, despite her dislike of the way such dates often unfold. After each blind date, she described how she would list each date's problems, telling her parents how this man was not good and unsuitable for her, and that there could be no further contacts with the man. She does not think she can be engaged soon via a blind date; nevertheless, she continues to obey her parents' arrangements before getting married.

Ms. Si, 31 years old, does not like blind dates either. She believes that marriage should be seen a decision made of love rather than a business exchange. Nevertheless, she has had blind dates arranged for her from time to time:

Although I had blind dates arranged for me very frequently over the past two years by my parents and colleagues, I found that boys today are very unrealistic and more materialistic than girls are. They inquire about all kinds of private matters during the first meeting of a blind date. In particular, they seek to know about my family background and financial situation. I feel very insulted. Now I am

⁸⁴⁵ Interview with Ms. Z, 30 years old, in Beijing, 26 April 2017.

*tired of that kind of blind date, and just wait for the appearance of Mr. Right.*⁸⁴⁶

Ms. Si noted that blind dates do not benefit her, because the other side often has a very strong utilitarian motivation. Instead, Ms. Si believes that such encounters are another kind of verbal humiliation. If marriage becomes a business bargain, then she believes it would be better to remain single.

Ms. J, 32 years old, is an urban migrant residing in Shanghai. She feels discriminated against and not being respected during blind dates. Due to not holding a Shanghai *Hukou* registration, she knows that in blind dates she is always in a lesser position:

*In my experience, each male candidate is too unrealistic and anxious to achieve quick success! During the blind date, they firstly inquire about my family background and economic situation, and then boast that they are rich and so have the right to select any girl as their partner. I have had many blind date experiences in the past, and I rarely feel comfortable during the conversations. As I am not local residence of Shanghai, matchmakers introduced some low-qualified local young men to me. However, I graduated from university, and I need a partner with common interests and hobbies.*⁸⁴⁷

Without local *Hukou* registration, Ms. J accepts that there are disadvantages in the blind date market. As it now the 21st century, she feels annoyed that women in China still feel the pressure of being selected and chosen by men. Now, she has completely given up on blind date, and no longer holds any expectations from blind matching.

⁸⁴⁶ Interview with Ms. Si, 31 years old, in Zibo, 6 August 2017.

⁸⁴⁷ Interview with Ms. J, 32 years old, in Shanghai, 24 May 2017.

Ms. O, 31 years old, is also tired of attending blind dates. In her opinion, blind dates are very embarrassing interactions:

For the last blind date, I met a very straightforward boy who asked me: 'how much money do your parents earn? How much do you earn?' For me, what is amazing is that the majority actually think it is normal to ask that of a person on a blind date! Incredible! Before, my parents and friends arranged blind dates for me very frequently. Now that I am over 30, I realize that I do not want to live my life in a hurry.⁸⁴⁸

Depending on age, appearance, height, salary and parent's background, unmarried women described their dating experiences as waiting for the right price to sell in the marriage market. For interviewees, privacy issues were often raised on the first date. Ms. O described her experience as if she was goods to being sold in a shopping mall, and being marked by price and value. To demand quick success and instant benefits reflects a general disrespect for people. Even if such a blind date results in marriage, this could easily result in divorce if partners enter the relationship too quickly or for the wrong reasons.

In contrast to many other interviewees, Ms. F, 35 years old, is very keen to get married. She even previously registered with a marriage agency to find a suitable partner. However, to date her hopes have been disappointed, and she has almost lost confidence in finding a marriage partner:

In the past, I had attended many blind dates in Shenzhen as the other unmarried girls do, but I now realize that it is not at all a reliable way to find a partner. I

⁸⁴⁸ Interview with Ms. O, 31 years old, in Xi'an, 15 August 2017.

once spent 20,000 Chinese Yuan⁸⁴⁹ to register with the 'Lily Network'⁸⁵⁰ but I found that there are many liars among potential male candidates. I no longer believe in blind dates, because I always feel that the other side is very anxious for success during the short blind date in spite of their own weak points. Now I do not think that marriage is a necessity. Blind dates always make me sad. I have almost no expectations for achieving a happy marriage.⁸⁵¹

Summary

Comparing status and compatibility is usually applied to mate selection⁸⁵², however, informants did not solely pay attention to material things, but also considered more spiritual or value concerns. To most interviewees, it seems that blind dates bring with them more trouble than they are worth. This could be explained due to older single women being more intent on pursuing marriage on the basis of love instead of material concerns, or because highly educated single women are more economically independent and have a greater ability to affect their own life choices. Therefore, in the face of this kind of bargaining blind dates, for them, is simply a torment to be endured. In their experience blind dates did not help them to conclude a marriage, but instead brought more trouble and pressure.

Negative experience 2: verbal abuse by male candidates

In addition to the negative feeling of blind dates feeling more like business transactions, in some cases research informants described being subject to verbal abuse by male candidates during the date itself.

Ms. J. (32) described her anger when recounting her unpleasant encounters from some blind

⁸⁴⁹ 20,000 Chinese Yuan equals to 2,563 Euro according to the currency rate of 1: 7.8 in 2017.

⁸⁵⁰ 百合网“Baihe” (www.Baihe.com) is the most well-known professional marriage website in China.

⁸⁵¹ Interview with Ms. F, 35 years old, in Shenzhen, 5 July 2017.

⁸⁵² Liu, Jonathan. (2012). “Social Exchange Theory on Romantic Relationships”. *California Sociology Forum*, 4 (1): 62-70.

dates:

*Once, the manners of the male candidate were very disgusting. He showed his arrogance and sense of superiority. He even directly expressed that his sexual abilities were very strong, which made me feel greatly insulted.*⁸⁵³

Male candidates consider themselves in a superior position, which shows that women are objectified while men are seen to be in control. However, Ms. J is highly educated, and considers herself and male suitor to be equals with no difference in status.

Ms. F, 35 years old, no longer expects to achieve a good result through blind dates. To her, negative experiences from blind dates have destroyed her trust in such processes:

*I have had several extreme negative experiences. Male candidates have verbally insulted me several times; they laughed at me and destructed my self-esteem. They said: 'Above 30, women are too old, you should not wait any longer, or you will become worthless. Do you still have fertility?' Even after the first blind date with a potential candidate, the man soon asked me for a sexual relationship, which shocked me and I felt shame for those guys. In a word, the blind date is a humiliating process.*⁸⁵⁴

In Ms. F's view, single women will progress and achieve in the future, and therefore patriarchy has to retake control by any means. While there are many kinds of violence in the world, as an unmarried woman she finds that her situation is worse than those women who suffer from physical violence. Ms. F considers that she has been mentally affected a lot from blind dates which have negatively impacted on her life.

⁸⁵³ Interview with Ms. J, 32 years old, in Shanghai, 25 May 2017.

⁸⁵⁴ Interview with Ms. F, 35 years old, in Shenzhen, 5 July 2017.

Summary

Insulting language can be a violent tool, where the right to condemn and criticize also means wielding power over another. Male candidates have a dominant position in the blind date system, and occasionally perform verbal abuse that reinforces the subordinate role of women in the patriarchal societal system in China. For many single women, blind date encounters and the psychological blows received from insults and criticism can be damaging. The existence of male hegemony and gender power imbalances was also interviewees' experiences of blind dates especially for older single women, who are already subject to dating disadvantages. They hope to find a happy marriage, but they have to bear many negative experiences from dating partners and family without cause or reason.

Negative experience 3: Insults by parents or matchmakers due to unsuccessful blind dates

From these accounts, it seems that blind dates neither produce a good partner for research informants nor allow them to live a quiet life free from criticism. Instead, single women suffer from additional social pressure and complaints from suitors. Blind date matching should be a serious thing. However, in many cases, several interviewees complained that matchmakers randomly select potential male candidates, without serious consideration of whether the two candidates are compatible. *"The matchmaker usually only knows little about the potential male candidate and myself, but introduces us for blind matching. This is ridiculous!"*⁸⁵⁵ This could be a key reason why many blind dates often end in failure:

*It is amazing that some matchmakers actually introduced some middle-aged divorced men over 40 with children to me for a blind date, which made me feel very hurt, because I am 31 years old. However if I act disgusted, the matchmaker would be unhappy.*⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁵⁵ Interview with Ms. O, 31 years old, in Xi'an, 15 August 2017.

⁸⁵⁶ Interview with Ms. E, 31 years old, in Shenzhen, 8 July 2017.

*I often have to find a reasonable excuse to reject further contact with the male candidate who I am not satisfied with after a blind date. I find that my parents are very strange, in that they introduce their own daughter for marriage to people who they even do not know very well.*⁸⁵⁷

*I hold a Master's degree from a prestigious university in China. However, some candidates who are low educated person were introduced to me by the matchmaker; sadly, we had very few common interests. It was awkward that we held different views and values towards our lives.*⁸⁵⁸

Interviewees believed that other people such as parents and professional matchmakers interfere too much in their private lives, and do not seriously look for the a well-matched blind date candidate. However, single women aged over 30 have become distorted in the eyes of the public, and are valued less than younger single women. At the same time, due to such social biases there may be less opportunity for single women above 30 to choose partners for themselves.

After returning home from an unsuccessful blind date, interviewees described that they often suffered from blame and criticism from the matchmakers or introducers:

An "aunt", one of the colleagues of my mother, introduced a boy to me for a blind date, but I did not like the male candidate after meeting him. The aunt was unhappy and enthusiastically tried to convince me: 'I think the boy is good. You should not be too picky, too selfish. Your parents will get older, you should be married soon. Otherwise and how poor your parents would be!' Her words hurt

⁸⁵⁷ Interview with Ms. Z, 30 years old, in Beijing, 26 April 2017.

⁸⁵⁸ Interview with Ms. B, 31 years old, in Zhengzhou, 10 August 2017.

*me a lot.*⁸⁵⁹

*If the blind date I felt inappropriate, they would complain everywhere, saying 'you are too picky'. Many people think they can stand in a moral position and interfere in my private life.*⁸⁶⁰

From the experience of interviewees, it is evident that many blind dates were arranged very randomly and without forethought. The introducer often made subjective judgments in arranging two unmarried people, without considering different interests, personalities or lifestyle. Faced with a forced blind date that cannot be refused can only bring negative psychological pressure to such single women, and reduce the chance of a successful date.

Ms. P (30 years old) lives in Beijing and attends a number of blind dates at the request of her family. Being single often means that family members would arrange blind dates for her. Her mother expresses dissatisfaction with her failed blind dates, and advises her to have further contact with suitors. She feels very confused and stressed:

After each blind date, my mother often does not allow you to feel uncomfortable, or when you feel uncomfortable my mother often tries to persuades me to 'give it a try', or 'be more active' to see if there is an opportunity for further dates with the male candidate. In other words, I do not like the other person, or the other person does not like me, we should continue to meet each other, which I feel is very unpleasant. Nevertheless, my mother suggests me that you should take some initiative to give other side a chance, and the man could become better for you, and then you two may have a good future together.

⁸⁵⁹ Interview with Ms. Li, 35 years old, in Guangzhou, 24 July 2017.

⁸⁶⁰ Interview with Ms. O, 31 years old, in Xi'an, 15 August 2017.

For example, one time a boy met me and immediately asked me to be his girlfriend, but at that time, I did not know enough about his background information and did not feel there was love at first sight. Therefore, I think this decision was too hasty and I did not want to agree with him. However, after my mother knew about this, she actually encouraged me to accept, advising that later I would gradually fall in love him. My mother's advice is not in line with my moral values, and makes me feel very humiliated.⁸⁶¹

Chinese society is undergoing rapid changes, and parents' life experiences are insufficient to provide children with enough advice in a more complex dating environment. Ms. P's mother urging and advising her daughter to accept a male candidate who dissatisfied her expresses a traditional outlook where women need to cater to and satisfy the expectations of a patriarchal society. This and similar interactions show the conflict between the two generations, where mothers and daughters cannot fully understand each other. The mother imposes her ideas over her daughter's morality, and shows the mother's absolute status in family relationships. In a filial piety culture, most of her daughters can only show obedience.

However, many marriages among the older generation were not always happy.⁸⁶² When discussing her parents' marriage, Ms. Ai narrated:

As far as I know, the relationship between my parents was not very harmonious, although they did not divorce and they lived together until the day my father died. Their unhappy marriage also had some negative effects on me and I am afraid to enter an unhappy marriage like my parents had. Therefore, I am very resistant to blind dates.⁸⁶³

⁸⁶¹ Interview with Ms. P, 30 years old, in Beijing, 17 September 2017.

⁸⁶² Zhang & Sun, 2014.

⁸⁶³ Interview with Ms. Ai, 35 years old, in Jinan, 11 August 2017.

Despite this, Ms. Ai's mother still pushes her to enter into marriage. In the moral worldview of her mother's generation, marriage is a woman's most important life achievement.

Unsuccessful blind dates can also have a negative impact on the relationship between single women and matchmakers, especially family members. For the last six or seven years, Ms. D has had countless blind dates arranged for her. However, they did not succeed for a variety of reasons:

Each time the blind date was unsuccessful, especially when it seemed that the qualities of the boy were good enough to compete with me, my parents would consider it my fault if I disagreed. Even they thought I did not try to please my date, and did not give him a chance. My mother always belittles and pressures me. I suffer a great pain every day. I became depressed, and the idea of suicide often appeared in my mind. During that time, my parents used many vicious words to attack me, so the parent-child relationship was extremely bad.⁸⁶⁴

An older unmarried daughter is seen as unreasonable and rebelling from social norms and family rules. Therefore, she cannot obtain support from the traditional family. This tension further proves that parents have absolute power in a family. Further for some parents, fearing their care as they grow older, marriage can also be seen as an insurance against unexpected risks. In short, verbal violence can be a key instrument to ensure their unmarried daughters comply and find a suitable partner to marry.

⁸⁶⁴ Interview with Ms. D, 33 years old, in Lanzhou, 28 June 2017.

Summary

In this section, I introduced the negative experiences cited by interviewees during the blind date process. Firstly, blind dates conducted like business negotiations make single women feel horrible, and so many of them choose to give up dates as a way to find partners. Secondly, a number of respondents cited extreme negative experience during blind dates, where male candidates verbally insulted their personality. Finally, interviewees also noted their need to bear pressure and criticisms from family and matchmakers, when they express their dissatisfaction with unsuccessful blind dates.

A blind date was originally a noble intention by matchmakers to help single women to find the right partner. However in reality, verbal forms of violence often accompany each stage of blind dating which causes single women interviewees to feel attacked or defeated. Such pressures include through conflict with matchmakers or male candidates, or through inappropriate or businesslike forms of dating. Nevertheless, it is not easy to say ‘no’ to those matchmakers or introducers: *“In the past, I was encouraged to go on blind dates many times, even if I felt embarrassed and always refused their concern. I expect to become stronger and just say ‘no!’”*⁸⁶⁵

Situation III: Mocking single women in casual social interactions (社交困境)

As previously discussed in Section 6.1.1.4, China is a classic collectivist culture.⁸⁶⁶ Chinese society emphasizes interdependence and harmony with others, with social cooperation playing a critical role in daily life as individuals interact with each other to carry out social activities, material and spiritual exchanges.⁸⁶⁷ In this context, Chinese single women have to regularly

⁸⁶⁵ Interview with Ms. M, 33 years old, in Shenzhen, 1 July 2017.

⁸⁶⁶ Hofstede, 1991.

⁸⁶⁷ Fan, Qianqian., & Chang, Weining C. (August 2015). “Social Anxiety among Chinese People”. *The Scientific World Journal*, 1-12.

face unexpected dilemmas due to their single status.

In the following section, dilemmas faced by research informants in casual social interactions are presented and discussed, with a focus on social discrimination occurring in two discrete settings:

- **Type 1:** *Inclusion situations (discrimination occurring in social in-groups)*
- **Type 2:** *Exclusion situations (active or passive exclusion from social settings).*

Type 1: Inclusion situations (discrimination occurring in social in-groups)

In social interactions among Chinese adult women, marriage and children are usual starting points of conversation. Based on the experience of interviewees, in social interactions their unmarried status regularly becomes a topic of discussion, and are judged and evaluated on this by the people around them. They therefore have to bear unexpected situations of being the topic of conversation, where they are subject to people's sympathy, suspicion, or misunderstanding, and may be asked to participate in a blind date at any time:

At the reunion party with my classmates from middle school, I easily became the object of ridicule, because I am the only unmarried person in the party. Some people immediately asked me what kind of boy I like, in order to arrange blind dates for me. However, I do not want to get married quickly before finding a suitable partner. I feel that I am a very powerful and strong woman. Nevertheless, I still worry about negative experiences in social interactions that often make me feel embarrassed and sad, and my self-esteem is affected. I do not like to be alone and expect to get along with people well. However, if I join in any group, I have to accept their opinions and judgments on my single status.⁸⁶⁸

⁸⁶⁸ Interview with Ms. Ai, 35 years old, in Jinan, 11 August 2017.

In order to avoid problems and being the focus of attention in social situations, single women sometimes pretend to be married. This is a good strategy for some single women, particularly when engaging in conversation with strangers:

One time, I took a taxi to the airport. The driver was very talkative, and asked me about my job, salary, and other things. Soon the topic turned to my marital and family status. I pretended that I was married, because the journey to the airport was long and I did not want to explain too much if the driver knew that I am a never-married woman. Otherwise, it would be very troublesome.⁸⁶⁹

I always tell someone who is not familiar with me that I am married. I do not want to lie, but I just want to avoid a lot of unnecessary trouble. Because if someone knows that I am single, I will certainly receive strange, sympathetic, and even disapproving looks from the other person. I know that it is difficult for married people to understand that I am a single woman who is over 40. However, I do not always like to be alone. I hope to get involved with some organizations to participate in charity work. I do not want people to pay too much attention to my personal life.⁸⁷⁰

In addition, on some occasions being a single woman alone can be misconstrued, especially when there is communication with the opposite sex. This can sometimes cause rumors or other troubles. Some married women may regard unmarried women as competitors, and may even perform verbal violence against certain single women who they feel are a threat:

I am single, and I get along well with one of my male colleagues. After this, it is very strange that many negative evaluations and rumors are spread about me, as

⁸⁶⁹ Interview with Ms. Ni, 44 years old, in Shanghai, 21 June 2017.

⁸⁷⁰ Interview with Ms. R, 43 years old, in Shanghai, 17 June 2017.

*if I behave in a disorderly manner. Can't I be friends with the opposite sex?*⁸⁷¹

*One evening, I went shopping in a supermarket and happened to run into the husband of a colleague. Later he also drove me home, because our homes are not far away; however his wife later found out and doubted our relations. Married women often suspect that a single woman is a rival. This time I felt particularly uncomfortable. Once single women are close to married men, this can cause some misunderstanding.*⁸⁷²

For all people, a sense of personal security is required to respond to unexpected risks, which depend on the informal social ties and private relationships between colleagues, friends and family. Strong social relationships can help to solve various problems, and allow people to respond to adversity and external challenges. Single women are no exception to this. However, in many instances, single status brings disadvantages to single women in many social interactions:

*Unfortunately, other people evaluate me as a loser in life, thus I often have very bad mood and am not confident at work. It makes me very embarrassed during social interactions.*⁸⁷³

In Chinese social understanding, an adult woman with a marriage and family life is largely taken for granted as the natural order.⁸⁷⁴ Consequently, Chinese single women over the age of 30 often experience greater difficulties than married women in integrating into social circles. To adapt therefore, some single women who are eager to integrate into the collective

⁸⁷¹ Interview with Ms. J, 32 years old, in Shanghai, 24 May 2017.

⁸⁷² Interview with Ms. Ai, 35 years old, in Jinan, 11 August 2017.

⁸⁷³ Interview with Ms. O, 31 years old, in Xi'an, 15 August 2017.

⁸⁷⁴ Budgeon, Shelley. (2016). "The 'problem' with single women: Choice, accountability and social change". *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 33 (3): 401-418.

life and get along well socially have to adjust themselves to find a way out in different situations. However there are also single women who actively or passively exclude themselves from social settings.

Type 2: Exclusion situations (active or passive exclusion from social settings)

Besides suffering from uncomfortable social situations, a number of single women interviewees also described actively choosing to isolate themselves or avoiding social activities, because of past experiences of being excluded or having less in common with their married peers.

Ms. B, 31 years old, intentionally avoids social group interactions, as she finds these uncomfortable and awkward for her. She has become more and more withdrawn, and finds that living in her own world makes her feel more at ease:

As an unmarried woman above 30, I almost have no any friends in this city. Theoretically, I should have many classmates, colleagues; however, they are now mostly married. Most of them see me almost like a monster, thus I do not think we belong to the same world. In the past, I was repeatedly asked about my single status in different settings that made me uncomfortable, when I had no interest in explaining my situation to anyone. I joined group forums with former classmates from both middle school and university. Now, I have deregistered from these forums.⁸⁷⁵

In this way, Ms. B's active avoidance of social settings can be seen as a coping strategy to avoid being humiliated, based on past negative experiences of exclusion. On different occasions she has suffered from misunderstanding, ridicule, and insults, and at work some

⁸⁷⁵ Interview with Ms. B, 31 years old, in Zhengzhou, 10 August 2017.

colleagues judge her unfairly and start rumors. Fortunately, she can do her job very well and the unit leader is satisfied with her achievements, and would like to keep her working at the company. However, because of her social isolation Ms. B remains worried about her future.

Ms. M, 33 years old, once experienced two years of depression and sought help from psychological counselling. Finally, she overcame her isolation to actively reconcile and confront the negative opinions of others:

For some time, I did not go out at all, and kept to myself in my own world, which lasted for about 1-2 years. I sought psychological counselling because I fell into a deep depression. Anyway, people are social animals. One day, I suddenly went out and spoke out, and suddenly found my voice!⁸⁷⁶

As previously noted China is a strongly patriarchal society, in which individual agency is limited and people are expected to follow collectivist principles. Ms. M believes that Chinese society is not fully enlightened, and so pursuing individualism cannot be respected. The freedom of the individuals is not protected and guaranteed. Furthermore, in public opinion a woman's career achievements are considered useless if a woman remains unmarried, as single status means that she is a failure in life.

Ms. D, 33 years old, gradually lost many friends with age, and believes that there is an invisible wall between married and unmarried women:

Although some of my friends complain a lot about the pain of marriage they also advise me to get married soon. Gradually, some friends can become alienated from each other due to the gap between the unmarried and the married; the

⁸⁷⁶ Interview with Ms. M, 33 years old, in Shenzhen, 1 July 2017.

*formerly intimate relationship with friends is thus transformed into an ordinary friendship. We have less and less things in common.*⁸⁷⁷

During social interactions, unmarried women like Ms. D have many disadvantages compared to married women in group interactions. This includes a lack of common life experiences, and a general lack of interest in her own single life. To be alone thus becomes a passive choice. Now she prefers to travel, watch movies and do other things alone. When Ms. D shares these personal experiences with others, some people regard her experiences of travelling and doing activities alone as being pitiful.

Ms. Ni, 44 years old, described her experiences and feelings of being excluded by others. In social situations, embarrassing situation sometimes occur from time to time. She tries to protect herself and not trouble others:

I am not a sensitive person and normally ignore trivial matters. However due to my single status, my life is gradually being marginalized and excluded. Sometimes people around me show a kind of concern, but they are usually insincere or ridicule me. I really don't like to judge, but receiving such sympathetic greetings is truly embarrassing.

*There is a couple whom I often encounter in my building corridor, we often had a short chat with each other. However, recently they learned that I am single. The situation changed. When we met again, I felt that the wife had a very strange look, as if to say, 'you'd better stay far away from my husband. After that, I tried my best to avoid meeting them again in the corridor because I felt embarrassed.*⁸⁷⁸

⁸⁷⁷ Interview with Ms. D, 33 years old, in Lanzhou, 28 June 2017.

⁸⁷⁸ Interview with Ms. Ni, 44 years old, in Shanghai, 21 June 2017.

Married people in China often hold a strong sense of superiority, based on ideas of marriage being the ideal social construct. As a minority group therefore, single adult women experience occasional embarrassing and uncomfortable situations where their single status is judged, and struggle to avoid being evaluated and belittled by others.

Single women are also potential targets of bullying in society because there is less social support for protecting unmarried women. Thus, unavoidably, single women have begun to emerge as an especially vulnerable group in Chinese society.⁸⁷⁹ Single women are vulnerable to personal attacks and marginalization, as well as exclusion in many social settings.

Ms. Ti, 45 years old, once experienced bullying in various contexts due to remaining single. In her opinion, the experience of being mocked and discriminated against is like a nightmare. For a long time, she isolates herself from any social interactions to protect her well-being:

Throughout my 30's, social interactions became a nightmare to me, and I used to have serious social phobia. As I continue to grow older, I have witnessed many unfortunate marriages. Today I completely accept my status as a single person. However, I sometimes think of past negative experiences. Several female colleagues belittled me in a group, and compared me with divorced women, and with false sympathy said to me: 'how should you live when you are older? Life would be very miserable for you! Just find a man; don't be picky'; or 'you are abnormal.' Their words really hurt me a lot, but I regret that I did not fight back in that period but only kept silent, and invested my time into work and study.⁸⁸⁰

⁸⁷⁹ Yamada, David. (31 August 2010). "Singled out? Workplace bullying, economic insecurity, and the unmarried woman". *The New Workplace*. Available at: <https://newworkplace.wordpress.com/2010/08/31/singled-out-workplace-bullying-economic-insecurity-and-the-unmarried-woman/> (accessed 22 January 2019).

⁸⁸⁰ Interview with Ms. Ti, 45 years old, in Beijing, 17 May 2017.

Ms. Ti actively excluded herself from any group participation due to frequent verbal ridicule and abuse. By staying away from interpersonal relationships, she sought to eliminate her exposure to widespread verbal violence.

Ms. S, 48 years old, has also experienced many ups and downs in her life, with a multitude of embarrassing occasions and social mistreatment. For a long time she has also found herself excluded herself from various activities:

In the past, my colleagues used to joke about me when they saw a change in any social situation. Once, an unmarried male colleague joined our organization. My team leader and some colleagues would make fun of me, saying: 'It is a good opportunity for you, just try to get him to be your boyfriend'. I certainly knew that they did not care my feelings; they were just meeting their own interests. I cannot participate in many social parties, as they are attended by couples. I also cannot participate in others' conversations because they focus on family matters, husbands and children.⁸⁸¹

Due to the stigmatization of single women as a minority group, some interviewees find themselves excluded in society or others choose to self-exclude themselves from hostile social environments, which causes them lose opportunities and happiness due to their excluded status. This status marks out single women as a special group, and it is difficult for such women to socialize and integrate with groups of married people. Between the married and unmarried groups therefore there is an invisible barrier where that cannot understand each other's perspectives, and reflects the Chinese valuing of married life over all other social constructs. Thus, lifestyles that do not conform to the majority in China, including single women, continue to be socially condemned and rejected.

⁸⁸¹ Interview with Ms. S, 48 years old, in Beijing, 2 May 2017.

Summary

Interviewees in this study contend with social struggles that are typified by two forms of collective violence: *Type 1 Inclusion (verbal violence occurring in social in-groups)*; and *Type 2 Exclusion (active or passive exclusion from social settings)* situations. They continue to be further marginalized due to a lack of commonalities and social ties with married women.

Single women are excluded from public conversation and dialogue, and disempowered from exercising their voice and freedom of thought through the judgment and criticism of others. No matter the social situation, single women are inevitably subject to suspicion, misunderstanding, ridicule, and even bullying. Women over 30 who remain single are perceived as no longer adhering to the standards of patriarchal society, and as such are seen as disobeying common social norms and the expectations of others. Social exclusion therefore contributes to verbal and emotional violence, with some single women choosing to exclude themselves from social environments as they are unable to endure unprovoked ridicule and marginalization. This furthers existing disadvantages against single women in their personal lives, employment and enjoyment from social activities. To address this, the perception of single women needs to be transformed, so that such women do not isolate themselves in response to direct or indirect social exclusion.

6.3.2 Key findings

Through analyzing data from in-depth interviews, this research has identified three key findings on the lived experiences of direct violence faced by Chinese single women. Firstly, the pressures faced by single women varies considerably by location, due to differing economic situations, cultural background and urban or rural location, with migrant unmarried women in particular suffering from significant verbal violence when returning to their hometowns during the annual Chinese Spring Festival. Secondly, this study shows that many

married women directly engage in verbal violence against single women. Gender-based women-to-women violence occurs against Chinese single women sometimes on a daily basis, mainly in the form of verbal insults, criticism and moral condemnation. Thirdly, due to age differences, marriage pressure on single women varies based on three different age categories. Single women under the age of 35 experience the most societal pressure, with single women aged between the ages of 35-39 entering into an indeterminate period where marriage demands lessen. Single women aged over 40 experience the least pressure to marry, and often describe this period as a golden age in their life.

Key finding I : Direct violence against Chinese single women varies by location

Introduction

In 1990, the urban population in China was only 26 percent.⁸⁸² With the process of rapid economic development and industrialization, the last three decades has seen China's urbanization rates increase rapidly, and by 2019, about 59.58 percent of the population lived in urban areas.⁸⁸³ To pursue better opportunities, many people have migrated to urban and economic developed regions from rural areas or small towns. In turn, rapid urbanization has also divided Chinese society both in terms of economic development as well as cultural values and concepts, including attitudes towards marriage and single women.

In this study, I found that single women with different family backgrounds experience differing pressures to marry, depending on their location. In addition, single women who migrated to urban areas suffer from specific pressures to get married, due to the cultural differences with their parents living in underdeveloped regions. In particular, research participants from rural backgrounds suffered intense pressure to get married when returning to

⁸⁸² Yusuf, Shahid., & Saich, Tony. (2008). "Optimizing Urban Development". China urbanizes: consequences, strategies, and policies". *Directions in development. Countries and regions*. World Bank, Washington, DC: 2-3.

⁸⁸³ 2019 China Population and Employment Statistics Yearbook.

their original hometown for family gatherings, such as during the annual traditional Chinese Spring Festival.

Divisions in Chinese society

Since the economic reforms beginning in 1978, China's economic development has achieved tremendous results. After 40 years of continuous development, China's population has almost completely escaped historic poverty and underdevelopment, and the living standards of most people have improved significantly. However, China is also a country with a large population and vast territory, which has resulted in uneven development between regions. In recent years, social divisions have widened with economic development, which threaten social cohesion and harmony in Chinese society. The two most significant factors affecting attitudes towards single women: unequal economic regional development and changing social values, are discussed further below.

Unequal economic development of Chinese regions

The issue of social equity and the gap between the rich and the poor has become a live issue requiring urgent consideration in contemporary China. According to 2017 National Bureau of Statistics data, the Gini coefficient of Chinese citizens' income in 2012 and 2016 is: 0.474 and 0.465, respectively.⁸⁸⁴ This is close to the figure of 0.5, which is considered a dangerous point for social inequality.⁸⁸⁵ In 2017, the country's Gini coefficient increased again to 0.467. With the pace of economic transformation, unbalanced economic development has also affected Chinese regions differently, with the gap between rich and poor increasing not only nationally, but also between different regions.⁸⁸⁶ Ongoing urbanization has also widened the urban-rural

⁸⁸⁴ The National Bureau of Statistics of China in 2017. Available at: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/statisticaldata/annualdata/> (accessed 1 December 2018).

⁸⁸⁵ Han, Jin., Zhao, Qingxia., & Zhang, Mengnan. (March 2016). "China's income inequality in the global context". *Perspectives in Science*, 7: 24-29.

⁸⁸⁶ Huang, Kevin X. D., Ning, Lei., & Tian, Guoqiang. (2018) "Conquering China's Unbalanced and Inadequate Development: Macroeconomic Outlook, Policy Simulations, and Reform Implementation - A Summary of Annual SUFE Macroeconomic Report (2017-2018)". *Frontiers Economics in China*, 13 (2): 147-170.

gap and income distribution inequality, which further results in imbalanced urban-rural and regional economic development.⁸⁸⁷ In addition, rising housing prices have also further widened the gap between rich and poor.⁸⁸⁸

From the early 1980s, income inequality has increased sharply in China, and rendered China (despite its socialist political system) as one of the most unequal countries in the world.⁸⁸⁹ Due to the different national policies, incomes in the first-tier cities and eastern coastal areas of China are much higher than that in the western regions and other less developed areas. As a rule, the incomes of urban dwellers are much higher than that of the rural population. Certain key regions, mainly along the southern and eastern coast, have strongly benefited from national economic policies, and as a result economic development has been rapid and ongoing.⁸⁹⁰

According to the National Health Commission-issued ‘*China Mobile Population Development Report 2018*’, there were 244 million migrants to urban areas.⁸⁹¹ The three major urban agglomerations with the greatest population migration comprise the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei urban agglomeration; the Yangtze River Delta urban agglomeration; and the Pearl River Delta urban agglomeration. Official data sources note that 8.63 million people have migrated into the Yangtze River Delta urban region; 7.96 million people to the Pearl River Delta region; and 6.84 million people to the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.⁸⁹²

⁸⁸⁷ Wang, Zhikai. (2015). “Private Sector Development and China’s Regional Urbanization: A Survey”. In: *Private Sector Development and Urbanization in China: Strategies for Widespread Growth*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. 23-51.

⁸⁸⁸ Lin, Yingchao., Ma, Zhili., Zhao, Ke., Hu, Weiyan., & Wei, Jing. (September 2018). “The Impact of Population Migration on Urban Housing Prices: Evidence from China’s Major Cities”. *Sustainability*, 10 (9): 1-14.

⁸⁸⁹ Xie, Yu., & Zhou, Xiang. (13 May 2014). “Income inequality in today’s China”. *PNAS (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America)*, 111 (19): 6928-6933.

⁸⁹⁰ Li, Qiumeng., & Wang, Hao. (2018). “Analysis of the gap between the rich and the poor in China”. *Theory of Learning*. 94-97.

⁸⁹¹ Gan, Beibei. (December 2018). The National Health and Health Committee issued “China Mobile Population Development Report 2018”. Available at: https://www.sohu.com/a/284707882_162422 (accessed 8 January 2019).

⁸⁹² The three major urban agglomerations with the most population movements refers to: the

As a result of these factors, intense migration from rural to urban areas and from small towns or cities to the larger cities has accelerated, due to greater work and lifestyle possibilities and better access to social resources. The wealth gap between rich and poor, urban and rural areas and different regions remains huge in China. Thus, higher incomes and better job opportunities are the major force driving urban migration.⁸⁹³

Diverging value concepts

As a result of uneven economic development across China, social values and beliefs are also diverging considerably, which in turn is affecting the behavior of individuals and their attitudes to marriage.⁸⁹⁴

Firstly, rapid urbanization and economic development has created different social values between developed and underdeveloped areas, and in particular between rural and urban areas. In China, the small-scale peasant subsistence economy has severely declined since industrialization, but still predominates in underdeveloped rural regions.⁸⁹⁵ There are still vast rural regions that have been hardly touched by Western-style industrialization and capitalism, and where modernization has been extremely slow.⁸⁹⁶ The mentality of most inland rural areas is dominated by traditional ideas, and although the villages have entered the 21st century, villagers' belief continue to be characterized by tradition, conservatism and insularity.⁸⁹⁷

Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei urban agglomeration; the Yangtze River Delta urban agglomeration; and the Pearl River Delta urban agglomeration. (其中人口流动最集中的三大城市群,是指京津冀城市群、长三角城市群和珠三角城市群。具体的数据为:长三角地区流入 863 万人;珠三角地区广州+深圳+东莞+佛山=流入 796 万人;京津冀地区流入 684 万人。按照目前的速度,预计 2020 年左右,上海就将拥有 3000 万人口,北京也将突破 2500 万人口,天津将拥有 1800 万人口,广州和深圳将分别突破 1500 万和 1300 万人口。长三角 7 大城市将合计拥有 8000 万人口,珠三角 4 大城市将合计拥有 4800 万人口,京津合计将拥有 4300 万人口)。

⁸⁹³ Lu, Ming., & Xia, Yiran. (September 2016). *Migration in the People's Republic of China*. ADBI Working Paper Series. 593.

⁸⁹⁴ Woodruff, Asahel D., & Divesta, Francis J. (1948). "The Relationship between Values, Concepts, and Attitudes". *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 8: 645-659.

⁸⁹⁵ Huang, Jikun., Wang, Xiaobing., & Qiu, Huanguang. (2012). *Small-scale farmers in China in the face of modernisation and globalization*. Chinese Academy of Science IIED/HIVOS. Center for Chinese Agricultural Policy, London.

⁸⁹⁶ Xie, Jingzhi. (2002). *Factors and Countermeasures for Restricting China's Rural Consumption Demand*. Master's Thesis. Zhengzhou University, Zhengzhou City, China.

⁸⁹⁷ Dai, Mingxiang., & Wan, Rongrong. (2010). "Reasons for insufficient domestic demand". *China Food*

Rural values generally lack an understanding and openness to new lifestyles arising from modern development, and even reject and oppose modern lifestyles to a certain extent.

Secondly, the concepts of tradition versus modernity continuously collide in contemporary China. While the urban population appears to be ascendant, cultural and spiritual values in urban China lag far behind the urbanization process.⁸⁹⁸ Even for city dwellers, changes to people's mentalities is much slower, and many people continue to believe in and support traditional patriarchal social forms.⁸⁹⁹ The fragmenting in Chinese value systems thus stems from the persistence of traditional Chinese social concepts alongside new lifestyles arising from China's changing urban and industrial development.

Thirdly, conflicting values between older and younger generations in China have intensified. Unmarried girls are pushed to get married by their parents, which reflect the conflicts between generations as well as different value concepts.⁹⁰⁰ At present, the values of the two generations are severely divided, with the younger generations undergoing a cultural shift away from traditional Chinese values.⁹⁰¹ Processes of social transformation have allowed younger Chinese to gradually shift and embrace western values, such as self-development and individualism. This contrasts with the experiences of the older generations, who grew up in eras of political and social turmoil and are consequently more cautious and conservative.⁹⁰² For previous generations, marriage was the only path to betterment because most people were trapped in extreme poverty, and personal preferences and self-selection were not recognized as important aspects of the courtship process. Instead, familial social status and the economic

Economics, 6: 61-62.

⁸⁹⁸ Yu, Junru., & Wang, Longling. (2006). "Seeking a balance between tradition and modernity-the values of rural youth in the context of urbanization". *China Youth Research*, 2: 40-43.

⁸⁹⁹ Ji, 2015.

⁹⁰⁰ Yan, 2013, 19-22.

⁹⁰¹ Adams, Russell., & Downey, Clara. (July-August 2015). "Traditional To Modern Values: China's Opening And The Impact On Prestige Goods". *International Business & Economics Research Journal*, 14 (4): 603-616.

⁹⁰² Sun, Jiaming., & Wang, Xun. (2010). "Value Differences Between Generations in China: A Study in Shanghai". *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13 (1): 65-81.

benefits of a prospective match were central.⁹⁰³ This also reflects a generational issue, with many elderly people not having the education or opportunity to understand the choices of unmarried women, or that being single can be a valid lifestyle today. Thus, tensions relating to unmarried women are also related to two generations conflicted between old and new ideas.

Finally, the polarization of attitudes towards gender equality has become a central issue in Chinese society. While the old-fashioned patriarchal value system during the socialist period continues to dominate social attitudes in contemporary China, conflicts between old and new values towards gender equality, including Western concepts of feminism, have started to emerge.⁹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, traditional gender norms prioritizing marriage and patriarchal family structures remain dominant in contemporary China.⁹⁰⁵

Summary

As described above, contemporary Chinese society is gradually splitting into two sides with differing social attitudes. The rapid pace of urbanization intensifies the social divisions and disparities in Chinese society, which reflect upon from the aspects of unbalanced economic development between areas and regions, and the differing values and worldviews of different people. On the one side are people who are urban, educated, affluent, and who feel supported and have benefited from modernization. The other side is comparatively rural or isolated, conservative, and left behind, and who feel neglected and abandoned by recent economic developments.

Migrant versus local single women in urban areas

In this study, no interviews were conducted with women living in rural China. However, six

⁹⁰³ Wu, 2001.

⁹⁰⁴ Hu, Alice C. (22 August 2016). "Half the Sky, But Not Yet Equal. China's Feminist Movement". *Harvard International Review*. Available at: <http://hir.harvard.edu/article/?a=13799> (accessed 5 January 2018).

⁹⁰⁵ Ji, 2015.

out of 32 participants have strong ties with parents or relatives living in rural or underdeveloped regions. Furthermore, 16 out of 32 participants are not local residents of the cities they live in, and migrated to bigger cities from their hometown for work or education opportunities. This is important, as single women who migrate to big cities encounter different experiences of gender-based discrimination compared to those of locally-born urban single women. Ms. J described the common experience for such women.

*I was born in a traditional family. My parents never lived in a big city and have less education. They don't know that the world can be bigger, and they don't understand that being single is also a way of life.*⁹⁰⁶

Migrant single women

Migrant single women, who are highly educated, appear to have integrated their lives fully into the big cities. However, they still have frequent connections with parents and relatives in other regions, who hold predominately traditional views and worldviews. Migrant single women therefore cannot completely separate themselves from the conservative mindsets of their traditional family. Thus, they have to struggle in dealing with the conflicts and conflicting expectations:

*Life should be pluralistic. However, many people have no perception that being single is also an option. My parents divorced many years ago. My mother was not happy in her marriage life, but she still pushed me to get married. I cannot persuade her.*⁹⁰⁷

Most of my relatives are rural people. The contradiction between us is not

⁹⁰⁶ Interview with Ms. J, 32 years old, in Shanghai, 24 May 2017.

⁹⁰⁷ Interview with Ms. W, 34 years old, in Suzhou, 4 June 2017.

*reconcilable.*⁹⁰⁸

*My hometown is a small village in Jiangsu Province, but I have lived in the city since studying at university. Because both of my parents are rural people and have a strong sense of feudal tradition, they used to urge me to marry which very often annoyed me, and therefore I visited them as rarely as possible. I have always worked in the city. The differences between my values and my family are getting bigger and bigger.*⁹⁰⁹

Despite their mixed identities, migrant women interviewed overwhelmingly agreed that larger cities are a more tolerant environment for single women:

*My hometown is very conservative. Fortunately, I had opportunities to study in Beijing and later worked and settled down in Shenzhen. My mother is very sad due to my single status. I am also very confused.*⁹¹⁰

*My parents could not understand my situation. I am alone working in Beijing, but they call me frequently from our hometown as they worry about my single status.*⁹¹¹

Such cities, especially first-tier cities, have a fast-paced lifestyle with a large single population, which allows such women to remain single on a long-term basis.

Urban/Local single women

Compared to migrant women interviewees born and raised in big cities seem to live a more a

⁹⁰⁸ Interview with Ms. B, 31 years old, in Zhengzhou, 10 August 2017.

⁹⁰⁹ Interview with Ms. Q, 41 years old, in Zhenjiang, 11 June 2017.

⁹¹⁰ Interview with Ms. M, 33 years old, in Shenzhen, 1 July 2017.

⁹¹¹ Interview with Ms. Z, 30 years old, in Beijing, 26 April 2017.

relaxed life, with relatively less pressure to marry. For example, in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Tianjin, local interviewees reported feeling less social pressure than their unmarried female colleagues who migrated from other regions. The reasons for this difference can be accounted for through the following three factors:

Firstly, urban life provides for a greater number and visibility of single persons, particularly in first-tier cities, which allows single women a greater opportunity to live freely:

*My parents of course expect me to get married. However, I have friends remaining single and some single colleagues in my work unit. I feel lesser pressure than those female colleagues who are from small regions.*⁹¹²

*In Shanghai, there are two kinds of judgments of my single status. One is negative, from my parents and my relatives. The other is supportive, from some of my friends. However, one of my colleagues, who come from a small town, takes great pressure in getting married. I am lucky that I am a local resident. I could not imagine how a single woman lives in the rural areas.*⁹¹³

Secondly, in urban areas there is a higher divorce rate, which has also increased in recent decades. The breakdown of many families and negative effects of unhappy marriages has also motivated interviewees who appreciate the free life of single women:

*I live alone and I can do whatever I want. My mother does not trust me alone and I always comfort her. There are many divorces, let me firmly believe that a low-quality marriage is not as good as a high-quality single life.*⁹¹⁴

⁹¹² Interview with Ms. Y, 35 years old, in Tianjin, 14 April 2017.

⁹¹³ Interview with Ms. N, 40 years old, in Shanghai, 1 June 2017.

⁹¹⁴ Interview with Ms. R, 43 years old, in Shanghai, 17 June 2017.

*I am the only child of my mother. My parents separated when I was 2 years old. My mother mentioned in the past that I should build a family. In Beijing, there are a very large number of single women, therefore I am not alone in being single. Especially in the age range of 30-40, there are many divorced couples. Anyway, nowadays I feel better and better.*⁹¹⁵

Thirdly, people living in the developed cities are busier with their own jobs and businesses, and have less time to concern themselves with other matters, including other peoples' marriage status.⁹¹⁶ In addition, life in big cities is also for many to be more dynamic and colorful. For example, some interviewees from Shanghai considered that they live in a relatively tolerant environment for various lifestyles:

*My parents formerly urged me to get married in the past. I was very angry and explained that there are various kinds of lifestyles. Parents are also under great pressure from others. Fortunately, despite their anxiety, my parents still take my feelings and happiness as the priority, which allows me to live a better quality of single life. In recent years, more and more women remain single, and so now my parents will not say this again.*⁹¹⁷

*Shanghai is a busy city. Everybody takes care of his or her own business. I believe that society will become better. Because I become a senior manager after years of hard work, I have noticed less negative comments against me.*⁹¹⁸

Thus, local interviewees in this study appear to have less marital stress than those interviewees who migrate from small towns or rural regions to urban cities for work and

⁹¹⁵ Interview with Ms. V, 46 years old, in Beijing, 2 October 2017.

⁹¹⁶ Sun, 2012, 133.

⁹¹⁷ Interview with Ms. U, 39 years old, in Shanghai, 26 May 2017.

⁹¹⁸ Interview with Ms. C, 40 years old, in Shanghai, 4 June 2017.

lifestyle opportunities. Although most parents living in urban cities are still pushing unmarried daughters to marry, they are also less likely to be pressured due to the more tolerant urban environment.

Marriage pressures associated with the Chinese Spring Festival (春节催婚)

One specific area of marriage pressure for migrant single women is the traditional Chinese Spring Festival, when they return to their hometown for family reunions.⁹¹⁹ In contrast to the mass enthusiasm expressed by other married people returning to their hometown, single women become known as the “home-fear group”, with migrant single women often experiencing extreme pressure to get married by their parents, relatives and acquaintances during homecoming visits.⁹²⁰

In this study, migrant interviewees expressed deep worries about going back to their families, due to their fear of being pressured to get married by parents and relatives, usually at the beginning of the festival. Nonetheless, concerted action urging them to get married usually occurs in the period of each Spring Festival, as mass population movements’ travel between cities and hometowns, and extended families clash over different value concepts:

I am the only unmarried woman aged over 30 in my extended family, and there is much gossip about this from my relatives and previous classmates and colleagues. In the Spring Festival, when gathering together, each time I become a character to be judged and worried over by my relatives, who urge me to promise to get married in the following year, and to even take a video recording my promise. I feel like I have entered a court trial. Every year, going through the Spring Festival

⁹¹⁹ Wang, Xiyang. (2017). *Gender, Dating and Violence in Urban China*. Routledge, London.

⁹²⁰ Ma. Li. (2010). *The making of the Chinese working class: rural migrants in Shanghai*. Doctoral Thesis. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

*in my hometown is a torture for me.*⁹²¹

The core concept of patriarchy is still entrenched in China, especially in small towns and rural areas. Parents and elders living in their hometowns, and the social circles they interact with every day, do also not allow families to ignore these traditional concepts, even if they are sympathetic to their daughter's wishes. Although marriage pressures reflect parents' concern for their children's future well-being, it also comes from the pressure of public opinion of neighbors and family members supporting cultural traditions. To reinforce marriage norms, rural residents use various words to diminish women's value and coerce women to get married.⁹²²

However, elders' traditional family concepts and the independent thinking of young people inevitably lead to fierce collisions and conflicts. This phenomenon, which is characteristic of contemporary Chinese society, reflects the significant inter-generational conflict of ideas which is a product of Chinese modernization and changing lifestyles:

*During the Spring Festival reunion each year, I am constantly a target to be attacked. In my traditional circle of acquaintances, everyone knows and compares themselves to each other. I do not want to meet them again, but I have to go back to my hometown at least once during this festival. At that moment, my parents feel they lose face, and then they turn their anger towards me. Before I am married, I do not think I will have any moment in peace.*⁹²³

All of my research participants working in big cities hold high academic qualifications, a strong belief in their individual independence and autonomy, and have their own measure of

⁹²¹ Interview with Ms. Ai, 35 years old, in Jinan, 11 August 2017.

⁹²² Xie, 2017, 104-107.

⁹²³ Interview with Ms. B, 31 years old, in Zhengzhou, 10 August 2017.

dating standards. They do not accept their own lives being manipulated and interfered with by their families. Parent's interference in their adult children's lives and attempts to impose traditional values have thus led to widespread tension and complaints among these participants, particularly migrant women with rural family connections:

I usually come back home during the period of the Chinese Spring Festival, but I have to face many ugly situation each time, they are always crazy asking me why I have not yet got married. Going home during the Chinese New Year holidays becomes the most uncomfortable time for me. I am always in a state of disbelief with my family for this moral blackmail. My close relatives complain to me: 'Your mother lives miserably!'⁹²⁴

Ms. M described feeling annoyed, distressed and crying a lot, and made a decision that she would not come back in the following Chinese New Year holidays as she felt interacting with these relatives was torture. Taking the negative experience of Ms. M, it could be explained that the pressure to marry crosses the line into private matters and personal interference, which shows a lack of respect for them as an individual within the family circle.

Based on participants' accounts, it appears that conflict between highly educated single urban women and their more traditional parents and relatives cannot be reconciled in the short term. Marriage, as the basic norm for human society, has been rarely questioned in Chinese history, and for most parents encouraging their children to marry is considered a necessary responsibility. If children are unmarried, responsibility always falls on the parents.⁹²⁵ At this time, parents and unmarried children form positions of mutual misunderstanding. Parents hope to "see" grandchildren in their lifetime, and their children are unwilling to seek or find

⁹²⁴ Interview with Ms. M, 33 years old, in Shenzhen, 1 July 2017.

⁹²⁵ Yan, 2013, 19-22.

marriage partners for various reasons.⁹²⁶ Therefore, although the most overt actions to pressure unmarried women to marry may occur at annual Spring festival in China, this is a situation in which both sides lose and fail to form a common understanding.

Key finding II: Gender-based ‘women-to-women’ violence against Chinese single women

In the context of a patriarchal society, ‘women-to-women’ violence is often overlooked or dismissed as a form of gender-based violence. This is due to its smaller and lower profile compared to ‘men-to-women’ violence, and its perceived lower impact on society as a whole. Perhaps surprisingly, this study found that most of the direct perpetrators of violent acts against single women have been married women. Many married Chinese women accept and indeed defend the patriarchal society, operating from a male perspective to vilify and marginalize the existence of single women. Manifestations of the negative image of single women range from moral condemnation and voicing support for patriarchal gender roles, to direct attacks (verbal, physical and psychological) on single women.

Women as the most direct perpetrators of verbal violence against Chinese single women

Interviewees revealed that most of the direct perpetrators of violent acts against them are mainly married women. Firstly, in traditional Chinese culture intervention in the daughter’s personal life is an obligation of parents, and mothers play a major role in pushing their daughters to be married quickly. If the daughter objects to this intrusive behavior, the mother typically uses verbal violence to humiliate her daughter with moral condemnations, or blames her daughter for not showing filial piety: *“Women discriminate against other women more than men do, and my mother sought to shame me more than other women do.”*⁹²⁷ *“The most*

⁹²⁶ Hu, Liming. (2017). “On the natural law and filial piety culture connotation in forced marriage”. *Journal of Shaoxing University*, 37 (5): 97-107.

⁹²⁷ Interview with Ms. Zi, 30 years old, in Shanghai, 20 May 2017.

*malicious behavior that I experienced came from my own mother. I have serious depression that is mainly due to the stress caused by my mother”.*⁹²⁸

Some female relatives also gossip about single women over 30, which can cause the mother to lose face due to having an unmarried daughter:

*I am very angry at my mother and also some female relatives, because they endlessly arrange for me to meet different men who are not suitable for me at all; come on! I am only 30 years old”.*⁹²⁹

*I go back to my hometown on average once instead of twice a year because I hate it when my mother and other relatives urge me to get married*⁹³⁰.

In the workplace, being single is often considered to be a weakness in comparison to other female colleagues. When single women experience conflict with colleagues, their personality is often vilified:

*In the office, one girl younger than me who is married always belittles me intentionally, often asks me whether I have had blind dates recently, and shows false concern or hypocritical sympathy”.*⁹³¹

*I had many negative experiences in the workplace; my female colleagues gained the upper hand by belittling me because I was single.*⁹³²

In addition, in some social interactions, being single also is a major problem, as it is a key

⁹²⁸ Interview with Ms. D, 33 years old, in Lanzhou, 28 June 2017.

⁹²⁹ Interview with Ms. Z, 30 years old, in Beijing, 26 April 2017.

⁹³⁰ Interview with Ms. M, 33 years old, in Shenzhen, 1 July 2017.

⁹³¹ Interview with Ms. Si, 31 years old, in Zibo, 6 August 2017.

⁹³² Interview with Ms. Ti, 45 years old, in Beijing, 17 May 2017.

topic ridiculed by female neighbors, female friends, and other female acquaintances. Married women often like to show off their marriages as a sign of their success, and sometimes belittle unmarried women to improve their self-image:

*One of my friends, who was over 30 and unmarried for a long period and like me was also previously pushed to get married in the past, just married 3 months ago. Suddenly, she has already forgotten her previous feelings of being pushed to marry and being insulted by others and turned her words towards me. In short, she started to act superior to me since she has become a married woman.*⁹³³

*In addition, some of my colleagues or friends like to show off their handsome boyfriend or husband and their happy marriages. In this way, they feel that they live better than I do, and then belittle me. That really makes me anxious to end my single life as early as possible.*⁹³⁴

Forms of ‘women to women’ violence against Chinese single women

Research participants reported that most ‘women-to-women’ violence they suffered in different situations came the form of verbal attacks and emotional manipulation from colleagues, resulting in social isolation. According to Galtung (1969), verbal violence is one form of direct violence, which is directed against a specific group or person. It is a verbalized means of attacking others, and can include abuse, humiliation, ridicule, mockery, or belittling.⁹³⁵

Some interviewees shared their experiences of suffering from ‘women to women’ violence through verbal attacks due to their single status:

⁹³³ Interview with Ms. Li, 35 years old, in Guangzhou, 24 July 2017.

⁹³⁴ Interview with Ms. Z, 30 years old, in Beijing, 26 April 2017.

⁹³⁵ Fan, Ruolan. (2014). “The Triangle of Violence from the Perspective of Gender: Interpretation and Reconstruction”. *Thought Front*, 40 (1): 98-103.

I was often insulted by other colleagues, and even friends. They joked with me, saying things such as ‘Are you a virgin? I am very angry at their words.’⁹³⁶

On different occasions, I suffered from misunderstandings, ridicule, and insults. In my company, some colleagues even describe me as very strange and spread rumors.⁹³⁷

Emotional manipulation or malicious rumors are additional forms of ‘women to women’ violence experienced by some interviewees due to their single status:

As I am already above 33 years old and still single, this arouses curiosity and speculation about my personal life, with some colleagues asking me: ‘do you like boys or girls? In this way, I often encounter someone maliciously assuming me to be a lesbian. I feel insulted but I cannot find a way out before having a boyfriend in my life. I do not owe them an explanation; I just stay away from them.’⁹³⁸

It could explain that woman above 30 remaining single is treated as strange thing in Chinese society, so that it causes people’s various speculations and negative comments, such as some single women being assumed to be a lesbian. To be homosexual is still considered taboo in much of Chinese society, and it is often used to belittle older unmarried people even though it is accepted in western countries.⁹³⁹

Categories of gender-based ‘women to women’ violence

In a patriarchal society, social standards are based on the male perspective, and therefore,

⁹³⁶ Interview with Ms. Ti, 45 years old, in Beijing, 17 May 2017.

⁹³⁷ Interview with Ms. B, 31 years old, in Zhengzhou, 10 August 2017.

⁹³⁸ Interview with Ms. M, 33 years old, in Shenzhen, 1 July 2017.

⁹³⁹ Xie, Ying., & Peng, Minggang. (2018). “Attitudes Toward Homosexuality in China: Exploring the Effects of Religion, Modernizing Factors, and Traditional Culture”. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 65 (13): 1758-1787.

women seldom challenge the social order or male power.⁹⁴⁰ In this study, I found that practices of violence made against and between women could be difficult to define; but could nevertheless be grouped into the following broad categories.

The first category related to attacks on appearance (looks) and body types. Single women are often mocked and vilified for their looks, with the implication that they are not attractive enough to find a man due to a lack of feminine charm, or they are not considered to be attractive or well-dressed enough to find a boyfriend. However, if a single woman was very pretty, then she would be often assumed to be indecent with an immodest private life, or may even be portrayed as promiscuous:

*Yes, I once had several boyfriends, and separated. Now, I am single, and I am serious about my personal life, thus I will not be rushed to marriage. Sadly, I heard some negative comments made about me.*⁹⁴¹

*Some female colleagues of mine think that if a woman does not rely on men to improve her standard of living, then it means that the woman is not attractive enough to get the attention of men.*⁹⁴²

Alternatively, the personality and temperament of single women can be portrayed maliciously. In public opinion, single women are often seen as picky, unrealistic, and snobbish, with excessive expectations regarding future partners:

*Others often portray me as a difficult and tough woman.*⁹⁴³

⁹⁴⁰ Li, 2016.

⁹⁴¹ Interview with Ms. Ti, 45 years old, in Beijing, 17 May 2017.

⁹⁴² Interview with Ms. Q, 41 years old, in Zhenjiang, 11 June 2017.

⁹⁴³ Interview with Ms. J, 32 years old, in Shanghai, 24 May 2017.

*As long as you are unmarried, any of your behavior can be considered to be abnormal, neurotic behavior, even if it is considered quite normal for a married woman.*⁹⁴⁴

In short, interviewees believed that being a single woman holds great negative connotations in Chinese society. Most of the participants revealed that they felt some degree of social exclusion, especially in the workplace. They felt lonely because they do not have much to talk about with married peers, and felt targeted and victimized because of their unmarried status.

Furthermore, interviewees revealed that when female colleagues compete, the status of being a single woman makes them disadvantaged and subject to attack by rivals, which means they easily lose opportunities or have fewer possibilities for promotion. Some colleagues may even manipulate interpersonal relationships, fabricate and disseminate rumors, or undermine the reputation of single women to serve their own interests in the workplace. On other occasions, single women are also misunderstood by married women to be a competing love interest for their partner:

*Because I remain unmarried, I find that some female friends are always wary of me. It seems that they are afraid that I will have romantic entanglements with their boyfriends or husbands, and they see any normal communication between men and me in an unflattering light. Gradually, I find myself alienated. In order to avoid further trouble, I reduce the chances of meeting with them.*⁹⁴⁵

⁹⁴⁴ Interview with Ms. D, 33 years old, in Lanzhou, 28 June 2017.

⁹⁴⁵ Interview with Ms. Ai, 35 years old, in Jinan, 11 August 2017.

Being a single woman can cause serious misunderstandings of married women in some occasions, incurring some inexplicable hostility. Ms. Ti (45 years old) described being insulted once by the wife of a male colleague:

I was seriously harassed by the wife of a male colleague, because we need to work overtime in the office. Sometimes we have dinner together which is just because of the needs of the job. However, his wife doubts our relationship, comes to pick up her husband at night, and looks at me with hostile eyes. She even called to warn me to keep away from her husband, which made me feel very embarrassed. It would be better if I were a married woman. It is very frustrating.⁹⁴⁶

Reasons for gender-based 'women-to-women' violence

In this study, interviewees described their mothers being primarily concerned about their daughters marrying, meaning that the fathers are generally not involved. Fathers communicate less about marriage topics than mothers, and consequently the mother, and not father, has the primary responsibility for arranging repeated blind dates and other introductions. At the same time, it is mainly female relatives who gossip about the lives of others, possibly to satisfy their own dissatisfaction. Indeed, one major motive behind parents' pushing their daughters to marry is because of peer pressure received from female relatives or acquaintances, which some mothers in particular transfer onto their unmarried daughters. A single woman aged over 30 affects not only her parents' social reputation, but also the likelihood of social censure.

Chinese mothers who remained deeply influenced by tradition are even more conscious of their responsibility to help their daughters marry as soon as possible. Many mothers are especially worried about their daughters' age, as older women are perceived as increasingly

⁹⁴⁶ Interview with Ms. Ti, 45 years old, in Beijing, 17 May 2017.

unwanted in the marriage market.⁹⁴⁷ As previously mentioned some parents especially fear their vulnerability in a rapidly aging society, and so their children marrying can be seen as an insurance against unexpected risks.⁹⁴⁸ However, the daughters today have their own ideas and life plans, and are no longer subservient to their parents. Today, many mothers have resigned to the fact they can no longer control their daughters especially in issues of marriage, which make mothers feel lost.⁹⁴⁹

Recognizing gender-based ‘women-to-women’ violence

Based on the negative experiences recounted by Chinese single women, gender-based ‘women-to-women’ violence occurs mostly in the form of verbal violence or emotional pressure or manipulation, causing single women in particular to feel marginalized and resulting in psychological damage:

*These uncomfortable experiences seriously affect my emotions. I often feel that I cannot concentrate on work and often suffer from insomnia.*⁹⁵⁰

*In the past few years, I suffered from serious depression. Until today, I still often feel anxious and nervous. However, nobody cares about your mental state.*⁹⁵¹

Such women-to-women violence has been directed particularly at the increasing number of Chinese single women, who despite their numbers have not obtained respect in Chinese society. Many married women who act as critics of other women are also seen to reinforce (and become accomplices to) patriarchal culture in Chinese society, in response to the

⁹⁴⁷ Zheng, Jing. (2015). *Xiangqin: matchmaking for Shengnü (“leftover women”) in China*. Doctoral thesis. University of Hongkong, Hongkong, China.

⁹⁴⁸ Hu, 2013.

⁹⁴⁹ Jiang, Zhu. (May 2014). “Urge to get married: intergenerational conflicts between mother and daughter”. *China Women’s Daily*. B03.

⁹⁵⁰ Interview with Ms. P, 30 years old, in Beijing, 17 September 2017.

⁹⁵¹ Interview with Ms. Zi, 30 years old, in Shanghai, 20 May 2017.

challenge that independent single women has brought to established social roles and gender structures in China's patriarchal system.⁹⁵²

Today, "male gender-based violence against women is globally recognized as a health, economic development, and human rights concern", which is caused by significant power differences between men and women.⁹⁵³ Distinct from male-to-female violence, which is often, involves overwhelming, threatening, and physical force, women-to-women violence mainly involves psychological and social punishments, which has previously been seen as less important.⁹⁵⁴ Women-to-women violence in China adopts a subtler form, which makes it difficult for single women to resist and counter such behavior, and where some victims even blame themselves for the perceived moral deficiencies criticized by others:

*My parents have greatly increased my psychological burden, and I sometimes think about my 'no filial piety', and whether I should sacrifice my personal freedom and rush and fulfill the task of getting married to someone casually to meet their traditional expectations.*⁹⁵⁵

In the context of a patriarchal society, 'women-to-women' violence is thus often overlooked or not considered to be a form of gender-based violence when compared to male-to-female and female-to-male violence. However, if a single woman encounters violence as an individual event, and most single women have the same experience, then this becomes an unaddressed 'structural form of violence'⁹⁵⁶ that should not be underestimated.

⁹⁵² Liu, Xuwu. (2007). On the Gender Rule in the movie of A Streetcar Named Desire. *Journal of School of Chinese Language and Culture*, Nanjing Normal University, 2: 101-105.

⁹⁵³ Russo & Pirlott, 2006.

⁹⁵⁴ Chesler, 2009, 10.

⁹⁵⁵ Interview with Ms. P, 30 years old, in Beijing, 17 September 2017.

⁹⁵⁶ Galtung's theory on structural violence (in 1969) is proposed as a foundational basis for understanding systemic patterns of violence affecting single women as a collective. For example, if a single woman is humiliated by the community it is personal violence; however if one million single women with the same personal characteristics are discriminated by the public, this is the result of structural violence, caused by an institution called patriarchy.

As a result, single women in China encounter unique obstacles that typify a new category of discrimination dividing women into married and unmarried groups. The identity of single women therefore carries a social stigma, with married women participating as direct perpetrators of gendered violence to belittle single women and reinforce their privileged status. Unfortunately, such violence it is still largely invisible and unaddressed. However, it is impossible to change antisocial behavior if it is not named and addressed.⁹⁵⁷ To recognize this phenomenon as a form of social harm is a necessary next step to undermine gender-based women-to-women violence against Chinese single women. Without achieving this, single women will be unable to live free from patriarchal culture due to deeply-held hostilities between different women.

Discussion and reflections of Gender-based ‘women-to-women’ violence

As noted, gender-based ‘women-to-women’ violence has yet to be taken seriously as a social concept, although it exists in Chinese society. Single women therefore must resist the oppression of patriarchal men while also dealing with gendered violence from other women.

Women’s economic status and disadvantaged position in the labor market can contribute to the impact of gender-based violence,⁹⁵⁸ as the workplace tensions serve to encourage social competition among women, making the relationship between women more fraught. Chinese patriarchal society still applies a male perspective to assess the performance of working women, and some women seek to reinforce their status under patriarchal structures by attacking different groups of women. This reinforces existing constructs of single women as ‘leftover women’ defying traditional gender roles.⁹⁵⁹ Thus, the continuation of patriarchal

⁹⁵⁷ Chesler, 2009, 20.

⁹⁵⁸ Shahnazaryan, Gohar. (3 May 2016). “Structural and Cultural Causes of Gender-Based Violence in Armenia”. *Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus*. Available at: www.feminism-boell.org/en/2016/05/03/structural-and-cultural-causes-gender-based-violence-armenia. (accessed 13 January 2018).

⁹⁵⁹ Li, 2016.

cultural constructs makes some women enabling agents of patriarchal society, which encourages violence against Chinese single women.

Consequently, the patriarchal social system in China is a primary factor influencing violence towards single women, although its role is often overshadowed by discussions around specific aspects of culture, traditions, and legal systems. Structural violence between women has never caused widespread social concern, with many people not even recognizing women's non-physical violence against other women as a form of gender-based violence. With conflicting values between the old and young generations and increasing competition in society however, violence among women should not be underestimated. Moreover, as violence against single women is tolerated and occurs overtly, such actions can partly be explained by the fact that Chinese culture has long derided being single as a failure. The patriarchal social system and gender concepts, social competition between women in modern society, are also factors affecting the prevalence of female violence in China today.⁹⁶⁰

Nevertheless, not all assessments received from single women were negative. Some interviewees reported that they had received support, tolerance, and understanding from other women; however compared to other negative experiences documented, these perspectives constituted only a minority of women surveyed.

In the study exploring single women's lived personal experiences, the existence of gender-based 'women-to-women' violence is an important issue affecting single women's well-being, and is one of the many specific challenges faced by single women in China, as targets of gender and marital status discrimination.

⁹⁶⁰ Li, Xuan. (2015). "China's Leftover Women: Late Marriage among Professional Women and Its Consequences". *Asian Woman*, 31: 4. Available at: www.e-asianwomen.org/xml/05591/05591.pdf (accessed 20 December 2017).

Key finding III: The *Dark Period*, *Self-doubting Period*, and *Golden Age* of Chinese single women

Introduction:

Human beings have their own distinct, socially-recognized life stages, namely “*infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age as developmental phases, through which individuals pass over the course of their lives*”.⁹⁶¹ Each life stage of a person can be composed of three different concepts: physiological changes (biological); psychological changes (mental and cognitive development); and social characteristics (social attributes).⁹⁶²

In this research, interview participants comprised 32 never-married Chinese single women between the ages of 30 and 48 years. 16 participants were aged in their early 30s (30-34); seven in their 30s (35-39); and nine aged in their 40s (40-48). Interview findings show that single women held different responses and perspectives on their own single status which varied by age. These could be divided into three broad age ranges, based on interviewees’ self-esteem, self-awareness, and experiences of direct verbal violence due to their single status. In my interview sample, these are described as the: *Dark period*; *Self-doubting period*; and the *Golden Age*, respectively.

Group 1 (30-34 years old) — Dark period:

Based on interview responses, interviewees aged between 30 and 34 seemed to experience the most extreme pressure to get married. They experienced intense pressure from families, friends, colleagues and acquaintances pushing them to get married, were regularly ridiculed and verbally insulted, and are pressed to attend blind dates more frequently than older single

⁹⁶¹ Mintz, Steven. (2004). *The Prime of Life: A History of Modern Adulthood*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.

⁹⁶² Erikson, Erik H., & Erikson, Joan M. (1998). *The Life Cycle Completed (Extended Version)*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York.

women. Under considerable social pressure, younger single women struggle to meet the expectations of others, with many seeking to get married as soon as possible to conform to the majority of married women:

Firstly, younger interviewees (between the ages of 30-34) continue through a prolonged period of regularly attending arranged blind dates. They are eager to live the same life as others, and to be respected and recognized. During this period, interviewees reported their concerns that they could not control their own destiny and nor their future state, but passively accepted the fate of searching for a partner:

*I really endure great pressure from my family. This year I entered into my 30s, and my mother constantly arranges blind dates for me, which have occupied almost all my weekends and holidays. Of course, I also expected to meet the right person earlier. However, I could not bear it anymore, because of the many negative experiences from some blind dates.*⁹⁶³

*I have been very anxious for many years. Others often organize for me to attend blind dates, which is very annoying.*⁹⁶⁴

Secondly, in this age range, unmarried women also face huge peer pressure, as most of the same-aged people in their early 30s are married and have their own children. Therefore, these unmarried women report they are frequently laughed at by others, so they bear tremendous psychological pressure:

⁹⁶³ Interview with Ms. Z, 30 years old, in Beijing, 26 April 2017.

⁹⁶⁴ Interview with Ms. W, 34 years old, in Suzhou, 4 June 2017.

*The experience of being laughed at is not very good, and I do not know when my days of being single can end. I cannot see any sunlight in my life before getting married because I live differently with my companions.*⁹⁶⁵

*Because I am a migrant in Shanghai, it is not easy for me to find a suitable partner. Colleagues laugh at me frequently, and I do not like blind dates. I do not know what to do. I certainly hope to get married early and let the gossip women shut up!*⁹⁶⁶

*I am very insulted when asked about marriage. Publicly acknowledging that I am single, being ridiculed, afraid of being sympathized. It has also caused me anxiety and depression.*⁹⁶⁷

Thirdly, between the ages of 30-34 is also an important period when many women experience their professional career rise and improve:

*I have had depression before, and it occasionally comes back. In recent years, I have been plagued by my single status as a woman aged over 30, and the biggest pressure comes from my work. In the workplace, I often encounter much unfair treatment due to being single. However, I still have many higher goals to achieve.*⁹⁶⁸

*I am very busy with my job in the hospital. I have to work night shifts almost four nights a week. After working for a few years, I hope that I can have a promotion opportunity. Thus, I work very hard, and I contribute most of my time to work.*⁹⁶⁹

⁹⁶⁵ Interview with Ms. B, 31 years old, in Zhengzhou, 10 August 2017.

⁹⁶⁶ Interview with Ms. J, 32 years old, in Shanghai, 24 May 2017.

⁹⁶⁷ Interview with Ms. M, 33 years old, in Shenzhen, 1 July 2017.

⁹⁶⁸ Interview with Ms. D, 33 years old, in Lanzhou, 28 June 2017.

⁹⁶⁹ Interview with Ms. Yi, 32 years old, in Wuxi, 25 June 2017.

Therefore, the most intense years for experiencing marriage pressure for single women are between the ages of 30 and 34, when women experience pressure from multiple burdens, including the pressure to marry and pursue a career and work expectations. During the dark period, the majorities of single women feel lost and do not see where their future will take them. They feel that the future is full of uncertainty and, although they hold ideals, they do not know how far they are from achieving them.

Group 2 (35-39)—Self-doubting period

At 35, single women are at a threshold age. In younger years, many women were constantly being pushed to get married and suffered from verbal violence. However by the age of 35, interviewees reported that they had moved beyond earlier dark periods and begin to enter a new period of self-awareness. As they get older, marriage pressures begin to gradually diminish, along with the direct forms of violence encountered from others. Instead, single women between the ages of 35 and 39 experience more insecurity or self-doubt.

As I get older, I begin to doubt myself. I cannot clearly see where I should go for my future; I don't dare to think about it.⁹⁷⁰

To be honest, I not dare think any more about the future. Sometimes I attend a blind date, but it is routine. I am numb. It is also not clear whether I may one day get married.⁹⁷¹

One interviewee expressed her mixed thoughts about her personal status. On the one hand, she could not predict her own future, which seemed to her full of confusion. On the other hand, she was full of embarrassment for his parents, because she had failed to meet their expectations:

⁹⁷⁰ Interview with Ms. L, 35 years old, in Guangzhou, 24 July 2017.

⁹⁷¹ Interview with Ms. Ai, 35 years old, in Jinan, 6 August 2017.

*I am still quite confused. It is mainly about parents. I do not care about myself. However, I do not want my parents to be sad. I don't know what life will be like in the future.*⁹⁷²

In addition, women above 35 also experience diminishing reproductive abilities as time goes on. Single women in their mid to late-30s thus enter a self-reflective period, as they cannot predict their future and if they will remain single or get married and have children:

*I am worried about missing the best reproductive period, so I will consider artificial insemination to have children. However, it is not easy decision. I don't think women should be bound by age. We have the freedom to choose the life we want to live.*⁹⁷³

*My work is very busy and my personality is very strong. However, I will also consider whether to marry as soon as possible. Otherwise, my 40th birthday is coming soon. Even I am afraid about thinking of having children.*⁹⁷⁴

During the interview, I was able to relate to interviewees' inner struggles, confusion and doubt, and their dissatisfaction and resentment with their current status. Chinese society uses mainstream social values as the standard for measuring against individual thoughts and behaviors, (for example, unmarried single women are seen to be abnormal and non-conforming), stifles the individual's freedom and autonomy, and creates limitations on the single women's action. To integrate and be accepted into the surrounding society therefore, individuals, especially those from marginalized groups, have to learn to meet social standards and expectations.

⁹⁷² Interview with Ms. H, 38 years old, in Shanghai, 25 May 2017.

⁹⁷³ Interview with Ms. F, 35 years old, in Shenzhen, 5 July 2017.

⁹⁷⁴ Interview with Ms. A, 35 years old, in Shanghai, 31 May 2017.

Single women in China find this social structure hard to escape. Even if such women seek to remain unmarried, they cannot escape their internalized struggle and social criticism arising from their atypical lifestyle decisions. Therefore, for those interviewees above 35, their anxiety relates to an unclear and unpredictable future where they continue to deviate from expected social norms.

Group 3 (Above 40) – The Golden Age:

Single women above 40 are also discriminated against in the society; however, emotionally and mentally the women of my sample appear to be stronger than younger single women. Reasons for derive from three aspects: *increased confidence and personal resilience; reduced marriage pressure from others; and changing life stages*, which open a new chapter.

Firstly, as they get older the single women of my sample reported they had become more mature, calm, and economically stable. They mostly accept their identity as unmarried women and enjoy their own company, and are less anxious and concerned about their single status. In addition, they have a good financial savings, some own their own housing, and they have enough resilience and strength to resist external harassment. Therefore, they become more comfortable and happy with their single status. The key concern for single women over the age of 40 is in ensuring they are well prepared for their later years, including old-age care:

*I am accustomed to living alone and have my own apartment. I should not be married. I am satisfied with my status. Sometimes some people still show their unfriendly face to me, but I do not care about it as much as in the past.*⁹⁷⁵

⁹⁷⁵ Interview with Ms. R, 43 years old, in Shanghai, 17 June 2017.

*There is nothing wrong with an unmarried life. Apart from worrying about pensions, other aspects are not that different from those of married people.*⁹⁷⁶

*I think life at 40 is the best. I am mature and have a sufficient economic base. I believe that the happiness of women should never be measured by marriage. In my spare time, I play the piano and sing. Life is beautiful.*⁹⁷⁷

*After 40, I became more relaxed and confident. There are still many unmarried women in their 30s who sharing the same suffering as I had in the past. I hope that your research can help to change the situation to some extent.*⁹⁷⁸

Secondly, interviewees noted that people no longer push them to get married, as they did before when they were younger. After the age of 40, single women are no longer seen to be in a hurry to marry and have children. In addition, the rise in divorced couples in Chinese society shows older women that unhappy married lives may be not better than living alone. Interviewees over the age of 40 were convinced that marriage is no longer a means of survival, and after being subjected to pressure in their 20s and 30s most no longer cared about public opinion:

Many of my colleagues' marriages are not happy, and some are even divorced or separated. Therefore, this audience no longer notices me, and this gives me great peace. I can invest more time and energy on my work, and I become more and more relaxed about my lifestyle. Now I am already 48, and few people would mention my single status any more. I do not worry a lot about other people's

⁹⁷⁶ Interview with Ms. N, 40 years old, in Shanghai, 1 June 2017.

⁹⁷⁷ Interview with Ms. V, 46 years old, in Beijing, 2 October 2017.

⁹⁷⁸ Interview with Ms. Q, 41 years old, in Zhenjiang, 11 June 2017.

*opinion as in the past. I do not think my life is lesser than those of married people.*⁹⁷⁹

*I think my life is getting better and better. Family members no longer urge me to get married and I no longer consider marriage as an option. Some married women tell me about their unhappy marriages and envy my single status. I feel that the whole world is brightly lit.*⁹⁸⁰

*Fortunately, the direct negative violence against me has diminished with my increased age. I am lucky that I can safely reach the age of 40, and the actions pushing me to get married gradually play less role in my life, and I accept my status of being single forever.*⁹⁸¹

Thirdly, while unmarried women over the age of 40 remain somewhat marginalized by society, they experience more freedom and opportunity to pursue their own lives. Research participants interviewed enjoy many interests and hobbies, and see their single status as an opportunity to enrich and open a new chapter in their later life:

*My job is stable and my life is prosperous. I try to create a tolerant environment and have done a good job of making my parents accepting. As I grow older, life will become easier and freer.*⁹⁸²

*I can manage my own life. Although I have been marginalized by mainstream society, I am very satisfied with my single life. My aim is to create my own way of living.*⁹⁸³

⁹⁷⁹ Interview with Ms. S, 48 years old, in Beijing, 2 May 2017.

⁹⁸⁰ Interview with Ms. K, 42 years old, in Guangzhou, 22 July 2017.

⁹⁸¹ Interview with Ms. Q, 41 years old, in Zhenjiang, 11 June 2017.

⁹⁸² Interview with Ms. C, 40 years old, in Shanghai, 4 June 2017.

⁹⁸³ Interview with Ms. Ni, 44 years old, in Shanghai, 21 June 2017.

*After the age of 40, I understood that marriage is actually a product of culture and a choice in life. Now I will never change again, but I will manage my own life. I believe that there are infinite possibilities for my future.*⁹⁸⁴

In short, interviewees over the age of 40 see themselves of entering into a golden age, with increased self-acceptance and self-recognition. Most of them have completely let go of the ideological burden of marriage, and no longer put marriage as the future goal in their life. They recognize that marriage cannot protect people from loneliness, depression and stress. Instead, they have more time to invest to their hobbies and interests, and to further pursue their career ambitions. Age thus directly or indirectly affects a person's role in society.⁹⁸⁵ Based on different age profiles, Chinese single women hold difference experiences and attitudes to their single status, and look for their own way to manage social pressures and criticism.

Summary

In this section, I attempt to summarize the interviewees into three categories, including the *Dark period* (30-34 years), the *Self-doubting period* (35-39 years), and the *Golden Age* (aged 40 and above). It can be seen that age group seems to be factor closely related to the psychological stress and resilience of single women. Unfortunately, as my sample size was small and because the age of respondents covered only women aged 30-48 years old, I was unable to develop a broader profile of Chinese single women across a wider age group.

6.3.3 Summary and reflection

In this chapter, three key findings regarding direct verbal violence against Chinese single women have been presented and discussed. The first key finding observed that single women

⁹⁸⁴ Interview with Ms. Ti, 45 years old, in Beijing, 17 May 2017.

⁹⁸⁵ Yang, 2008.

experience different degrees of mistreatment based on their location and family background, with women from rural or less developed economic regions and migrant women living in cities experiencing higher degrees of violence due to single status. The second key finding was that gender based violence against Chinese single women occurs mostly between women, which contributes to recognizing and drawing attention on gender based ‘women to women’ violence, including by family members and married women. Finally, I proposed an age category for differentiating the negative experiences of single women according to their approximate age range, which proposes a life cycle approach to single women responding and managing their true suffering under different situations.

Based on the complete analysis of interviews with Chinese single women, this study contends that direct violence in the Chinese context refers to sarcasm, insulting language and degrading comments experienced by single women, which is enforced to reassert dominant power structures through verbal belittling and intimidation. In addition, because the dominant power structures in China hardly changed, there is little likelihood of individuals challenging and pushing back against such oppression in the near future. Direct violence against Chinese single women, especially verbal forms of violence, is omnipresent in the lives of single women interviewed for this research. Their lived experiences show that verbal violence is continuously rationalized, routinized, and even promoted, either as a punishment or coercion to force such women to choose married life. The existence of verbal violence, as the psychological mechanism of surrounding culture, reflects existing cultural biases and values and embodies the enforcement of hegemonic discourse power. Verbal violence thus has a unique advantage in drawing legitimacy from people’s cultural and psychological heritage, and in enforcing conformity with the social cultural psychology of the abuser.⁹⁸⁶

⁹⁸⁶ Wang, Yumei. (December 2011) “The Cultural Psychology of Language Violence”. *Journal of Chuxiong Normal University*, 26 (12): 15-19.

6.4 Analysis of triangular violence applying to Chinese single women

According to the sociological model of violence proposed by Johan Galtung (1990), cultural values legitimates or justifies society to make action against wrongdoers, and convinces people that violence, either direct or structural, is the correct and right action to enforce order. Cultural violence is closely linked to China's socio-economic transformation and the fact that Chinese single women have become a prominent social phenomenon in Chinese society. Social mobility and differentiation, and the react of other persons to such changes, is the base that constitutes cultural violence. In this section, connections between cultural, structural, and direct violence are analyzed to determine why Chinese single women face such a hostile environment in contemporary China.

To date, no scholars have applied Johan Galtung's violence model to the current situation of Chinese single women. Based on his concept of the *violent triangle doctrine* (see Chapter 3), I adapted this theory to this research, which contributed a new analytical framework to understanding gender-based violence against single women in China. Based on my above analysis, three kinds of violence against Chinese single women are identified as closely related, and constituting three corners of a triangular vector of violence.

Chinese single women are constantly educated, persuaded, and instructed to act morally by conforming to collectivist and filial piety cultural values, because their single status is seen to undermine China's traditional patriarchal, family and marriage culture. Thus, single women are systemically dis-empowered and discouraged from obtain autonomy or agency over their own lives. This pressure can and does result in direct and structural violence against single women. Direct violence belittling and humiliating Chinese women can intensify social injustice or cultural violence; while structural violence via institutional and policy restrictions further impacts forms of direct and cultural violence affecting Chinese single women. Over

time, these three forms of violence intertwine to encourage and exacerbate conflicts in Chinese society, and which encourage the escalation of “*violence breeding violence*” against Chinese single women.

Chinese single women are thus living in a violent vortex in contemporary China, suffering from cultural, structural, and direct violence in their daily lives. Cultural violence has laid the foundation for structural violence, which in turn encourages structural violence and direct violence against single women on an individual level. Structurally-violent social and organizational systems, including governments, families, workplaces, are enforced and maintained with direct forms of violence, including direct actions of control and victimization of Chinese single women. Thus, indirect structural violence is often correlated with, and interdependent, with direct violence action.

However such institutionalized forms of structural violence are also supported by cultural factors embedded in Chinese social structures, and longstanding traditions of prejudice against Chinese single women. This is seen for example in the demonizing of single women as a lifestyle choice, because unmarried life is considered a rebellion against traditional patriarchal collectivist cultural values. Patriarchal culture thus legitimates verbal violence to humiliate single women and reinforces social structures which disadvantage and limit women’s autonomy.

The patriarchal culture in China is the primary factor which institutionalizes male dominance in social relations, and which supports a close relationship between status and gender, and the legitimization of patriarchal traditions. The patriarchal culture, as well as other cultural forms, unites three kinds of violence, which can exist and reinforce each other. Cultural factors stemming from Chinese patriarchal values therefore support pervasive direct verbal violence

against Chinese single women, and exclude them from mainstream society. The structural factors in turn help ensure that both men and married women obtain more political, economic and social advantages. For instance, married women enjoy more advantages at the workplace when looking for a job or obtaining training or promotion opportunities, and can publicly criticize and denounce single women without any repercussions. These advantages exclude most Chinese single women from the normal benefits of the state, thereby placing them as a vulnerable group.

Overall, Chinese single women suffer from regular and insidious assaults on their dignity, which derive from various forms of violence. Direct violence is interdependent with structural and cultural violence, whereas cultural and structural violence encourages direct violence, which each form reinforcing the others. For example, unmarried women are pushed to get married by mothers and suffering from verbal insults from others, whose actions are legitimized by patriarchal culture and justified by filial piety culture. However such women cannot forcefully resist such pressure and insults as they lack agency and power in society. They only remain silent or passively accept mistreatment and, because of overall structural oppression, they are unable to live freely. Such violence forms a violent circle, in which Chinese single women endure and feel that they cannot escape.

As an oppressed group living in a violent social system it could be considered why single women do not turn to direct forms of violence, as a way to change or overcome the systems oppressing them.⁹⁸⁷ However, Chinese contemporary society is still characterized by a strictly hierarchical structure, with less agency and power for those groups with low social standing, especially single women. For such women, the day when they are free from such violence seems out of reach. Chinese single women need a new social model to overthrow old models

⁹⁸⁷ Hervás, 2015.

of cultural bondage and structures; however societal opposition to the patriarchal system remains quite weak. Most Chinese do not consider that the patriarchal culture is hindering social and economic development. Change therefore requires the continuous influence and pressure from social agents, and will occur only over a longer period.

Chinese society is in a period of transition, and as family and social structures in China change, family responsibilities, gender roles, and power dynamics are all likely to change in turn. More and more people are starting to think whether it is right to follow the existing social systems or to choose to live their own life. As a consequence, there is opportunity to reexamine longstanding Chinese cultural traditions and reconsider whether cultural values and norms, including beliefs around marriage and gender roles, remain valid and relevant to modern-day Chinese society. Even so, many single women find that despite their advancement traditional social structures are hard to escape, and even if some women are able to overcome expectations and live independently, they cannot escape social criticism. Dominant patriarchal constructs have also not changed, and stratified and gendered social class structure is still in existence. Therefore, in a system which privileges marriage and family formation, the status of single women remains in a tenuous and unfavorable position in contemporary China today.

6.5 Symbolic violence against single women in contemporary China

Introduction

The concept of symbolic violence, which was first introduced by Pierre Bourdieu, draws attention to forms of violence not involving physical force but which operating symbolically, through forms of emotional, psychological or cultural coercion or pressure. In this section, I seek to introduce how such indirect, invisible symbolic forms of violence impact on single women in contemporary China.

In this study, symbolic violence against Chinese single women is manifested and discussed through the following aspects, including:

Introduction of the concept of “*leftover women*”;
gender inequality in the discourse between “*leftover women*” and “*leftover men*”;
construction and promotion of the “*leftover women*” image in Chinese mass media;
the opinions of interviewees towards the term of “*leftover women*”; and
discussion of gender domination and symbolic violence against Chinese single women.

6.5.1 The concept of “*leftover women*”

6.5.1.1 Emergence of the concept of “*Leftover Women*” in China

After the reform and opening up period in China since 1978, concepts used to describe the status of Chinese single women have undergone tremendous change. In the 1980s and 1990s, Chinese women who chose to marry late or remain single as a new lifestyle were once highly esteemed as “*single noble women*”, and were considered to have desirable lifestyles followed by a considerable number of fashionable Chinese.⁹⁸⁸ However, in the 21st century, the status

⁹⁸⁸ Ma, 1994.

of single women has neither remained the same as in the 1990s nor improved further. Instead, the role of Chinese single women has dramatically regressed to a stigmatized status characterized as “*leftover women*”, and subjected to considerable scorn in contemporary society. Nevertheless, Chinese single women have already emerged as a distinct social group due to their continuous demographic rise in contemporary China.

In 2007, the concept of “*leftover women* (剩女)” has been officially recognized by the Ministry of Education as one of 171 new Chinese words.⁹⁸⁹ In August 2007, the Ministry of Education of China and the State Languages Commission jointly released the *China Language Status Report*,⁹⁹⁰ where the term “*leftover women* (剩女)” was identified as a new Chinese vocabulary for the new generation. Consequently, the evolution of labels describing Chinese single women has shifted from a positive “*noble single women*” in the 1990s to a more pejorative concept of “*leftover women*” in the 21st century, reflecting changing social attitudes.

From a semantic point of view, “*to be single* (单身)” is a neutral term in Chinese. However, the concept of “*leftover*” retains a derogatory sense when replacing the term “single”, indicating a negative review of unmarried women and alluding to single women as being those who “*lack of charm, no one cares.*”⁹⁹¹ Even in the English language, “*leftover women*” holds an added pejorative emphasis, which connects to such women’s lack of status with the literal meaning “*Shengnü*”⁹⁹² from the Chinese language referring to all women who are above the basic marriageable age and still unmarried.⁹⁹³ This belies the official neutral

⁹⁸⁹ Sun, Tingting. (2015). “Leftover Female: The Reality of Symbolic Construction”. *China Academic Journal Electronic Publishing House*. Yunnan University of Finance and Economics, Kunming City, China.

⁹⁹⁰ National Language Resource Monitoring and Research Center. (2007). *Chinese Language Life Report*. The Commercial Press, Beijing.

⁹⁹¹ Xue, Yuan. (May 2016). “Study on the Spreading Phenomenon and Media Construction of “leftover women” from the perspective of gender”. *Journal of News Research*, 7 (9): 109.

⁹⁹² *Shèng nǚ* is the Pinyin characters for *Leftover women* in Chinese.

⁹⁹³ Sun, 2015; Xie, 2017; Xue, 2016.

interpretation of the term “*leftover women*” as being: “*modern urban women, most of whom are highly educated, with high-income and high IQ, but no marriage*”.⁹⁹⁴

It is commonly believed that the majority of these older single women have higher expectations for partner selection, which leads them to failing to find an ideal marriage partner and thereby become “*leftover women*”.

Thus, the term of “*leftover women*” applies to women who are “*left (剩余的)*”; “*not to be picked up (被挑剩的)*”; “*not to be selected (不被选择的)*”; and “*being excluded (被排除在外的)*”.⁹⁹⁵ Since the emergence of the term “*leftover women*” in China in 2007, it has been always used as a negative term to attack, marginalize and belittle unmarried women, who are seen as “objects”, not yet “picked up” by men.

6.5.1.2 “*Leftover women*” as negative symbol of single women

Traditionally, any women who have not completed the expected duties of being a wife and mother in China would be criticized socially being “unusual” and “rebellious”. Thus in actuality, China’s stigmatization of single women has long been existed, with never married women previously called “*old girls (老姑娘)*”.⁹⁹⁶

The ancient Chinese marriage system discriminated and punished these “*old girls*” severely. Under the Han (202-220B.C.E) and Tang (618-907C.E) Dynasties, women who had not married by the age of 15 years old and their families were fined 600 *Qian*. In the period of the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-589 C.E), women aged over 15 who were not yet

⁹⁹⁴ Sun, 2015, 84.

⁹⁹⁵ Mao, 2009.

⁹⁹⁶ Zang, Xiaowei., & Zhao, Lucy Xia. (2017). *Handbook on the Family and Marriage in China*. Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham. UK. 126.

married and their families were seriously punished and imprisoned.⁹⁹⁷ Therefore, ancient Chinese policies mandating a set marriage age regarded unmarried women as an illegal act.⁹⁹⁸ This type of discrimination and prejudice against single women was widespread throughout the history of China, and has continued to the present day.

However, Chinese society is constantly changing, and thus expectations of overcoming old-fashioned gender roles can and has been changing due to improvements in the social and economic status of women. For example, in the context of recent social changes, many highly educated Chinese women no longer consider themselves passively confined to a set gender role, and have sought to break traditional gender constructs through new ways of living. In this way, the role of the single women conflicts with the traditional gendered female models. Even so, the sense that: “*Men as breadwinners working outside, women as homemakers doing household chores. (男主外, 女主内)*” remains widely-held in contemporary China, which forms a normative structure that judges and evaluates women. Once Chinese women are identified as deviating from recognized gender norms and expectations, they are thus stigmatized.⁹⁹⁹ Today, “leftover women” has become a negative symbol of single women, which intends to present them as an undesirable status.¹⁰⁰⁰

As a result, the concept of “*leftover women*” is a continuation of longstanding Chinese cultural prejudices against single women, which resurrect and continue existing stigmatization of “*leftover women*” in mass communication, social media, and everyday life in contemporary China. In the face of such concepts, many modern Chinese women advocate

⁹⁹⁷ Shen, Yue. (1974). In Chinese “宋书·周朗传, Song Shu • Zhou Lang, 沈约.”, 女子十五不嫁, 家人坐之, recorded in *Songshu Zhoulang Zhuan*. 82. Zhonghua Book Company, Beijing.

⁹⁹⁸ Sun, Fang. (2017). “Discussion on the stigma of “leftover women” from the perspective of sociology”. *Journal of Intelligence*. 11. Tianjin Normal University. Tianjin.

⁹⁹⁹ Gong, Wanqi., Guo, Qin., & Jiang, Crystal Li. (2018). The Dilemma of Chinese Single Women: Understanding Oppression and Discrimination from an Intersectional Perspective. *Journal of Zhejiang University, Humanities and Social Sciences*, Hangzhou, China, 48 (2): 117-128.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Goffman, Erving. (1963). *Stigma*. Penguin, London.

that “*our own marriages should be mastered on our own*”¹⁰⁰¹, and try to break away from traditional restrictions. However despite these aims, they are stigmatized to be “*leftover women*”, which reflects the lack of acceptance of single women in Chinese society today.

6.5.1.3 Existing negative labels for independent single women

The demonization of “*leftover women*”, the role and recognition of highly educated women, and the ridiculing of single women are all means to belittle and push back against the rise of unmarried Chinese women. In addition to “leftover women”, other terminology is emerging in China which is also inextricably linked to the same concept, and is used to belittle, disparage, and undermine the status of independent single women. These include new words such as “*strong woman (女强人)*”; “*single female Ph.D. (女博士)*”; and “*female man (女汉子)*”; to label highly educated and independent unmarried women. These terms are discussed in detail in the following section.

In China such discrimination is first evident when women seek to pursue a profession or a job, where parents and teachers regularly advise them to withdraw from a certain career path or profession that is dominated by male employees, such as science or technology. Gradually, women find that they are not welcome to be involved in certain fields or subjects where men play a dominant role. The participant Ms. C, who majored in high voltage technology when studying at university, changed employment field after graduation following her parents’ advice, even though she had achieved high academic results and did much better than most of her male classmates: “*My mother did not approve of my work in the engineering unit, because she believes that I will not do anything in this man-dominated field.*”¹⁰⁰²

¹⁰⁰¹ Qi, Yaqiong. (2009). *The relationship between marriage and attachment, personality traits and marital quality*. Master Thesis, Northwest Normal University, Lanzhou City, China.

¹⁰⁰² Interview with Ms. C, 40 years old, Shanghai China, 4 June 2017.

When a woman is determined to overcome such social expectations and enter a male-dominated profession, she finds that such positions that were originally tailored for men are assumed to also require a male temperament, known as “*manhood*”.¹⁰⁰³ However, if women attempt to take on male habits, Chinese women are also judged of being in danger of losing their femininity.¹⁰⁰⁴ Compare to married career women, unmarried Chinese single women are more noticeable working in a male dominated industry, and thus become more negatively targeted. Before leaving a state-owned enterprise, Ms. U once worked in a famous steel industry, wearing greasy work clothes and working in various workshops every day like her male colleagues. At that time, many people made jokes on her: “*not like a woman, iron woman, no man is willing to marry you.*”¹⁰⁰⁵

The term “*strong woman*” thus has an embarrassing connotation for single women. If a strong man is considered male that is normal, adding the word “male” in front of the word “strong man” is a positive assessment. The term “*strong woman*” in contrast is usually bestowed on a woman with a successful career but who ignores her family; however, this title is constructed by male discourse towards male-centered roles in a male-dominated society. Thus, while outwardly affirming and praising female behavior, the term is loaded with more negative connotations that deny that such woman can be both professionally successful and feminine.¹⁰⁰⁶

In recent years, there is a popular saying in China that: “*There are three kinds of genders in the world: the first is male, the second is female, and the third is unmarried female Ph.D.*”¹⁰⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰³ Cai, Wenjuan., Chen, Fengchun., & Chen, Sai. (2011). “Interpretation of modern strong women”. *Journal of Tokyo Literature*, Kaifeng City, China, 6: 227-228.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Evans, Harriet., & Strauss, Julia C. (2011). “Gender in Flux. Agency and its limits in contemporary China”. *The China Quarterly Special Issues. New Series no. 10*. Cambridge University Publishing, Cambridge. 180.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Interview with Ms. U, 39 years old, in Shanghai, 26 May 2017.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Yan, Xiaogang. (2012). “Interpretation of ‘The Strong Woman’”. *Journal of Theory of Learning*, 28: 92-94.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Yang, Ying. (2011). “Research on social media impressions of female PhD”. *Journal of China Youth Study. Beijing*, 5: 65-70.

In other words, a well-educated single female PhD is ridiculed as being asexual in China.¹⁰⁰⁸ Highly educated single women titled “*Female PhD (女博士)*” is thus a kind of covert form of gender discrimination. Compared to traditional ideals that “*women without talent is a virtue (女子无才便是德)*”¹⁰⁰⁹, women today are more open and no longer restricted to the boundaries between family and career, and can even compete with men in professions dominated by men.

The label “*Female PhD*” is precisely a potential symbol of inequality, as it expressly contrasts the value towards female and male PhD graduates.¹⁰¹⁰ It has evolved into a social value tendency and has unconsciously influenced many people’s attitudes toward highly educated women, and especially for those unmarried women among them.¹⁰¹¹ Thus, there is undoubtedly a revolt against the decline in “male power”, where female success is regarded as “abnormal”.

In Chinese society today, although the slogan of “*equality between men and women*” is regularly mentioned, some men choose to reinforce repression through undermining female achievement, causing highly educated women to become weakened groups that are neither recognized by men nor accepted by women.¹⁰¹² Consequently, as a symbol of female PhD holders have become a negative symbol in popular media, equating to “*being sexless, odd and unattractive*”.¹⁰¹³

¹⁰⁰⁸ Kuo, Lily. (29 January 2014). “In China, highly educated women are mocked as a sexless “third gender”. *Quartz news (Global business news and insights)*. Available at: www.qz.com/312464/in-china-highly-educated-women-are-mocked-as-a-sexless-third-gender/ (accessed 13 November 2018).

¹⁰⁰⁹ *Women without talent is a virtue (女子无才便是德)* is a Chinese saying meaning that women do not need to have individual talent, just obey their husbands.

¹⁰¹⁰ Feldshuh, Hannah. (2018). Gender, media, and myth-making: constructing China’s leftover women. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 28 (1): 38-54.

¹⁰¹¹ Li, Tingru. (2008). “Walking on the edge of men and women - a cultural interpretation of the female Ph.D.’s “third sex” phenomenon”. *Lanzhou Xue Kan*, 172 (1): 77-80.

¹⁰¹² Xu, Xiping., & Zhu Wei. (2011). Social Psychology Interpretation of Female Doctor’s “Third Sex”. *Theory Research*, 15: 90-91.

¹⁰¹³ Tan, Tiffany. (9 February 2010). “Getting Past ‘Female PhD’ Label”. *Women of China*. Available at: www.womenofchina.cn/womenofchina/html1/opinion/10/4015-1.htm (accessed 13 November 2018).

In Chinese language, highly educated women are inscribed in the category of male authority, with the term “*Female PhD*” having a female Chinese character added before the male PhD word. Its potential meaning therefore relates to a gender and academic construct that is no longer consistent with traditional gender norms. As a result, all unmarried female PhDs are therefore imprinted with unusual symbolic importance, and are considered socially as unfamiliar, aloof, indifferent, unattractive, and self-centered.

In the academic field in China, prospective female postgraduates are often warned to “*be cautious about pursuing your career, otherwise you cannot get married*”; and “*a female PhD cannot find a husband*.”¹⁰¹⁴ Other well-meaning suggestions make educated women hesitate about whether they should continue to pursue further academic studies. In contrast, married women are lauded for finding a husband that reflects an intrinsic value on its own, which surpasses other single women’s advantages in terms of education and achievement. Furthermore, women who excel in their career but remain unmarried are also more likely to be criticized by their peer-married women. Thus, highly educated single women who are classed as “*Female PhD*” face greater pressures than other women seeking marital partners.¹⁰¹⁵ For example, Ms. Ni studied for a PhD in Hong Kong when she was 31-35 years old. When she returned to work in Shanghai, she found it difficult to find a suitable partner because of her age and education. “*I don’t reject marriage, but my doctoral title has discouraged many male candidates*.”¹⁰¹⁶ In academic achievement, unmarried female PhD graduates have become synonymous with leftover women.¹⁰¹⁷

The terms “*female man (女汉子)*” also appears frequently in China in recent years.¹⁰¹⁸ Under

¹⁰¹⁴ Dickerson, Yuan. (May 2016). *Chinese female graduate students on U.S Campuses: Negotiating classroom silence, the leftover woman and the good woman discourses*. Doctoral Dissertation of Syracuse University, New York, USA.

¹⁰¹⁵ Xie, 2017.

¹⁰¹⁶ Interview with Ms. Ni, 44 years old, in Shanghai, 21 June 2017.

¹⁰¹⁷ Xie, 2017.

¹⁰¹⁸ Li, Xiaoyan. (2014). “Interpretation of Contemporary Women’s Social Status from the Internet Popular

the longstanding influence of a male-dominated society, Chinese women have tended to underplay themselves and seek a “weaker” position for themselves in the public subconscious, in order to expect to meet social expectations and to receive favor and attention.¹⁰¹⁹ Just as many girls seek to be protected by showing weakness; this kind of mentality has long been ingrained in women. If a woman breaks this mentality, she is often considered to hold male characteristics and risk losing femininity, and can be subjected to scorn and disparagement as a “manly” single woman.¹⁰²⁰

No matter the term, concepts such as “*leftover women*”, “*strong women*”, “*female PhD*” or “*female man*” are intentionally created and propagated to diminish competent Chinese single women, who fail to conform to stereotypical gender expectations to be subordinate women. Such social commentary thus becomes a kind of backhanded compliment, or can alternatively be straightforwardly pejorative.¹⁰²¹

6.5.2 Inequality in the discourse between “*leftover women*” and “*leftover men*”

The development of the term “*leftover women*” is complemented by the existence of “*leftover men*”, who exist in comparable or even greater numbers to single women in China.¹⁰²² However, social attitudes towards the two groups of people are not equal. From mass media, internet communication, to everyday life, there is widespread discrimination against “*leftover women*”. Chinese society is sensitive to the existence of “*leftover women*” in a way that is not seen to the larger numbers of “*leftover men*”.¹⁰²³ In China, women who are not yet married

Female Appellations”. *Academic Weekly Late Issue*, 11: 16-17.

¹⁰¹⁹ Harrison, Dew. (2015). *Handbook of Research on Digital Media and Creative Technologies*. IGI Global, University of Wolverhampton. Wolverhampton, UK. 419.

¹⁰²⁰ To, Sandy. (2015). *China’s Leftover Women: Late Marriage among Professional Women and its consequences*. New York: Routledge.

¹⁰²¹ Yuan, Feng. (2017). “Women’s Rights in China - an Interview with Feng Yuan.” Available at: chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/articles/womens-rights-in-china-an-interview-with-feng-yuan/ (accessed 2 May 2018).

¹⁰²² Koetse, 2015. “Not ‘Leftover Women’ but ‘Leftover Men’ Are China’s Real Problem”. Available at: www.whatsonweibo.com/not-leftover-women-but-leftover-men-are-chinas-real-problem/ (accessed 13 November 2018).

¹⁰²³ Sun, 2015, 86.

by her late twenties or early thirties are already considered to be left behind in the marriage market, whereas single men usually do not suffer the same pressure from family or society as single women, and are less stigmatized in the media.¹⁰²⁴

The frequent appearance of the “*leftover women*” concept is not mirrored in social perceptions of “*leftover men*”, or of their respective statuses as potential marriage partners. The “*leftover women*” dismissed in Chinese society often have high social and economic status, whereas the “leftover men” often hold lower status as potential partners.¹⁰²⁵ Many “*leftover women*” live in cities, attained higher education degrees, and engage in enviable careers with generous salaries. In contrast, the majorities of “leftover men” live in the rural areas and have less education and weaker economic backgrounds.¹⁰²⁶ In addition, “leftover men” is considered a derived word from “leftover women” rather than becoming a formal term like “leftover women” to be defined, and so such men avoid such stigmatizing associations, despite their comparative situation.

Thus due to societal discrimination, a group of highly eligible, urban unmarried women have become a disadvantaged group in the marriage market, due to their single status and increased age. In contrast, however, the term “*leftover men*” is perceived in more neutral or positive images. These include the “*perfectionist type* (完美主义型)”; “*playboy type* (花花公子型)”; “*liberal type* (自由主义型)”; “*career type* (事业型)”; and “*poor and weak type* (穷困潦倒型)”, which distinguish according to single men’s ability to choose different spouse.¹⁰²⁷ In addition, age and physical appearance of women are the most important factors cited by unmarried men

¹⁰²⁴ Koetse, 2015.

¹⁰²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰²⁶ An, Chuanxiang. (27July 2015). “The leftover woman should not be worried; the “leftover man” is the crisis”. *Xinhua News*. Available at: www.news.xinhuanet.com/comments/2015-07/27/c_1116044841.htm (accessed 13 November 2018).

¹⁰²⁷ Xing, Yulong. (2015). *Analysis of the Communication of the Media Image of “Leftover Men”*. Master Thesis of Inner Mongolia University. Hohhot City, China.

when choosing marriage partners.¹⁰²⁸ This contrast between evaluating single men and single women reflects the male's decision-making power in the Chinese marriage market.

In addition, while the number of “*leftover men*” is significantly greater than the number of single women in China, this has been largely overlooked in Chinese media and public discussions.¹⁰²⁹ In academia, the study of single men is mostly focused on the potential social threat to society by a cohort of men who cannot marry; whereas the study on single women is more extensive.¹⁰³⁰ Such perspectives derive from the fact that social expectations presuppose female roles as mothers and wives, with more family responsibilities than men have. Furthermore, discrimination towards single women comes not only from men, but also from many married women.¹⁰³¹ The selective highlighting of “*leftover women*” and obscuring of “*leftover men*” thus also reinforces the dominant position of patriarchal culture in China.¹⁰³² Leftover men are more treated with a tone of sympathy and understanding, whereas leftover women are degraded and discriminated. As interviewee Ms. L complained:

*In our company, there are also some single men over the age of 30, although they bear some marriage pressure, but it is much better than me. I am very frustrated because most people laugh at me that I am too demanding on the other half of the future. They believe that this is because the leftover women in China are too picky, resulting in many men not having the opportunity to find a partner.*¹⁰³³

¹⁰²⁸ Ying, Yingxiu. (2007). “Leftover women” to get “Leftover men” in strategy”. *Journal of “Wish you happiness: afternoon”*, 4: 32-33.

¹⁰²⁹ Jiang, Yu., Wang, Li., & Wie, Na. (2012). “The construction of the image of “leftover men” in the mass media news report”. *Journal of Culture and Communication*, 5: 59-63.

¹⁰³⁰ Peng, Qingqing., & Li, Lei. (August 2017). “An Empirical Study of the Chinese Marriage Market: Leftover or Not?” *Journal of Scientific Research*, 5 (8): 229-247.

¹⁰³¹ Li, 2016, 13-20.

¹⁰³² Qin, Jingwen. (2012). “*Analysis of the media image of ‘leftover women’*”. Master thesis of Hunan Normal University, Changsha, China.

¹⁰³³ Interview with Ms. L, 30 years old, in Beijing, 13 May 2017.

Thus, the construction of the “leftover women” can be embodied in the patriarchal system, in that the reasoning for “leftover women” can be constructed in that these “leftover women” do not meet the standards for a marriageable woman under the patriarchal culture system in China. Compared to unmarried men, unmarried Chinese women are under greater pressure and have to face greater pressure to get married.¹⁰³⁴ Moreover, women who voluntarily choose to be single have also been placed in an objectified and marginalized position as “leftover women” in public opinion.¹⁰³⁵

In such manner, the discourse between the concepts of “*leftover women*” and “*leftover men*” in media, academic research, and public opinion are unequal. Public opinions of single women hold prejudiced attitudes, and marriage success is still seen as the measure of female worth, ability, and influence.¹⁰³⁶ This use of different gendered value judgments reflects essentially an enduring gender bias in traditional Chinese society.¹⁰³⁷

Thus, although gender equality has been regarded as official national policy in China, the concept of patriarchy continues to hold sway due to the resilience of a rigid and conservative gender system. In all areas of Chinese social life, women are still disadvantaged, and gender discrimination still exists.¹⁰³⁸ Accordingly, the continued targeting of Chinese single women by the construction and propagation of the “*leftover women*” concept helps to continue the traditional patriarchal culture in modern China.

¹⁰³⁴ Wei, Manjiang. (2014). “Gender Discourse in the Mass Media”. *Journal of Hubei Social Sciences*, 6: 193-195.

¹⁰³⁵ Dou, Meihua. (2014). “*The illusion of ‘leftover women’ and the gender discourse bias of TV media*”. Master thesis of Shandong Normal University. Jinan, China.

¹⁰³⁶ Xie, Huiqi. (April 2017). “Research on Marriage Squeeze under Discipline Discourse”. *Journal of Cognition and Practice*, 4 (21): 104-107.

¹⁰³⁷ Yuan, Fang. (2012). “On the problems and countermeasures in women’s media”. *Journal of Modern Women*, 2: 8-13.

¹⁰³⁸ Zou, Liyun., & Chang, Wei. (2014). “On the problems and countermeasures of women’s reports in online media”. *Journal of Jin Media*. No. 2. *Media Criticism*.

6.5.3 Construction of the “leftover women” image in Chinese mass media

6.5.3.1 Symbolic violence in the mass media

Today, popularization of internet communication and social media has elevated the power of language as a new symbolic form of violence.¹⁰³⁹ Symbolic violence against Chinese single women also reflects the new media environment, in which the infringement of women’s rights and interests is predominately manifested in the dissemination and depiction of negative stereotypes. Negative images of Chinese single women are further reinforced in mass media sources, such as TV programs or internet communication.

The manifestation of symbolic violence against Chinese women is most apparent in television programming and communication, with the essence of television communication being a process of symbolic social construction and deconstruction of a targeted group. Television programmers sell ideas by producers through the coverage of TV and its extensive communication platform, and encourage symbols that symbolize beauty or unattractiveness. As the recipient of cultural hegemony, TV audiences are concurrently both a large but unorganized and chaotic group, which reproduces mechanisms of cultural hegemony.¹⁰⁴⁰

Turning to China’s preeminent marriage and dating program, Jiangsu Satellite TV’s “*The perfect match* (非诚勿扰)”¹⁰⁴¹, it can be seen how media perspectives are dominated by media’s marketing and obsession over the topic of “leftover women” to attract attention and keep viewer interest.¹⁰⁴² The concept of “leftover women” has been extensively spread and

¹⁰³⁹ Blommaert, Jan. (2015). *Pierre Bourdieu and language in society. Handbook of Pragmatics*. 126. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Lou, Wei., & Liu, Chengdong. (2006). “Current problems and countermeasures of online news”. *Financial Education Research*, 1: 102-103.

¹⁰⁴¹ *The perfect match* (非诚勿扰); which can also being translated as: *If you are the one* by western scholars. For example, (Feldshuh, Hannah. (2018). Gender, media, and myth-making: constructing China’s leftover women. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 28 (1): 38-54.

¹⁰⁴² Guo, Shaohua. (9 May 2016). “When dating shows encounter state censors: A case study of ‘If You Are the One’”. *Journal of Media, Culture and Society*, 39 (4): 487-503.

promoted by the media, and has quickly become a hot social topic of discussion.¹⁰⁴³ As a result, such popular TV shows may also reinforce people's preference for marriage as an outward sign of women's personal success. It serves to persuade single women that having a successful career is not as good as marrying a good man.¹⁰⁴⁴

Additionally, current technological changes have also enabled ordinary “netizens-网民”¹⁰⁴⁵ to exercise a stronger sense of self-expression online.¹⁰⁴⁶ This assertiveness, particularly coupled with the anonymity of the Internet and related laws and regulations, has allowed free speech to prevail in today's environment.¹⁰⁴⁷ This alternative form of symbolic violence, particularly against “leftover women”, has been especially noteworthy on the Internet, with an influence and reach are beyond that of traditional media communication.¹⁰⁴⁸ For instance, “leftover women” is the most popular topic on the exchange platform of “Zhihu/知乎”¹⁰⁴⁹ in China. It is an internet exchange place similar to the American website Quora.¹⁰⁵⁰

Questions discussed online around “leftover women” are mainly focused on aspects of single women's inadequacy, including: “*Why are there more and more leftover women in China?*”; “*Why can these leftover not find a partner?*”; “*Will leftover women have a tragic ending?*”; or “*Why are leftover women so picky?*”. Moreover, most online forum answers blame or even humiliate “leftover women”, however such responses receive the most approval from netizens.

¹⁰⁴³ Chen, Jingjing., & Yang, Lijiao. (2011). “Interpretation of the stereotype between the two sexes of ‘You Are the One’”. *Journal of News Communication*, 12: 85-86.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Zhu, Pingyan., & Yan, Hua. (2012), “Analysis of Ladies’ View on Choosing Husband in ‘If you are the one’-Based on Coleman’s Rational Choice Theory”. *Journal of Shandong Women’s University*, 1: 17-19.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Chinese internet users are often referred to as ‘netizens’-网民”.

¹⁰⁴⁶ European Union. (2018). *Cyber violence and hate speech online against women*. European Parliament. Available at: [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604979/IPOL_STU\(2018\)604979_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604979/IPOL_STU(2018)604979_EN.pdf) (accessed 14 November 2018).

¹⁰⁴⁷ Huang, Yalan., & Chen, Changfeng. (2013). Free Dilemmas: Social Media and Gender-based Violence. *Journal of Mass Media*. Beijing, 24: 58-61.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Merriman, Mazie Katherine. (2015). *China’s ‘Leftover’ women phenomenon: media portrayal and ‘Leftover’ voices*. Master Thesis. University of Mississippi, Oxford, USA.

¹⁰⁴⁹ The website of Zhihu/知乎 (<http://www.zhihu.com>) is an online discussion forum where users can post and discuss topics of interest, and can focus on people with the same interests.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Quora was founded in 2009, as an American company that aims to provide answers to specific questions on the Internet. The Website is www.quora.com.

For instance, in November 2019 an anonymous netizen's post vilifying single women achieved the most support on *Zhihu*, with 3,800 online netizen approvals.¹⁰⁵¹

Thus, the concept of marriage advocated by the mass media paradoxically is still centered on a male-dominated society, despite the rising number of singles in China. This perspective not only ignores social reality, but also causes a collective disdain and disregard for single women in Chinese society. Thus, single women suffer from unfair treatment and judgment due to failing to follow traditional marriage rules and expectations in a certain age. In this way, the portrayal of “*leftover women*” in mass media leaves single women vulnerable to attacks and criticism in contemporary China.

6.5.3.2 Stereotyped misunderstandings of the characteristics of single women

The constructed concepts, language, and symbols serve to strengthen male domination over the female through repetition in daily life habits, which then reinforce through dominant socio-cultural discourse to construct misrecognition.¹⁰⁵² In China, the image of the “*leftover women*” in social media is constructed through a number of stereotypes, mainly negative; with such women labeled as having “critical” or “picky” personalities; negative psychological characteristics, like being “anxious”; or through deficient moral characteristics, like “unfilial”. For example, “*Beijing News/ 新京报*”¹⁰⁵³ is the largest and most comprehensive daily newspaper in Beijing, with a daily circulation of 576,000 copies. Since 2011, the paper has released more than 100 reports on “leftover women” every year.¹⁰⁵⁴ In media reports, more than half of all stories focused on “leftover women” have a negative image, while only 11.3

¹⁰⁵¹ Available at: <https://www.zhihu.com/question/291423984/answer/566890200> (accessed 30 November 2019).

¹⁰⁵² Bourdieu, 1991.

¹⁰⁵³ The “*Beijing News/ 新京报*” is a comprehensive large-scale city daily newspaper, and officially launched on 11 November 2003.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Guo, Chen. (December 2015). Stigma: “leftover women” in media reports. *Journal of Changchun Education Institute*. Changchun City, China, 31 (23): 27-29.

percent present such women in a positive way.¹⁰⁵⁵

Symbolic violence against women is formed through the habitual process of daily production, consumption and reproduction in social practice. In this way, public opinion reproduces media propaganda through exaggerated rendering, so that the group of single women is portrayed and constructed to have unique and abnormal personality, psychological and moral characteristics compare to those of married women, and which is frequently reflected in the daily lives of single women.

Personality characteristics

Reflecting the negative image of a single woman in Chinese society, single women are common recognized as having the following qualities: abnormal, picky, and selfish, and with overly-high expectations for potential partners.¹⁰⁵⁶ Older unmarried women are also considered to be unsociable, childish, and not yet grown up.¹⁰⁵⁷ One interviewee described her experience of being negatively characterized due to her single status:

*Due to remaining single at the age of 33, the leader of my workplace often tries to persuade me to get married and of course organizes blind dates for me. In his eyes, I am irresponsible, and a little selfish. At the beginning, I reluctantly accepted his arrangements. Now, I would immediately reject any invitations of blind dates. Because of being single, I am always considered to be not mature enough, with a flawed personality.*¹⁰⁵⁸

¹⁰⁵⁵ Guo, Chen. (December 2015). Stigma: “leftover women” in media reports. *Journal of Changchun Education Institute*, 31 (23): 27-29; Qin, 2012, 15-17.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Liu, Moxian. (February 2010). “Female Single Phenomenon Review and outlook”. *Journal of China Women University*, 2 (2): 44-49.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Hu, Guangxin. (2015). *Urban single female family stress and coping analysis*. Master’s thesis. Zhejiang University School of Public Administration, Hangzhou, China.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Interview with Ms. W, 34 years old, in Suzhou, 4 June 2017.

In terms of assumed personality traits, Chinese society considers single women to be deficient in character, either being too powerful, too self-reliant, strange or impulsive.¹⁰⁵⁹

*In general, the discrimination of non-marriage women (extends) from their appearance to their personality. In the viewpoint of the public, single women usually lack soft feeling, and are too independent so as to not to be picked up by men. As long as you are single woman above 30, you have a defective personality that is not in line with the standard for traditional Chinese women.*¹⁰⁶⁰

Psychological characteristics

As single women are considered to be excluded from the marriage market, they are considered to be lonely, unhappy, and living in an insecure state. Thus, most single women are anxious to end their single life.¹⁰⁶¹ Being single is socially constructed to be a very particularly miserable life experience. Therefore, single women living alone for a long time are perceived by many to have serious psychological problems:

*During conversations with people, once I mention that I am still single, the other side looks at me with strange and sympathetic eyes. Even someone immediately asked me: “what men do you like? I would like to introduce some unmarried men to you. When do you have time for blind dates?” They believe that my life is lonely and miserable. I tell them that I am not anxious to marry and everything is fine. To live alone won’t generate any psychological problems, but I have always been overly concerned and treated differently from the married women for a long time, which could possibly cause me psychological illness in the future.*¹⁰⁶²

¹⁰⁵⁹ Xie, 2017.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Interview with Ms. Yi, 32 years old, in Wuxi, 25 June 2017.

¹⁰⁶¹ Sun, 2017.

¹⁰⁶² Interview with Ms. I, 32 years old, in Shanghai, 2 June 2017.

Public opinion about “*leftover women*” assumes that they cannot marry, and as a result are affected by insomnia, loneliness, an eccentric personality, and are difficult to get along with.¹⁰⁶³ Negative experiences about evaluating single women’s psychological state were cited by many interviewees, included from family members:

*I once heard from my mother that if a woman were too old to marry, she would become an idiot. I felt absurd then. She gave me many real-life examples from her single colleagues. Now, I am above 30. Sometimes, I have severe depression and a disorder due to work pressures as everyone could have. However, I found that any of my behavior might be thought to be neurological tendencies due to being single. Even some colleagues often laugh at me. To be single is not normal life, to be single is to be guilty.*¹⁰⁶⁴

Therefore for married women, while having a bad mood sometimes is considered normal behavior, for single women it might be deemed by others to be mentally abnormal. In other words, all of the bad temper or bad feelings that single women may have could be socially attributed to psychological problem due to their single status, with many Chinese convinced of this through public opinion.

Moral characteristics

Moral condemnation from family and society towards single women is endless in China, as noted by several interviewees:

Single women are blamed for having much higher expectations in partner choice and for paying too much attention on materialism. My sister once complained about me and thought that I was not filial. For me, it is strange to think that

¹⁰⁶³ Xie, 2017, 105.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Interview with Ms. D, 33 years old, in Lanzhou, 28 June 2017.

women have to obey the dominant mainstream thinking and values.¹⁰⁶⁵

Single women are also blamed for being uncaring about their family and the society.¹⁰⁶⁶

*The public think that most single women are selfish and unethical, as they do not give birth for family heritage. The media image of single women is negative that helps to attack the group of single women in our country. In China, people's thinking lags behind. Single women are still a disadvantaged group. According to mainstream views, single women are losers in life.*¹⁰⁶⁷

Furthermore, single women are not trustworthy because they evade family responsibilities and violate Chinese traditions:¹⁰⁶⁸

*In my workplace, I feel that my leader sees unmarried women as immature and untrustworthy. There is always a prejudice that believes that single people expect to avoid taking family responsibility. The value of Chinese women relies on their contributions to their families. There are double standards to single women and single men, because the social expectations of men and women are not the same.*¹⁰⁶⁹

By analyzing the operation of symbolic violence, it is helpful to understand the internalized subordination and double standards that single women experience in their daily lives, and which makes the victims silent and unheard.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Interview with Ms. Ti, 45 years old, in Beijing, 17 May 2017.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Yang, Yanjing. (December 2014). "Contemporary Connotation and Practical Significance of Filial Ethics". *Journal of Hebei University of Economics and Business (Comprehensive Edition)*, 14 (4): 36-42.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Interview with Ms. U, 39 years old, in Shanghai, 26 May 2017.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Fang, Xudong. (2016). *Leftover Women, Individualism and Family*. *Journal of Social Science Forum*, 7: 174-184.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Interview with Ms. Ni, 44 years old, in Shanghai, 21 June 2017.

6.5.3.3 *Negative impact created by single women on Chinese society*

According to the media propaganda narrative, the existence of a considerable number of unmarried women is harmful to the China's harmonious society.¹⁰⁷⁰ In Chinese traditional society, it is believed that competitive work in the public sphere belongs to men; and the center of women's life is the family. Until recently women were regarded as a vulnerable group and constrained to the private sphere, with limited ability to influence public affairs. However, women with high academic qualifications are considered "strong" in popular understanding, and so do not meet traditional expectations for Chinese women. Public opinion thus regards highly-educated single women as a threat and seeks to suppress such deviation from expected norms.

As previously noted, since 2007 the term "leftover women" has been continually constructed and promoted as a regular topic in Chinese media communications. Most media reports and stories are biased and provide incomplete information, which magnifies the alleged problems attributed to highly educated single women and deepens cognitive bias in Chinese society. Media campaigns seek to mobilize societal panic and unease with a series of social problems, and have further increased discrimination against single women who suffer from heavy pressure from most of society.¹⁰⁷¹

The creation of the "leftover women" label, and the stigmatization of such women in mass media, online and in daily life raises several thought-provoking questions. Faced with the gender discrimination inherent in China's power discourse system and traditional concepts of marriage, independent single women seek "*to master their own fate or destiny*"¹⁰⁷² and attempt to break this status in society, which puts them in a difficult situation. In such a

¹⁰⁷⁰ Hahn & Elshult, 2016, 7-8; Merriman, 2015, 15; Fincher, 2014.

¹⁰⁷¹ Fincher, 2014.

¹⁰⁷² "*Master their own fate or destiny*" is a phrase meaning that single women have the complete right to live their own lives, married or unmarried, based on their own choices.

construct, single women are constantly stigmatized, and by supporting this, the Chinese mass media strengthens male patriarchy, weakens women's role, and minimizes the unequal relationship between the two sexes. Therefore, single women are suffering from numerous false reports and characterizations in the media, which caters to a general patriarchal understanding of women and regulates the discourse and behavior of women. This further increases the psychological and social pressures on single women.

6.5.4 The opinions of interviewees towards the term “leftover women”

The onset of mass media technology use, including social media, has significantly affected people's views and attitudes towards marriage-related matters, and people's marriage behavior and values.¹⁰⁷³ During the process of research interviews, most informants expressed their belief that the label of “leftover women” was spreading in China. Based on their answers, research participants could be divided into two types of respondents:

Type 1 (completely refused to identify as “leftover women”); and

Type 2 (being inured or numb to being labeled “leftover women”).

Type 1: Complete refusal to identify as “leftover women”

The majority of my research participants completely refused to be described as “leftover women”. Together with the new vocabulary of “female men”, and “female Ph.D.”, the general perception was that inequality between men and women was on the increase. Interviewees expressed strong opposition to such gendered language, including:

I really do not like the titles such as “leftover women” or “female men”. What is wrong with women above 30? We are fine. In my opinion, all these words such as “leftover women”, “female PhD”, discriminate against highly independent

¹⁰⁷³ Wu, Yuxia. (2015). “Analysis of the Positive Impact of News Media on Marriage and Family Disputes”. Shandong Women's College of Social and Law School. *Journal of News Front*, 5: 230-231.

women.¹⁰⁷⁴

*This is a manifestation of gender inequality. Why are unmarried women called leftover women? Women's status has improved a lot, but the subconscious of our society is still patriarchal. Perhaps it is the behavior of the marriage market to expose those unmarried women, who should end their single status to better cater to the expectations of society.*¹⁰⁷⁵

It could be seen that interviewees understand very well that the term of “leftover women” is strongly related to gender bias, while gender inequality is the real reasons behind these negative labels to independent single women.

Currently, there are two different attitudes towards single women and single men, and therefore “leftover women” is really discrimination against Chinese unmarried women. Some interviewees’ comment noting this connection included:

*To me, being called “leftover woman” is a symbolic discrimination, which has a much higher exposure than the term of leftover man. I am a single woman, but not a leftover woman.*¹⁰⁷⁶

*In my opinion, the term “leftover woman” is created by showing the male power that really insults and hurts unmarried women.*¹⁰⁷⁷

It is socially acknowledged that older women have individual problems and are losers. Single women are attacked and excluded - that proves that China needs to

¹⁰⁷⁴ Interview with Ms. T, 30, years old in Tianjin, 14 April 2017.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Interview with Ms. L, 30 years old, in Beijing, 13 May 2017.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Interview with Ms. Zi, 30 years old, in Shanghai, 20 May 2017.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Interview with Ms. B, 31 years old, in Zhengzhou, 10 August 2017.

*improve in aspects of values and concepts of women.*¹⁰⁷⁸

In the real world, the frequency of leftover women criticism occurs much more frequently than observations about leftover men, in spite of the bigger number of male singles in China. Unmarried women are therefore being negatively targeted. Chinese society is therefore still not open, and single women are a generally disadvantaged group in China.

Interviewees were acutely aware that women who seek to be independent are not accepted and supported in Chinese society:

*Leftover women, I really think this is people's discrimination against independent women. Why aren't unmarried women left alone? Marriage is just one life option. To get married or not should not be an issue interfered with by other people! This affects my emotions and mood a lot, I do not think being unmarried is failure of a woman. However, the public belittle you! It is as if you were a loser if you did not get married.*¹⁰⁷⁹

Women are often restricted to activities that are lowly paid or unpaid, and are expected to attend to household obligations much more frequently than men do.¹⁰⁸⁰ In many ways then, nothing is changed in that China is still a patriarchal society:

I think "leftover women" is a very insulting term. It seems that women are naturally created by this patriarchal society. The popular American drama "The Handmaid's Tale" has been much exaggerated. The meaning of women's existence is to have children, and women without fertility are useless. Fertility is the

¹⁰⁷⁸ Interview with Ms. U, 39 years old, in Shanghai, 26 May 2017.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Interview with Ms. O, 31 years old, in Xi'an, 15 August 2017.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Fan, Hongxia. (2013). *Research on Media Violence Based on Gender Perspective*. Doctoral Thesis. Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China.

*prerogative of women, but not oppression and restraint. I think what is called the leftover woman shows in many senses whether this society still measures the status of women in terms of men's standards and the status of women, and in fact there is no equality between men and women. In addition, the insults on me are mostly from married women, who accuse unmarried women more ruthlessly than men do.*¹⁰⁸¹

Some interviewees also believed that the “leftover women” status should not be used against women who actively choose to remain single:

*In fact, I think that “leftover women” should only target those women who hope to get married but fail to find a suitable partner. However, at present it seems that it covers all unmarried women who have reached a certain age that are still single. This expression towards all unmarried women is not fair. Although it would not impact my job in the workplace due to being single, sometimes it was a really unpleasant experience to hear the related remarks by my colleagues, which affected my mood to work in the workplace.*¹⁰⁸²

To label single women as “leftover women”, therefore, is to discriminate against all women based on the male perspective of women existing as wives and mothers:

I personally think that the meaning of discrimination through the term “leftover women” is obvious. It is an insult to all women and then also an insult to unmarried women. At the same time, I also feel that it is the result of consciously guiding public opinion to force more women to return to their family instead of working hard for a career. Although being single has not had any serious impact

¹⁰⁸¹ Interview with Ms. Yi, 31 years old, in Wuxi, 25 June 2017.

¹⁰⁸² Interview with Ms. P, 30 years old, in Beijing, 17 September 2017.

*on my survival, it has greatly affected the quality of my life and the space for upward development. It is a distorted image of the construction, reproduction and creation of unmarried women by patriarchal people, while women who are not selected by men for married mean they are defective products in the marriage market.*¹⁰⁸³

Symbolic violence is described as a kind of non-physical violence, expressed as a power difference between social groups. However, the true image of “leftover women” is obscured, and instead an exaggerated image is presented which misleads the public, which makes interviewees uncomfortable. The term “leftover woman” is a manifestation of male power, manifesting a highly unequal gender order. In the eyes of most interviewees of this study, this kind of propaganda is designed to advance state government objective, not to respect or pay attention to individual rights.

Type 2: Being inured or numb to being labeled “leftover women”

Symbolic violence occurs quietly and unconsciously in most cases, as victims of such violence may not realize where such pressure comes from, or feel silenced or overwhelmed because of their subordinate status. So it is unsurprising that during interviews I found that a couple of participants could not accept the term “leftover women”, but rather reimagined the term to make fun of themselves or to ignore that they themselves are the victims of violence. This also extended to minimizing or denying the illusion of male authority:

*In my view, ‘leftover woman’ is a dirty word. To my surprise, some unmarried women are accepted and even recognized.*¹⁰⁸⁴

I will free myself from being considered a leftover woman. Gender equality is far

¹⁰⁸³ Interview with Ms. D, 33 years old, in Lanzhou, 28 June 2017.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Interview with Ms. Ti, 45 years old, in Beijing, 17 May 2017.

*from being achieved, there is no way out, I am already numb.*¹⁰⁸⁵

*Media reports are also biased. I am called a “leftover woman”. In my opinion, the term “leftover woman” is to make people quickly recognize your identity, but also quickly to draw a line between us and married people. The term of leftover women is in line with the values of many people, and will therefore be widely circulated. In some places, the patriarchal ideology is still quite strict. Nevertheless, I do not mind being called a leftover woman. Even if I do care it is pointless, because this situation cannot be changed.*¹⁰⁸⁶

Consequently, it can be conceived that the influence of patriarchal authority on media and public opinion has contributed to symbolic violence affecting single women, and which encourages women’s voluntary acceptance and/or submission to the status quo. The pervasive nature of symbolic and structural violence makes single women inured to the negative impact of the status quo on themselves and their situation. Although some single women struggle to challenge and change social attitudes, they work against those who are experiencing the same suffering as they do, but feel unable to change the societal opinions. They feel helpless and increasingly powerless, before trying to seek an accommodation with the surrounding community. The term of “leftover women” is therefore imposed by a patriarchal society, but does not allow such women to speak up for themselves or to take control of their personal agency.

Furthermore, this kind of propaganda against single women receives tacit state government support, as it does not promote or demand respect for individual rights. The Chinese government has also not done anything to counter the negative status of single women, which

¹⁰⁸⁵ Interview with Ms. Q, 41 years old, Zhenjiang, 11 June 2017.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Interview with Ms. E, 31 years old, Shenzhen, 8 July 2017.

explains why the term is widespread online, in contrast to other restricted topics:

*In my opinion, the government does nothing on this issue; just let it be in its own way. On the other words, the government should take some responsibility.*¹⁰⁸⁷

From a structural perspective, it could be argued that the purpose of labeling older unmarried women over 30 is a means for control and oppression, with the intent that all women obey the role of being a good wife and mother.¹⁰⁸⁸ This reinforces stereotypical and discriminatory traditional Chinese gender roles and orders. The inertia of patriarchal social thinking in Chinese society over thousands of years has further conditioned women to accept a relatively passive position, in terms of mainstream discourse power. Based on the above analysis, Chinese media contributes to the construction of gender imbalance, in which symbolic violence plays a role in the interaction between people and single women, and constructs and reproduces domination in these direct interactions. The process of misidentification or misrecognition shapes the image of single women in China through a process of symbolic violence, where the ideas and values of the dominant class (men) are purposefully imposed on single women to effect compliance and obedience to gendered cultural traditions.

6.5.5 Gender domination and symbolic violence against Chinese single women

6.5.5.1 The role of gender domination in symbolic violence against Chinese single women

Millet (1970) argued that politics refer to a group of people who dominate the power structure and another group of people, and that the essence of politics is power. The situation between the two sexes is also a relationship between dominance and subordination. Through discourse construction, society defines what is “normal” and “abnormal”, and regulates people’s

¹⁰⁸⁷ Interview with Ms. Y, 35 years old, in Tianjin, 14 April 2017.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Wang, Fengxian. (2012). “The ‘Good Wife and Wise Mother’ as a Social Discourse of Gender”. *Journal of Chinese Studies in History*, 45 (4): 58-70.

behavior through a normative process where power is hidden in the discourse.¹⁰⁸⁹ Power relations thus transcend the violence and coercion of gender interrelationships.¹⁰⁹⁰ Bourdieu proposed that symbolic violence imposes a system of symbolism and meaning on groups or classes, also symbolic violence as “*the essential part of masculine domination*”¹⁰⁹¹.

While gender-based violence is deeply rooted in cultural understanding of gender and power, it is further constructed in mainstream discourse through various types of socio-cultural domination.¹⁰⁹² Gender inequalities emerge out of female subordination that is directly or indirectly supported by males, with habitual concepts, language and symbols used in daily life enhancing male domination over women. Male-dominated culture or patriarchy thus plays a central role in maintaining power relations through symbolic violence. Therefore, female subordination embedded by males on a daily basis belongs to a condition of structured gender inequalities.

The realization of symbolic violence relies on a universal consensus, but at the same time rests on a misconception. Bourdieu describes “*symbolic violence*” as referring to the social actors under the control of recognized power structures, and which aligns with the interests of a dominant social group. Symbolic violence is therefore particularly evident in the impact of discrimination against Chinese single women as “*leftover women*”, as commonly constructed and reproduced in daily life. In contemporary China, discrimination towards single women across society is both overt and widely shared.¹⁰⁹³ Women are often typified as the chief cause of social problems, especially during the recent decades of rapid socio-economic development. Through negative portrayals in the media and public opinion also government

¹⁰⁸⁹ Foucault, Michel. (1971). “Orders of Discourse”. *Social Science*, 10 (2): 7-30.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Ruíz, Felipe Jaramillo. (July-December 2013). “Power, Gender and Democracy. From Domination to Gender Equality”. *Sección Derechos Humanos y Derecho Internacional Humanitario*, 11 (12): 107-125.

¹⁰⁹¹ Bourdieu, 1990, 11.

¹⁰⁹² Merry, 2009, 16.

¹⁰⁹³ Xie, 2017.

policies, single women have been characterized as “*leftover women*”¹⁰⁹⁴ which serves to reinforce traditional patriarchal authority.

In such way, Chinese society applies male perspectives to examine and interpret the status of single women. The ideology of “*leftover women*” reflects male symbolic violence behavior which divides women into two levels: married and otherwise “*leftover women*”. It does not allow women to have a legitimate third path in their lives as single unmarried women. In this way, the social transformation and collision of different ideas has led single women to an embarrassing situation. Labeling single women as “*leftover women*” thus politicizes their existence and has become a new form of social censure, with the symbolic aim of rebuilding or reproducing existing social structures.¹⁰⁹⁵ Symbolic violence against single women thus seems to be consolidating entrenched gender domination patterns in contemporary China, in spite of rapid social and demographic changes.

6.5.5.2 Why symbolic violence against Chinese single women?

The existence of large numbers of single women challenges social role afforded to women in China, and the authority of patriarchal systems. Single women are freed from traditional gender roles but are in turn exposed to enormous risks and challenges. The label “*leftover women*” is a means of social guarantees that reflects widespread fear of changing gender dynamics and power structures, and an attempt to reassert control over economically-independent single women.¹⁰⁹⁶

¹⁰⁹⁴ Long, Ya., & Zhang, Zhenyu. (2017). “The social construction of discourse and power on the current image of “leftover women in China”. *Journal of Modern Communication*, 10: 64.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Zhang, Xingming. (2008). *Symbolic Production and Social Order Reproduction -- The Political Communication Implication of Bourdieu's Symbolic Power Theory*, Hubei Social Science, 9: 50-52.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Feldshuh, 2016.

From the concept itself, the term “*leftover women*” is a word constructed by male power creating a certain sense of symbolic image for unmarried women.¹⁰⁹⁷ The term “*leftover women*” itself expressly refers to the relationship between a man and a woman as one between the selector and selected person; thereby supporting men and demeaning women in the power relations dynamic and maintaining male structural domination.¹⁰⁹⁸ Single women have thus already challenged the dominant position of the traditional male elite, undermining the full realization of male domination over women.

In such manner, single women existing outside the established gender relations system constructed by patriarchal authority are classed as a deviant behavior, which in turn should be supervised by the society. This is also a continuation of the traditional Chinese culture of “*men superior over women* (男尊女卑)”, and intentionally constructed gender inequality. As men in China traditionally have a dominant position in the marriage market, they have significant incentive to strengthen and maintain gender domination patterns. In the 21st century, symbolic violence is an effective means to disempower and negate the existence of Chinese single women.

6.5.6 Summary and discussion

This section presented how symbolic violence operates against Chinese single women in contemporary China. It is an attempt to clarify the meaning and usage of how symbolism and cultural terms are used against Chinese single women in contemporary China. This study finds that single women are negatively labeled as “leftover women”, together with other pejorative labels such as “strong woman”, “female PhD”, and “female man”. Moreover, unmarried women are not treated the same as unmarried men in contemporary China, but

¹⁰⁹⁷ Chen, Zhenghong. (2012). “Research on Social Identity of Leftover Female Discourse -- A Case Study of Chaoyang District, Beijing”. Master Thesis. Northeast Normal University, Changchun City, China.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Zhou, 2010.

rather as holding a lower position. In Chinese mass media and online, “leftover women” are constantly constructed in a negative light, in which single women are seen to hold defective personality, psychological, and moral characteristics compared to married women. This consequently impacts on public opinion on the group of single women. In the symbolic violence construct, most interviewees felt uncomfortable, while some have become passive and accustomed to the mistreatment associated with being called “leftover women” as they perceive there is limited ability to effect change. Finally, the primary reason for symbolic violence against Chinese single women is analyzed, namely the continuing results of gender domination and subjugation of women in contemporary China.

The concept of “leftover women” is thus regularly constructed, maintained and referenced to support a patriarchal ideology of female subservience that has existed in Chinese culture for thousands of years. Furthermore, the propaganda of female and wifely virtue has started to return to Chinese society after many years, leaving women in a position of being dominated and materialized, and being perceived as property of men. In addition to the demonization of unmarried women by some males, many married women act as critics of other women are also seen to reinforce, and become accomplices to, a patriarchal culture enforcing structural and symbolic violence against single women in Chinese society.

Nowadays, due to the constant efforts and achievements of international feminist movements, male domination is no longer seen as a natural consequence in contemporary society. Even so, changes in the status of women in China still face resistance from a traditional gender model of distinguishing between men and women, and men continue to rule public spaces and institutions while women are largely restricted to the private sphere. This is because changes in cultural concepts still lag behind political and social changes in China. China’s economic development overwhelmingly undervalues the needs and contributions of career women, to

the benefit of mainly male-dominated professions. The values supported by prevailing public opinion thus represents a continuation of the existing gender order; and more specifically the continuation of the patriarchal consciousness in Chinese society through shaming the deviation of unmarried older single women.

Finally, it is precisely due to the insufficient political rights afforded to women, and the low level of political participation of women, that leads to women, and even single women in the mass media or online, to not assert their rights and feel truly “silenced”. Because of this, it is critically important that symbolic violence against Chinese single women is recognized and acknowledged, to provide a means of countering the pervasive gender domination inherent in contemporary Chinese culture and society.

Chapter 7 Conclusions & further research

This research has explored the current social situation of Chinese single women, based on the results of in-depth interviews and document research. Through the refinement and summarization from 32 in-depth interviews, this study adopts the principle of the violence triangle of Johan Galtung, and the symbolic violence theory of Pierre Bourdieu, to better understand and contextualize the personal experiences and social humiliation experienced by single women in contemporary China. At the same time, the underlying political, economic and social causes behind this phenomenon are also explored at length. The results show that the interaction and influence of family, society, the mass media, and even political interests have all engendered false evaluations and accounts of Chinese single women as being freer than they really are. As a result, most Chinese single women are living in a variety of violent vortexes, suffering from social misunderstandings and enduring grievances due to the negative actions and treatment within Chinese society. Chinese single women, who are constantly demonized and discriminated against by both their families and the Chinese society, have become convenient scapegoats for the social and economic instability experienced in contemporary China in recent decades.

This focuses attention to the central research question, which considers: *what factors influence cultural, structural, direct and symbolic violence against Chinese single women in contemporary China?* And also: *how does violence against Chinese single women operate on a cultural, structural, direct and symbolic level?*

This study concludes that the underlying factors of gender power, social control, and economic demands contribute to perceptions of Chinese single women being under pressure in contemporary China. Regarding the issue of gender power, the study found that gender

equality still faces big challenges in contemporary China, that national policies to reduce sexism and cultural biases disadvantaging women are not effective; and the values and concepts of gender inequality still play a key role in driving unequal outcomes. Chinese society still lacks a true ideological commitment to gender equality, even traditional gender roles are making comeback in recent years with increasing unemployment rate during the economic transition period.

In addition, the increasing number of single women has been perceived to bring about social instability and to undermine the traditional moral standards required to maintain a harmonious state. Under the background of stagnant economic growth, growing social tensions, unbalanced population structure, and the resurgence of gender inequality between women and men, single women are easy targets for criticism for challenging still-dominant Chinese models of patriarchal culture. Finally, single women are seen to undermine economic goals as they cannot contribute to the economic and family growth and reduce demand for weddings and associated industries, although interest in their situation (albeit usually negative) remains high in the mass media. Therefore, in such way gender power and social control constructs and economic interests are each major driving forces influencing patterns of violence against Chinese single women.

In contemporary China, single women suffer from cultural, structural, direct and symbolic violence. Firstly, entrenched cultural discrimination legitimates and justifies direct and structural violence against Chinese single women. Patriarchal culture remains dominant in contemporary China and traditional family and marriage patterns retain strong social support, and both collectivist culture and filial piety culture are used as a weapon against single women. Secondly, single women suffer from structural inequality in employment and policy discrimination or restrictions, including barriers to employment and limitations for promotion;

no recognized rights for giving birth (as a single person); and limitations on purchasing housing. Thirdly, single women suffer from direct violence regularly in their daily lives, especially through verbal violence received from their family members, colleagues, friends, and even strangers. As single women, they are pushed to get married, coerced into organized blind dates, and at any time, may become a target to verbal or even physical attacks as a result of being single. These vulnerabilities exist, as the image of Chinese single women is seriously vilified and distorted. Finally, symbolic violence operated against single women in Chinese society is explored in this study, to further establish that gender domination imposes the negative values on single women which impacts on their agency and ability to live autonomous lives in society. Chinese single women are considered a subordinate group and are repeatedly subject to negative commentary and criticism online and in the media which impacts on their daily lives. This includes repeated denigration of “leftover women” and the reinforcement of stereotypes that endorse violence against single women.

Nevertheless, I hope that the current experiences of suffering by single women are only an interim response to the macro background of the social transition and economic transformation in China. It is hoped that with time, the identity and worth of single women will be afforded the same status and value of married women in China and in other countries.

The theoretical contribution of this research combines Galtung’s violence theory and Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence embodied in gender relations to further explore the status of single women in contemporary China. This study considers the perspectives of single women themselves, and how such women respond to societal pressures to remaining single beyond a culturally-defined marriageable age (30 years old and above) in a traditionally patriarchal society. This research fills the research gap through analyzing the previously under-explored situation of Chinese single women, and the various forms of discrimination or

violence they suffer within society.

This study therefore seeks to draw attention to an important phenomenon that has not been given sufficient attention in scholarship, both in China and the West, which critiques the current situation of Chinese single women and the systematic discrimination and various forms of violence they suffer in various aspects of Chinese society, with a focus on the personal feelings and experiences of single women themselves.

This study also addresses a significant but to-date under-analyzed social phenomenon of women-to-women violence in contemporary China, that could potentially contribute to the broader scholarship of gender-based violence in different societies. While women-to-women violence is not new in the scholarship of gender-based violence, most existing studies have hitherto focused on experiences of intimate partner violence in same-sex female relationships. Few studies have examined situations of violence by other heterosexual women, including in familial, work or social relationship. This study thus has the potential to fill some of these gaps in the broader research of gender-based violence.

This study also holds great practical implications for contemporary Chinese society, to deepen understanding of gender conflicts during a period of continued economic and social change, particularly as the increased trend of single and unmarried women appears irreversible. This study seeks to encourage a better understanding and respect for single women in China, and a long-term promotion of changes to social beliefs and patriarchal thinking that hold back such women from realizing their full potential. By listening to women's own voices when collecting research data and analysis, this study also contributes to new data sets and research pathways on the key issues impacting contemporary Chinese single women.

Limitations and further research

Although considerable efforts have been made to complete this study as rigorously as possible, there may be deficiencies or oversights which could be improved upon by other researchers or scholars in related research fields. My doctoral thesis reflects current social issues affecting Chinese single women only from one perspective: that is, the impact of cultural and social violence on single women. Nevertheless, the limitations of this study could be summarized and further expanded on through further research.

This study is an exploratory study covering one single issue affecting Chinese single persons. When considering future research methodologies and research design, a comparative study between different issues affecting single women and single men in China, or of the contrasting situation of single women between countries, could be considered to deepen understanding of the issue of Chinese single women. The present study only selected urban single women as a research group, and did not include rural women. Future researchers may wish to investigate the experiences of rural women as a discrete research group, and consider similarities and differences between Chinese single women in urban and rural areas.

This study used qualitative interview data and was a static analysis, only considering the current state of single women. However, for all human beings the life process is dynamic. In future iterations of this research, I intend to analyze the life cycle of single women from a longitudinal perspective to examine their life pressures over time, and will re-interview some of my interviewees in the following 3-5 years. In addition, the attitudes of male figures (father, brother, and other male colleagues and relatives) towards single women have not been studied, which is a key limitation of this study given the importance of the patriarchal social system in China. In future research, I expect to analyze the effect of male relationships on different groups of single women. Future researchers, taking all of these limitations into account, will

therefore be able to provide a more generalized perspective on the experiences of Chinese single women.

Although different factors were considered in the process of selecting samples, research findings were inevitably affected due to the small sample size. China is a big country with a vast land area, and a population of approximately 1.4 billion. Therefore, research interviews could only cover a small sample of affected women, consisting of 32 in-depth interviews undertaken across 13 cities in mainland China. These interviews could not represent all situations or issues impacting on Chinese single women. In addition, the stigma attached to single women as “leftover women” in China discouraged other potential participants, who were not willing to share their life stories with an unknown researcher. Interview time limits, comprising only 1 to 3.5 hour interviews, could also not uncover or relate all interviewees’ experiences and feelings. Furthermore, this research did not identify whether interviewees remain single for other reasons, such as identifying as lesbian or bisexual. This was in part because an awareness of publicly identifying sexual orientation in China is limited and still somewhat stigmatized. However, this study only sought to explore the pressures affecting heterosexual-identifying single women aged over 30, and did not seek to explore further factors.

In future research work, I propose to study the extended and related issues affecting single women in China including: how single women have babies and raise children; how single women deal with loneliness and other emotional health issues; and how single women prepare for their care in old-age care; all of which are key concerns of single women towards their future lives.

Epilogue

Despite living in the vortex of violence, Chinese single women do not compromise and make concessions, but seek as far as possible to hold their destiny as firmly in their own hands. My interviewees expressed their belief that things are better today than at any time before, because at least as single women, they can attain higher education, decent jobs and stable income, and supporting their basic lives through their own efforts. Chinese single women have thus become stronger than ever before, and more confident to find their own position in the modern society.

The following section details a summary line nominated by each interviewee, describing their response to marriage pressure and their overall attitude to life:

Ms. T, 30 years old: *"I choose my own life, marriage is dispensable. Live a good life and never be defeated by any malicious violence."*

Ms. Zi, 30 years old: *"Love and marriage can't be grasped, and hard work can bring me a sense of accomplishment. If people can't find a suitable partner, it's better to marry your career with peace of mind."*

Ms. L, 30 years old: *"The way out of life is not by marriage, but by yourself!"*

Ms. Z, 30 years old: *"Gradually I am no longer afraid to be single and become old. I only want to make more money and realize the freedom of wealth."*

Ms. P, 30 years old: *"I believe that society is constantly improving, and the tolerance for single women must be improved."*

Ms. Si, 31 years old: *"I won't marry until I find a right person. When being urged to get married, I become more and more uncaring about other people's opinion."*

Ms. E, 31 years old: *"I expect my mind can be stronger and stronger. I strive to make money, and I can live in a senior nursing home when I am old."*

Ms. B, 31 years old: *"Because I am worried about missing the best childbearing age, I may be married before the age of 35. However, marriage is absolutely not a must for women."*

Ms. O, 31 years old: *"There will be more and more single women in the future, because there are more and more women with economic independence. I hope that in the future, Chinese society will be tolerant of single women, at least not to interfere and respect each person's life choices."*

Ms. Yi, 32 years old: *"I do not reject marriage, but the quality of marriage I require is much higher than that of my parents. There are fewer things we can control in this world, and marriage is one of them."*

Ms. J, 32 years old: *"As long as I can't find true love, I will remain single. I am not afraid of getting older; I am full of confidence in the development of science and technology."*

Ms. I, 32 years old: *"Even though public opinion is directly shining on us like the sun, I will protect myself with copper wall, and be indestructible."*

Ms. D, 33 years old: *"I have always paid tribute to single women. Single women can arrange their own life according to their free will."*

Ms. G, 33 years old: *"I will never marry to prove that marriage is not a must. Now that I have a good job and good friends. This is enough for me."*

Ms. M, 33 years old: *"Today, I have overcome the sorrows, and opened a new world, because I can completely accept my identity being single for the rest of my life. That allows me to be relaxed and to face all negative comments and gossip about me".*

Ms. W, 34 years old: *"I am happy to live with my cat, sitting on the sofa, which makes me feel safe and calm. My current single life will continue into the future."*

Ms. Y, 35 years old: *"I am very likely to stay single and I think I am very happy. I will never change my lifestyle for marriage due to being urged."*

Ms. F, 35 years old: *"Despite single women suffering from repeated suppression, society still has a positive progress that cannot stop the trend of single women's self-selected marriage autonomy."*

Ms. Ai, 35 years old: *"To me, the knowledge, wealth, and wisdom of single women are much stronger than married women."*

Ms. Li, 35 years old: *"The concept of people is still changing step by step. The day of women not needing to prove their status by marriage will certainly help achieve it."*

Ms. A, 35 years old: *"Although remaining single, I continue to enrich my life. Society still gives a certain amount of space, and the soil of single women's life will certainly become more and more fertile."*

Ms. H, 38 years old: *"Life should not be measured by the presence or absence of marriage. I have been very calm about my single life."*

Ms. U, 39 years old: *"Lifelong learning is my belief; perhaps marriage is just a bonus."*

Ms. N, 40 years old: *"A good marriage would be the icing on the cake, and our attitudes towards marriage should let nature take its course."*

Ms. C, 40 years old: *"My dream is to travel all over the world, and all my plans are prepared for my single life. Only women with high income, independent*

thinking, and strong inner strength are eligible to be single.”

Ms. Q, 41 years old: *“Marriage is not a must. I like to be alone, and am free to arrange my time. Physical health is the most important.”*

Ms. K, 42 years old: *“Single women must have a lot of pressure relative to married women, but they are normal and should be respected.”*

Ms. R, 43 years old: *“I don’t care about the ridicule of others, and my mentality is getting better and better.”*

Ms. Ni, 44 years old: *“Despite the public’s perspective, singles are still considered to be a problem to be solved. However, I believe that the social tolerance will become better and better. Even living alone, I can settle my life well. So, I think I still live in a good time in which I can make my own choice.”*

Ms. Ti, 45 years old: *“I have fully recognized my choice to be single for the rest of my life, and will never make any compromises to the world. The word ‘marriage’ has long been removed from my life.”*

Ms. V, 46 years old: *“To be single has long been a habit that will continue. In this way, I can only focus on my career.”*

Ms. S, 48 years old: *“Everyone has the right to choose their own life, and our society should not force everyone to be the same.”*

There have always been such people in society who seek to change and overcome societal norms and expectations. Despite the difficulties, they insist on doing themselves. In China today, not everyone can understand or accept the lifestyle choices of single women. Although in many Chinese communities such women are isolated and marginalized, but in the near future, they may be the final winners. The world moves forward through the actions of determine front-runners promoting new ways of living day by day. Therefore, the current cohort of Chinese single women are paving the way for future generations, and are living out new ways to seek their individual happiness, despite opposition.

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Appendix 1: Information of interviewees (*The name of interviewees is anonymous.*)

Name	Time	Location	Age	Edu	Income	Job	From	Living with
Ms. Y	14.04.17	Tianjin	35	Master	7K	Servant	local	Alone
Ms. T	14.04.17	Tianjin	30	Bachelor	2W	Sales	Xian	Alone
Ms. Z	26.04.17	Beijing	30	Master	6K	Editor	Zhangjiakou	Rent a room
Ms. S	02.05.17	Beijing	48	Middle	7K	Servant	local	Parents
Ms. L	13.05.17	Beijing	30	Master	1W	Marketing	Taiyuan	Rent a room
Ms. Ti	17.05.17	Beijing	45	Master	1W	Engineer	local	Alone
Ms. Zi	20.05.17	Shanghai	30	College	1W	HR	Hubei	Rent a room
Ms. J	24.05.17	Shanghai	32	Bachelor	5K	Teacher	Jiangsu	Rent a room
Ms. H	25.05.17	Shanghai	38	Master	7K	Lecturer	Anhui	Alone
Ms. U	26.05.17	Shanghai	39	College	None	None	local	Parents
Ms. A	31.05.17	Shanghai	35	Bachelor	3W	Boss	Sichuan	Alone
Ms. N	01.06.17	Shanghai	40	College	1W	Marketing	local	Parents
Ms. I	02.06.17	Shanghai	32	Bachelor	2W	Marketing	Daqing	Alone
Ms. W	04.06.17	Suzhou	34	Bachelor	5K	Servant	Xuzhou	Alone
Ms. C	04.06.17	Shanghai	40	Bachelor	3W	E-business	local	Parents
Ms. Q	11.06.17	Zhenjiang	41	Bachelor	8K	Teacher	local	Rent an apartment
Ms. R	17.06.17	Shanghai	43	Bachelor	1.2W	Accountant	local	Alone
Ms. Ni	21.06.17	Shanghai	44	PhD	1.5W	Lecturer	Hunan	Rent an apartment
Ms. Yi	2017/6/25	Wuxi	32	Master	8K	Doctor	local	Parents
Ms. D	2017/6/28	Lanzhou	33	Master	6K	Lecturer	local	Alone
Ms. M	01.07.17	Shenzhen	33	Bachelor	2W	Marketing	Shandong	Rent an apartment
Ms. F	05.07.17	Shenzhen	35	Bachelor	2W	Design	Hubei	Alone
Ms. E	08.07.17	Shenzhen	31	Master	7K	Reporter	Guangxi	Rent a room
Ms. K	22.07.17	Guangzhou	42	Bachelor	4K	Secretary	Xinjiang	Alone
Ms. G	23.07.17	Guangzhou	33	Bachelor	1W	Media	Hunan	Rent an apartment
Ms. Li	24.07.17	Guangzhou	35	Bachelor	4K	Accountant	local	Parents
Ms. Si	06.08.17	Zibo	31	Master	4K	Servant	local	Alone
Ms. B	10.08.17	Zhengzhou	31	Master	6K	Editor	local	Parents
Ms. Ai	11.08.17	Jinan	35	College	3K	Clerk	local	Mother
Ms. O	15.08.17	Xi'an	31	Master	6K	Accountant	local	Parents
Ms. P	17.09.17	Beijing	30	Bachelor	1.3W	IT engineer	Huizhou	Alone
Ms. V	02.10.17	Beijing	46	Master	1W	Music	Local	Alone

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Introduction:

My PhD research project aims to achieve a better understanding of the personal experience of Chinese single women suffering from direct, structural, cultural and symbolic violence on a daily basis during the social transition in contemporary China. A series of in-depth interviews will be a good research method for this. The field work will be carried out in the various cities in China, from March to October in 2017. The author will interview at least 30 Chinese single women from different social classes, in different employment, with different education, who are 30 years old and above. The specific interview venue will be determined by the researcher and each participant in consultation. Each interview will take about 1 hour.

The in-depth interview will be divided into 4 parts with a total of 12 questions:

Part 1: Self introduction from both sides of the researcher and the participant. 双方介绍篇

Part 2: The main body of the interview. In this part, the researcher expects to obtain details of the personal experience of the interviewee suffering from multidimensional violence due to being single in all aspects of life. And how do they respond? 仔细聆听篇

Part 3: On the basis of Part 2, the interview questions could be further developed. The researcher expects to discover the reasons why Chinese single women are being denigrated in contemporary China on the basis of the cognition of these single women themselves. Their deepest feelings and understandings are the most straightforward answers to the research question. 深度挖掘篇

Part 4: Free talk& Follow-up invitation. 自由交谈&未来邀请篇

Confidentiality Agreement by the researcher

I am doing my PhD research project focusing on Chinese single women at the University of Vienna. This interview is an important part of my research project. I agree that all information obtained from the interviewee today will remain confidential and not be disclosed to any other person or provided to any organization, private, or governmental, by me, at any time. The content matter from this interview would be used for academic purposes only. The names of interviewees involved in this research shown in my doctoral thesis are just the initial letter of their surname.

Name: Shaofen Tang

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Email: a1349171@unet.univie.ac.at, tangtang308@gmail.com

Signature:

Date:

.....

Participant Consent by the interviewee

To enter into this Agreement, I acknowledge that:

1. The interview process required for the research and my participation as an interviewee in the research have been clearly explained to me by the researcher, and any questions I have about the study have been responded to my satisfaction;
2. I understand that I am voluntary to be an interviewee in this research; and the researcher may contact me for brief clarification of any aspects of the interview at a later date;
3. I understand that this study is anonymous, my participation will also be treated confidentially and no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity, and the content of the interview will be used only for academic purposes;
4. I consent to be recorded during the interview today only for the purpose of this research.

Signature:

Date:

Interview Guide

Part 1: Introduction

A. Self-introduction by the researcher:

First, the researcher will introduce herself at the beginning of each interview, present her personal background information, research topic, and then sign the Confidentiality Agreement and Participant Consent with each participant as well as ask permission for recording.

B. Personal information of the interviewee:

- Name:
- Age:
- Education:
- Job position:
- Income:
- Living with parents, with friends, or alone

1. Why are you still unmarried? What reasons have lead you to remain single? Could you give a brief introduction about yourself? (Note: the researcher may give some tips to the interviewee, for example: *You are busy with your work, less time to consider marriage.*)

Part 2: Negative experience due to being single?

2. Family: How do your parents, relatives, feel about you still being single? Do they push you to get married or they are tolerant to your status of still being single? Are there any talking and behaviors from them that make you feel uncomfortable? How do you respond?

3. Friends: How do your friends feel about you still being single? Do they push you to get married or they are tolerant to your status of still being single? Are there any talking and behaviors from them that make you feel uncomfortable? How do you respond?

4. Labor market: Have you experienced any problems in the labor market due to being single?

How do your colleagues feel about your single identity? If so, what is the way they are? Can you talk about your experience in detail? What are the disadvantages, in any, at work or for your career or for professional development? (*For example: is there a negative impact on your job search, in the workplace, or career promotion?*)

5. Social arena: The media overwhelmingly promotes single woman as “leftover woman”, how do you see it? In what way will affect you? Which aspects of the news in media about single women make you uncomfortable?

6. In addition to the above-mentioned aspects, have you encountered unpleasant experiences as a single woman in other situations? Can you talk about the situations in detail?

7. Did these negative experiences affect your daily life? How do you respond?

Part 3: What aspects cause a single woman suffering from unfair treatment in China today?

8. So what do you think the reasons that single women at a disadvantage in many aspects of life? In other words, how do you see single women today are being strongly vilified in China?

- Cultural factors: *How do you think the traditional Chinese culture affects this issue? How do you consider the necessity of marriage in China?*
- Economic factors: *Are there economic factors around it, so that marriage is a necessity?*
- Social factors: *Are there any other social reasons?*
- Gender factors: *Do you think gender equality in China has been achieved?*
- Political factors: *How do you think Chinese single women are vilified by the media with impunity? Are there political factors?*

9. How do you think the situation of single women in China will develop in the future? What kinds of challenges are there that Chinese single women have to face nowadays? Do you think the society will become more tolerant or the other way around?

Part 4: Free talk:

10. What do you do in your spare time? Recreational activities?

11. Will you stay single until you meet a suitable partner? Or are you eager to get married as soon as possible to meet the expectations of others, such as your parents? In your opinion, marriage is a necessity or you don't feel the need to marry at all?

12. As a single woman, do you think it is an advantage in some aspects of your work life? In other words, what are the advantages of being single in your opinion? (*For example: more time to contribute to work and study, more free time.*) Please illustrate.

13. Do you have any other comments for this interview? Do you have any other supplements? Are you willing to accept my follow-up for my further research, perhaps three or five years later, as I look forward to understanding how your life will be in the future?

通过开展本项博士调研工作，作者期望能够更好地、更深入地、和更加全面地了解在当代中国社会转型期间，中国日益增长的单身女性群体，是以何种方式遭受着直接，结构，文化和象征性暴力，又是什么原因造成了当今的中国单身女性们无法在社会中被宽容对待的尴尬局面。深度访谈将是一个很好的研究方法。因为通过与不同的单身女性个体面对面地进行直接交流，作者可以为此项博士项目获得第一手研究资料。实地调研工作最初基于中国两座最大的城市,北京和上海，也就是中国单身女性群体最集中、最显著的聚集地，之后涉及了其他级别城市。具体实地访谈将定于 2017 年 3 月至 10 月期间。受访者均为 30 岁，或者 30 岁以上的中国未婚女性。作者有机会近距离倾听她们每个人的亲身经历。具体访谈场所将与每一个参与者经协商后确定。每次访谈大约需要 1 个小时左右。

此深度访谈一共包括 4 个部分：

第一部分：双方介绍篇。首先，访谈双方分别进行自我介绍，彼此建立信任，以便对此次访谈能够顺利进行达成共识。

第二部分：仔细聆听篇。作为访谈的主要部分。研究员将简单的提出一些指导问题，然后倾听被访谈者的由于大龄未婚而在其生活中所遭遇的一系列个人负面经历，以及单身女性自身的感受和她们以何种方式面对？

第三部分：深度挖掘篇。基于第 2 部分的访谈，这一部分旨在进一步挖掘单身女性遭遇多重暴力之背后的深层原因。（例如：文化，经济，社会，等因素。）也许她们最深切的感受和认知可以对本项目研究问题作出最直接的、和最确切的回答。

第四部分：自由交谈篇。自由交谈和后续邀请。

保密协议

我正在进行一项关于中国单身女性的博士研究课题。今天的深度访谈将成为我的研究项目的一部分。我同意，今天从受访者那里获得的所有信息将严格保密，不会向任何其他人透露，也不会在任何时候提供给任何组织，私人或政府机构。在之后我的博士论文中所显示的受访者的姓名只是她们姓氏的首字母。本次采访的内容事项将仅用于学术目的。

研究者姓名: 唐少芬

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签字:

日期:

.....

参与者同意协议

通过签订本协议，我承认：

- 研究人员已经向我解释了研究所需的要求和有关我的参与情况，我对此项研究所产生的任何疑问均得到了满意答复;
- 我理解我的参与是自愿的; 研究人员可以稍后与我联系，以便进一步澄清访谈的某些方面;
- 我清楚这项研究是匿名的，我的参与也将被严格地保密处理，并且我的个人身份不会在研究论文中被识别，我的个人信息不会以任何方式揭示，此次访谈仅用于学术目的;
- 我同意此次访谈被录音。

签字:

日期:

深度访谈指导问题

第一部分：介绍

A. 研究员自我介绍:

首先，研究员进行自我介绍，关于其个人背景，研究课题，然后与被访者签订保密协议，并征求被访谈者录音许可等事宜。

B. 被调查者介绍个人信息:

- 姓名:
- 年龄:
- 教育背景:
- 工作职位:
- 收入:
- 居住情况:

1. 为什么您依旧保持着单身状态吗？能大致简单介绍一下您的个人情况吗？(例如：工作很忙，生活圈子小，等)

第二部分：作为单身女性，您在生活中有遇到过哪些负面经历吗？

2. 家庭范畴: 请问您的父母，亲戚，朋友，是如何看待您仍旧单身呢？他们会催促您尽快结婚吗，还是他们表现出宽容理解,觉得无所谓并且支持您呢？如果催促您,是否有哪些言语和举止会令您觉得不舒服呢？能具体谈一谈吗？那么，您又是如何回应的呢？

3. 朋友圈: 请问您的朋友们是如何看待您仍旧单身呢？他们会催促您尽快结婚吗，还是他们表现出宽容理解,觉得无所谓并且支持您呢？如果催促您，是否有哪些言语和举止会令您觉得不舒服呢？能具体谈一谈吗？那么，您又是如何回应的呢？

4. 工作范畴: 您觉得作为单身女性，在工作中，在您的职业生涯或职业发展中，会以什么方式影响您吗？例如：单身会对您的求职有影响吗？那么在职场里面呢，同事们会怎么看？单身会对您的职场晋升有影响吗？如果有,是怎样的方式？您能具体谈谈吗？

5. 社会范畴: 如今媒体铺天盖地宣传单身女性作为“剩女”，您是怎么理解的呢？会以什么方式影响您吗？

6. 此外,除了上述提到的这些方面,您还在哪些时候,由于作为单身女性,而遇到过一些不愉快的经历吗?能具体谈一谈吗?

7. 是否以上这些负面经历会影响到您的情绪,或者说日常生活呢?一般情况下,您如何排解这些负面情绪的呢?

第三部分:什么原因导致了单身女性遭遇不公正的对待呢?

8.那么您认为是什么原因造成了大龄未婚的单身女性在生活的方方面面处于不利地位呢?也就是说,您如何看待单身女性在当今中国遭遇不公正的对待呢,真正的原因是什么?

- 文化因素:您觉得哪些传统文化影响了这个局面?
- 经济因素:有没有经济因素左右呢?
- 社会因素:那么有没有其他的社会深层原因呢?
- 性别因素:您认为在中国性别平等是否实现了呢?
- 政治因素:您认为中国单身女性被媒体肆无忌惮地恶意丑化而不受惩罚?有政治因素左右吗?

9. 您如何看待单身女性这个群体在中国的未来发展趋势呢?中国社会对单身女性的看法,会变得越来越宽容吗?您认为性别平等在中国实现了吗?

第四部分:自由交谈

10. 您在业余时间都做些什么呢?参加哪些娱乐活动?

11. 您会一直保持单身,直到遇到一个合适的伴侣吗?或者您急于结婚,以满足他人的期望呢?(例如:您身边的人催婚,您会凑合着结婚吗?)在您看来,婚姻是必须的吗,还是,您并不觉得有必要结婚?

12. 那么,请问是否您认为有的时候,作为单身女性,也有很多有利的部分呢?例如:更多的时间贡献给工作和学习,更多的自由时间。您能详细地谈一下吗?

13. 对于今天的访谈,请问您还有其他的补充吗?您愿意接受我的追访吗,也许是3或5年以后,我会做进一步的研究项目,我盼望了解在未来您的生活将发生怎样的变化?

Appendix 3: Background information of the interviewees

(Listed in the age order from 30 to 48 years)

- 1) Ms. Z, 30 years old, originated from a third-tier city in Hebei Province, after graduating from a famous university abroad. She has been living in Beijing for better career opportunities since 2013. She currently works at a famous publishing house as an English language editor, renting a room in a shared apartment in the suburbs of Beijing and earning 6000 Chinese Yuan per month. Although her salary is not very high, at least she can be self-sufficient to support herself. Her parents and other family members still live in the original third-tier city. She lives alone in Beijing and enjoys her single life very much. *(Interview in Beijing, 26 April 2017)*

- 2) Ms. P, 30 years old, a Bachelor degree holder, graduated from a famous university in Beijing and now works in Beijing as software engineer with a high salary (20,000 Yuan per month). She comes from a small city in Guangdong province and was the only child in her rich family. She owns an apartment in Beijing, and has always lived alone. Her mother often calls her and talks with her about getting married from time to time. She sometimes has blind dates. However, she remains single due to finding no suitable available partner. *(Interview in Beijing, 17 September 2017)*

- 3) Ms. Zi, 30 years old, works in the private sector in a Human Relations role in Shanghai. She is originally from Hubei. Her parents expected to have a son, but unfortunately had only two daughters, and thus she was discriminated against by her family. In the past, she had a boyfriend, but is separated. Her boss prefers for singles to work in the company, because single employees can contribute to work all the time. She is afraid of her future, as at age of 35 years old she may lose her job. Her parents push her to marry. *(Interview in Shanghai, 20 May 2017)*

- 4) Ms. T, 30 years old, of Tianjin, originally from Xi'an, has a high income and owns an apartment in Tianjin. She studied in a famous Tianjin university, and after graduation got a job there. She is very busy with her job, and economically independent. Her parents divorced when she was young, and she has a brother living with her father. She only has her mother; thus her mother is very worried about her marriage issue, and often calls her. She feels some pressure to marry. However, she will not marry before meeting the right person. *(Interview in Tianjin, 14 April 2017)*
- 5) Ms. L, 30 years old, working in Beijing, is from Taiyuan. She graduated from a famous university in Hong Kong, holding a Master's degree. After graduation, she did not want to return to her hometown, but expected to have better career in a first-tier city and came to Beijing. Now she shares an apartment with other roommates. She is busy with her job, earning 10,000 Yuan a month. Her past boyfriend wants to reunite with her. However, she is looking for a better man. Her parents come to Beijing to see her not often, but hope that their daughter can marry soon. *(Interview in Beijing, 13 May 2017)*
- 6) Ms. O, 31 years old, from Xi'an in Shan'xi Province, lives with her parents, She holds a Master's degree and is an accountant, and has a high salary (6000 Yuan a month). She feels great pressure due to being unmarried, and because she lives in a conservative place in China. Compares to Beijing and Shanghai, Xi'an is an old and traditional city. Therefore, she feels pressure from both her family and her workplace. Although she received a higher education, it is not easy for her to find a matching partner. *(Interview in Xi'an, 15 August 2017)*
- 7) Ms. B, 31 years old, from Zhengzhou in Henan Province, holds a Master's degree and

works in a private company. She is still living with parents, and feels isolated from society. Most of her relatives are rural people, who consider marriage as only option for a woman. She became more and more isolated after 28 years old, because almost all her classmates, friends and colleagues are now married. She could not find any common interests with other married young people. Now she does anything alone to avoid any occasions being laughed at due to her unmarried status. *(Interview in Zhengzhou, 10 August 2017)*

- 8) Ms. Si, 31 years old, from Zibo, a small city in Shandong Province, graduated from a university in Suzhou with a Master's degree in Law, and now works in the city government as civil servant earning 4000 Yuan per month. She owns her apartment. In high school, she had a negative experience with class adviser, and took one year off due to mental problems. When she was in college, she had a boyfriend but separated after graduation. Until today, she does not feel completely put down by past negative experiences. She loves life, and enjoys swimming, fitness, shopping, reading, and travelling. *(Interview in Zibo, 6 August 2017)*

- 9) Ms. E, 31 years old, holds a Master's degree and works in a hospital in Shenzhen, and currently lives in the dormitory of the hospital. She is from a small town in Guangxi, in the southern part of China. She received some negative experiences from previous blind dates. She is independent and ambitious with her future career. Her parents live in her hometown, and so she can temporarily get rid of her parents' constant complaints about getting married. Her roommate who is much younger than her is married, and often laughs at her. *(Interview in Shenzhen, 8 July 2017)*

10) Ms. I, 32 years old, originally from Daqing, works in Shanghai. She lives alone and has a high income. Her parents live in her hometown. Since she was 30, her parents started to push her to find a man as soon as possible. Each spring festival, she has to return to her hometown which is difficult for her, as she always becomes a target due to being single and because all of her friends of the same age are married. Sometimes, her friends in Shanghai organize for her blind dates. However, she is serious about her life. Moreover, she has sufficient economic status, and so still waits for the right person. She believes that China is a patriarchal society, and that to achieve gender equality is a daydream. (*Interview in Shanghai, 2 June 2017*)

11) Ms. J, 32 years old, lives in Shanghai, and is originally from Zhenjiang, Jiangsu province. Working in a kindergarten in Shanghai as teacher, she loves working with children. She also has a married sister living in Shanghai. Now she rents a room, and shares an apartment with other friends. As a migrant, she feels some discrimination from the local residents in Shanghai. She had some negative experiences on blind dates, where she did not feel being respected by some low-educated dating partners. Because she has no Shanghai Hukou and was over the age of 30, she experienced discriminated by HR departments during some job interviews. Because of being single, many people gossip. (*Interview in Shanghai, 24 May 2017*)

12) Ms. Yi, 32 years old, is from Wuxi. She is a Doctor in a hospital, and holds a Master's degree. She is very busy with her job and very competent in the workplace. However, as a female employee she received less training and promotion. She notes that in a male power society, gender-based women-to-women violence is extreme, and that many married women also play a key role in belittling single women. Moreover, family is very important to remain social stability. (*Interview in Wuxi, 25 June 2017*)

13) Ms. D, 33 years old, lives in Lanzhou in Gansu Province. She holds a Master's degree and works as lecturer in a local university. She lives alone and is economically independent, but unfortunately feels extreme pressure from the family to marry, especially from her mother. She is the only child in the family. She had blind dates, but no good results. Her mother is very traditional, and has a strong desire to control her. She previously suffered from depression, and many times wanted to commit suicide. Due to being single, her relationship with her parents has deteriorated. She believes that gender equality cannot be achieved in the short term. In the workplace, she is often ridiculed and teased. In addition, she has to work overtime and does many chores, because others believe that being single means that there is no family responsibilities. However, she cannot be left in charge of key tasks, because unmarried person are considered irresponsible people. (*Interview in Lanzhou, 28 June 2017*)

14) Ms. G, 33 years old and originally from Hunan, works in Guangzhou in the media industry. When she was very young, her parents separated because her father had an affair. She witnessed that her parents were constantly quarreling at home, so she has little hope in marriage since she was a child. Now, she lives a self-sufficient life. She is the only child of her mother, and thus her mother is worried about her marriage status. (*Interview in Guangzhou, 23 July 2017*)

15) Ms. M, 33 years old, lives and works in Shenzhen. She lives alone and holds a Bachelor degree, and has a job with a very high salary. She comes from a small city in Shandong province. Her father passed away a few years ago, and her mother still lives in her hometown. She has a brother 2 years younger than her. She does not want to go home, but still has to return for a family reunion every Spring Festival. (*Interview in Shenzhen, 1 July 2017*)

16) Ms. W, 34 years old, graduated from a Suzhou university and is still working in Suzhou. She originally comes from Xuzhou. She owns her own apartment, and enjoys her life with a cat. She also has a brother living in Suzhou. Her parents fear losing face due to having an unmarried daughter aged over 30. In the past, she was often asked: “*Why have you not got married*”? Because she works in a state-owned company, company managers even helped her to organize blind dates. *(Interview in Suzhou, 4 June 2017)*

17) Ms. A, 35 years old, is female entrepreneur in Shanghai, originally from Sichuan, with a high salary. Three years ago, her parents pushed her to get married. However, she feels this pressure is lessening, because she owns her own apartment. As a woman aged 35, she has become more relaxed about remaining single. Shanghai is a very open city that helps her achieve her own dreams. *(Interview in Shanghai, 31 May 2017)*

18) Ms. Y, 35 years old, is from Tianjin, and works for a local state-owned company. She is a very determinedly unmarried person, and thinks her character is very unsociable. She was born in a rich family. Later, she had an excellent academic record, and has held a stable job. She is not ambitious person, and likes to live in a relaxed life. Tianjin is not a first-tier city in China, but is near to Beijing; it has good economic performance and an open cultural atmosphere. Therefore, she does not feel too much pressure; although she knows that there are many who spread rumors behind her. *(Interview in Tianjin, 14 April 2017)*

19) Ms. F, 35 years old, originally from Hubei and living in Shenzhen, lives alone. She works in Shenzhen as engineer and has a high salary, owns an apartment, enjoys a

varied social life and loves dancing. In the past, she had unpleasant experiences on blind dates. The young men who came to the blind date were anxious to achieve quick success, which made her feel uncomfortable. Now, she has no hope for marriage but is eager to have a baby. Due to being older than 35, she thinks maybe she will go to Hong Kong to receive artificial insemination to give birth to a child. (*Interview in Shenzhen, 5 July 2017*)

20) Ms. Ai, 35 years old, from Jinan in Shandong Province, lives with her mother. Her father died a few years ago. There are few singles aged over 30 in this city, which creates great pressure on her. She likes travelling. She often becomes a topic of conversation. Some female friends hold hostility towards her. Her mother is also worried about her life. (*Interview in Jinan, 11 August 2017*)

21) Ms. Li, 35 years old, is from Guangzhou. She has a stable job and enough salary to live on her own. She comes from a small town in Guangxi. Some female friends married earlier, and have suddenly become aggressive, criticizing single women like her. (*Interview in Guangzhou, 24 July 2017*)

22) Ms. H, 38 years old, is lecturer in a university in Shanghai, originally from Anhui province. She holds a Master's degree, and owns an apartment in Shanghai. She is the only child in her family. Before the age of 30, she expected to be married as soon as possible. However now aged over 30, marriage is not very important for her. In Shanghai there are many single women, thus she has less pressure. Nevertheless, she has had many negative experiences due to being single. She also thinks that being single allows her to have more free time to do whatever she wants to do. (*Interview in Shanghai, 25 May 2017*)

23) Ms. U, 39 years old, lives in Shanghai with her parents, and is a local resident. She quitted her job in a state-owned company, and since then has no stable job. Instead, she became a backpacker, travelling over half year every year. Sometimes she does some part-time work, such a taking care of cats. Her parents were once worried that their daughter remained single after 30. However, she insists on choosing her own lifestyle. She believes that Shanghai is generally a more civilized city in China, and women have a higher status. *(Interview in Shanghai, 26 May 2017)*

24) Ms. N, 40 years old, is a local resident in Shanghai and lives with her parents. She earns 10 thousand Chinese Yuan per month. At the age of 30, she separated from her boyfriend. At that time, her parents were very anxious about her single status. Later, she gradually got used to her single life. In her spare time, she often volunteers and goes to the seniors' garden to visit the elderly. In Shanghai, the pressure on single women is much less than in other Chinese regions. *(Interview in Shanghai, 1 June 2017)*

25) Ms. C, 40 years old, is a local resident in Shanghai and lives with her parents. She works at an e-business industry and has a very high salary (30,000 Yuan per month). She has a sister who is married. She believed that turning 35 years old was a watershed. After turning 35, she recognized that she would remain single. In the past, her parents kept urging her to marry, and now it is very rare. Her single status comes from having a high income, strong work ability, and independence. All life plans are prepared for her single life. *(Interview in Shanghai, 4 June 2017)*

26) Ms. Q, 41 years old, comes from a small village in Jiangsu Province, and is now living in Zhenjiang in Jiangsu Province, the neighboring city of her hometown. She works in

a state-owned company as a technical staff. In this city, she has a stable job, a well-paid salary, and is renting an apartment on her own. Because of living in a small city, she experienced various violent actions in her life. The pressure to marry comes from both her family and workplace. Her parents live in the village; thus she does not like to go home to avoid being asked about her single status. She often feels hurt by her parents' and relatives' demands. As she grows older, she becomes less and less mindful of other people's opinions. (*Interview in Zhenjiang, 11 June 2017*)

27) Ms. K, 42 years old, working in Guangzhou, and originally comes from Xinjiang. Several years ago, she took a loan to purchase her own apartment. Now she lives alone. Her parents live in Xinjiang. She likes to be alone and enjoys her own life. She has no plan to get married. Her salary is not high, 4000 Yuan per month, but she also has low expenses. Sometimes she feels anxious when she is reading negative opinions about single women in the media. Before the age of 35, she was discriminated against by HR departments in job interviews. After that, there were no issues, because they considered that she has passed the childbearing age. (*Interview in Guangzhou, 22 July 2017*)

28) Ms. R, 43 years, a local resident in Shanghai, owns an apartment and lives alone. She works as accountant. Her father passed away some years ago, and her sister lives in Canada. Her mother also lives in Shanghai, and she goes home to see her every week. Most of her colleagues are married. She is clear that there are many negative comments about her; however, she does not care about it too much. In the face of strangers, she sometimes prefers to lie that she is married, so that she avoids problems. In addition, she constantly comforts her mother that being single is a good option. (*Interview in Shanghai, 17 June 2017*)

29) Ms. Ni, 44 years old from Shanghai, comes from a small city in Hunan Province. Now she is a lecturer in a famous university in Shanghai, and holds a Doctorate degree. She rents an apartment and lives alone. Her family members live in Hunan. She graduated from a famous university in Beijing, and then worked there for 5 years. After that, she completed her PhD in Hong Kong. She feels deeply that married people have a strong sense of superiority. She believes that she is already isolated, and that being single can affect her social interactions. (*Interview in Shanghai, 21 June 2017*)

30) Ms. Ti, 45 years old and a local resident in Beijing, owns her own apartment and has a Master's degree. She lives alone and is the youngest child of her family. Her sister and brother are married. She is independent, but her character is not open, and she has many negative experiences due to being single aged over 30. After turning 30, she suffered a lot of language-based violence. At that time, she remained silent, and now regrets that she did not resist such criticism at the time. She has no plan to get married in this life, and now she saves money to prepare for her future. Her parents urged her to get married previously, however now make fewer actions than before. After turning 40, she feels that she has already ushered in her golden age. (*Interview in Beijing, 17 May 2017*)

31) Ms. V, 46 years old, is a local resident in Beijing, and studied in France for her Master's degree. Now she lives alone, and has fewer friends in her life. Her parents separated when she was 2 years old, and she has always lived with her mother. At the age of 26, she separated from her ex-boyfriend because she studied abroad. Since that time, she has always lived alone. Two years ago, her mother was seriously ill, and she began to have more thoughts about her future. She is a very strong and independent

woman. However, her mother still expects to see her daughter be married.
(Interview in Beijing, 2 October 2017)

- 32) Ms. S, 48 years old, is a local resident of Beijing living with her parents. Her salary is around 100,000 Yuan annually. She has a stable job at a state-owned educational organization. She never lives alone, although she herself owns an apartment in the central area of Beijing. In her spare time, she likes to swim and ride bicycles. 20 years ago she had a boyfriend, but the boy was from the country and so her parents were not satisfied, and then they separated. Later on, she had no any chance to find a right partner. Previously, many friends and colleagues laughed at her, and she was very angry at other people's behavior. After the age of 35, she recognized her single identity. She feels the pressure to get married is getting smaller and smaller. The only hope she has is that she stays healthy. *(Interview in Beijing, 2 May 2017)*

Abstract/Zusammenfassung

Abstract- In this doctoral dissertation, the Galtung triangle and the theory of symbolic violence by Pierre Bourdieu are used as the theoretical basis in order to explore the situation of Chinese single women in contemporary China. In this study, 32 participants were interviewed on their experiences as single Chinese women in mainland China in 2017. The results demonstrated that in China single women above 30 suffer from high rates of direct and structural violence in their daily lives and social arena, which is strongly supported by certain aspects of the traditional Chinese culture including patriarchal family and marriage beliefs, filial piety, and collectivist attitudes in Chinese culture. Under the slogan of “building a harmonious society”, supported by the Government of the People’s Republic of China, the increasing number of single women has been decried as undermining both the social stability and the deep-rooted gender hierarchy in China. Therefore in recent years, single women are increasingly targeted by both their families and the public for breaking accepted social norms. In the process of social transition in contemporary China, women have more opportunities for education and career development. However, the traditional concept of male supremacy remains, thus unmarried Chinese women being labeled as leftover women are portrayed as something negative. This study contributes to the expansion of the concept of gender-based violence from private to public violence, from personal to collective violence, and from direct and structural violence to cultural violence.

Keywords-- Chinese single women, gender hierarchy, social stability, social transition, violent triangle

Zusammenfassung -In dieser Doktorarbeit werden das Modell des Gewaltdreiecks von Johan Galtung und die symbolische Gewalttheorie von Pierre Bourdieu als theoretische Grundlage verwendet, um die Situation von alleinstehenden chinesischen Frauen im heutigen China zu untersuchen. In dieser Studie wurden 32 Teilnehmer zu ihren Erfahrungen als alleinstehende chinesische Frauen auf dem chinesischen Festland im Jahr 2017 befragt. Die Ergebnisse zeigten, dass alleinstehende Frauen über 30 in China in ihrem täglichen Leben und in ihrem sozialen Umfeld in hohem Maße direkter und struktureller Gewalt ausgesetzt sind, stark unterstützt von bestimmten Aspekten der traditionellen chinesischen Kultur, einschließlich patriarchaler Familien- und Heiratsüberzeugungen, kindlicher Frömmigkeit und kollektivistischer Haltung in der chinesischen Kultur. Unter dem Motto „Aufbau einer harmonischen Gesellschaft“, unterstützt von der Regierung der Volksrepublik China, wurde

die zunehmende Zahl alleinstehender Frauen als eine Störung der sozialen Stabilität und der tief verwurzelten Geschlechterhierarchie in China eingestuft. Alleinstehende Frauen werden daher in den letzten Jahren in zunehmendem Maße von ihren Familien und der Öffentlichkeit angegriffen, sie hätten gegen die bestehenden sozialen Normen verstoßen. Während des sozialen Übergangs im heutigen China haben Frauen mehr Möglichkeiten zur Bildung und beruflichen Entwicklung, doch bleibt das traditionelle Konzept der männlichen Vorherrschaft bestehen. Unverheiratete chinesische Frauen, die als übrig gebliebene Frauen bezeichnet werden, werden daher als etwas Negatives dargestellt. Diese Studie trägt dazu bei, das Konzept der geschlechtsspezifischen Gewalt von privater zu öffentlicher Gewalt, von persönlicher zu kollektiver Gewalt und von direkter und struktureller Gewalt zu kultureller Gewalt zu erweitern.

Schlüsselwörter - alleinstehende chinesische Frauen, Geschlechterhierarchie, soziale Stabilität, sozialer Übergang, Gewalt-Dreieck