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A life history study of young Chinese women's experiences under the influence of traditional culture and its contemporary evolution.

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**UNIVERSITY OF
PLYMOUTH**

**A LIFE HISTORY STUDY OF YOUNG CHINESE WOMEN'S
EXPERIENCES UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE TRADITIONAL
CULTURE AND ITS CONTEMPORARY EVOLUTION**

by

Wenjun Liu

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in partial fulfilment for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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the driving power to make progress. It can be said that, without their support, I could not have completed this dissertation.

Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other university award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

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Abstract

As Chinese society and culture have become more complex and diverse over time, this has impacted upon the roles and experiences of women. Women continue to face significant barriers while pursuing self-development and enhanced social status. In general, Chinese culture is for men, and there exists a sharp disparity in social status between men and women. There are concerns about how the transformation of culture, family values, education systems and social beliefs affect and impact on young Chinese women.

This study analyses the research on women in traditional Chinese culture, and found they have been encountering various problems, such as women's low status in families, lack of access to higher education, employment difficulty for women graduates, women's social and political participation crisis, and negative attitudes towards the gay women community. This indicates conflicts between various women roles and the influence of women's self-identity.

This thesis explores the life histories of eight young Chinese women for five years and conducted a range of qualitative research, including interviews, focus groups, social media WeChat interviews, email-exchanges and research diaries. It used a postmodern feminist approach to address diversity, which criticised the concepts and

epistemology of traditional Chinese culture, and proposed new ideas to boost women's social status.

This study focused on family, higher education and LGBT experiences. It investigated the differences between traditional families and modern families in four aspects: family and education; family and marriage; family and leaving China; as well as family and employment. It also analysed the current situation of higher education in China and explored the campus-life of women students. On the basis of breaking traditional cultural conventions and old habitual ways of thinking, this study considered the matters of LGBT. It showed what LGBTs face in terms of their marginalisation by mainstream society. It told stories of emotion, love, marriage and life under difficult circumstances and this community's drive to challenge and change Chinese society's cultural norms.

This study found that young Chinese women live in the shadow of the traditional patriarchal society and their identity has experienced severe contradiction and conflicts in their development. They are trying to break the bonds of tradition; however, they have to face huge pressure from society and family. Therefore, building up cultural diversity is the key to Chinese women's development. Women's development has a close connection with men's development; postmodern feminist culture leads women out of dilemma; it asks men to hear the voice of women. It shows that Chinese women's development is not simply seeking own benefits, but aims to create a better future together with men.

Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction	12
1. The Origin of My Research---The Story of My Life	12
2. An Outline of Research Intentions and Process	18
3. Layout	25
Chapter 2 Research Background and Literature Review	38
1. Family Relationship and Culture	38
Traditional Chinese Parenting	39
A Classic Traditional Chinese Family	40
Change from Hierarchy to Equality	41
2. The Changing Role of Chinese Women	42
The Development of Chinese Women's Social Status	44
Loss and Awakening of Chinese Female Subjective Consciousness	46
Gender Roles	47
3. Traditional Chinese Ethics in Women and Education	49
Social Reforms that have Reduced Inequality	57
Chinese Education System	59
Educational Opportunities for Chinese Women Students	60
The Development of Equality in Education	62
Review of Chinese Higher Education	68
Higher Education in China	68
Women in Higher Education in China	69
Some Problems in China's Higher Education	71
4. Summary of Present Research on Young Chinese Women	72
5. The Direction of Women's Study in China	75
6. The Significance of My Research	78
7. Conclusion	81
Chapter 3 Methodology	83
1. The General Aims and Research Questions	83
2. A Discussion of Narrative Research	83
Characteristics of Women's Narrative Inquiry	87
3. Theoretical Framework	88
Discourse and Power View of Postmodern Feminism	89
A Denial of Binary Opposition	93
A Denial of the Traditional Concept of Gender	95
Postmodern Feminism is Particularly Necessary in China	96
My Effort to Explore the 'Truth'	99
Features about China's 'Truth'	101
Chinese Youth and their Search for Truth	103
4. Women's Right to Speak Out: Life History Approach	105
Introduction	105
Theoretical Thinking on Life History	106
Research Strategy	109

5. Research Method Application.....	112
To Put Life History into Practice.....	112
Using Photo Elicitation to Make Sense of Life History.....	114
First Stage of Field Work.....	117
Longitudinal Fieldwork.....	124
6. Fieldwork Reflection.....	127
A Breakthrough in the Traditional Telling Pattern: Exploring Hidden Life Stories.....	127
Interview as a Method for Qualitative Research.....	129
7. Validity.....	132
8. Ethical Issues.....	134
Ethical Procedures and Processes.....	138
Maintaining the Privacy and Autonomy of Participants.....	139
Interactive Interview Model in China's Local Context.....	140
Respect and Equality.....	144
9. Research Reflexivity.....	145
10. Analysis of Data.....	151
Chapter 4 Family Life.....	155
1. Family and Education.....	156
2. Families and Marriage.....	166
3. Family and Leaving China.....	173
The Motivation for Studying Abroad.....	175
I Hope My Children Will Receive a Better Education.....	175
Chinese Parents' Conformity.....	176
Better Employment Opportunities for Children in the Future.....	182
4. Family and Employment.....	185
5. Conclusion.....	195
Chapter 5 Women's Experiences of Higher Education (HE) in China.....	198
1. Chinese HE System.....	199
Overview of the Educational System in China.....	199
2. Access to HE: The Gaokao.....	200
The Tragedy of an Unsuccessful Gaokao Result.....	200
Chinese Students' Gaokao Life.....	202
What Destroys the Health and Happiness of Millions of Chinese Young People?.....	208
3. Space and Facilities in HE.....	211
The Realistic Depiction of University Life.....	211
4. Loneliness, Pain and Conflict.....	222
Betty's Life Story - Gave Me a Reason to Be Unhappy.....	222
Inequality in the Chinese Education System Between Rural and Urban Areas.....	227
Research on University Campus Satisfaction.....	232
University Students' Satisfaction with Campus Life.....	233
Attitudes towards Campus Relationships.....	236
Main Factors Affecting Interpersonal Relationships in University Dormitories.....	238
Individual Causes.....	238

Family Causes.....	240
Educational Causes	240
Social Causes.....	242
Looking for Normal Campus Life.....	244
5. Gender and Self-actualisation	246
Contemporary Female University Students Need Spiritual Independence and Initiative	249
A Never-ending Life Cycle	250
Chapter 6 LGBT Lives in China.....	255
1. A WeChat Interview Report on an LGBT Chinese Lesbian	255
2. The Attitudes to LGBT in China	259
The Official Attitudes to LGBT	259
Social Attitudes to LGBT	260
Parental Attitudes to LGBT	263
3. Break the Conventional Thinking.....	266
The Development of LGBT Rights in Asian Countries.....	268
The Development of LGBT on University Campus	269
The Development of LGBT Organisations on Campus.....	270
Underground Community on Campus.....	270
The Academic and Teaching Activities Related Social Gender in Universities.....	271
The Internet and BBS for LGBT Students	272
Student Groups-based WeChat	274
Safe Spaces	274
Dilemma Relating to LGBT Community Activities	275
Sexual Orientation - Another Life Choice.....	276
4. A Longitudinal Research Study - Never-Give-Up's Life Story	279
Never-Give-Up's Cross-gender Psychology - The Impact of Family Factors	281
The Formation of Never-Give-Up's Identification	283
Confined Existence	290
Never-Give-Up and Me	291
5. An Informal Group Discussion with Six LGBTs in 'Aixin Home'	292
Some Interesting Findings.....	293
6. Conclusions.....	296
Chapter 7 Conclusion.....	298
1. Key Findings.....	298
Family Relationships and Education.....	300
Family Education.....	301
University Life.....	303
The Gaokao	303
Resource Allocation for Higher Education	304
The Impact of Young Women's Personality on their Growth and Development	307
To Challenge the Traditional Pattern.....	308
In Summary	312
2. Changing Culture in China	314

The Change in Traditional Family Concepts.....	314
The Awakening of Chinese Women's Subjective Consciousness.....	316
3. Review of the Research Process.....	318
The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study	319
The Strength of a Longitudinal Research Study	319
To Encourage Participants to Tell the Truth.....	322
Traditional Research Methods Combined with New Media	326
Research on Self-awareness and Self-realisation	327
Rethinking How I Could Make this Study Better in the Future	329
4. Research Rethinking and Further Study.....	332
Plans for Postdoctoral Study.....	336
Postscript: A Female Researcher's Happiness and Bitterness.....	341
Appendices.....	344
Bibliography	370

Chapter 1 Introduction

1. The Origin of My Research----The Story of My Life

I was born in Tianjin, a very beautiful city located in North China. I grew up in the countryside of Tianjin until I went to primary school. It is typical northern Chinese countryside which still retains many feudal and traditional customs. My mum once said to me: 'When I was pregnant with you, all in our family wanted a boy because your grandparents wanted to make sure that their only grandchild was a boy to carry on the family name.' Although that was not how it turned out, I still had a happy childhood at that time. I suppose it was because I was the only child in the family.

My parents were very busy and worked very hard and I went to nursery when I was eight months old. When I was in primary school, I remember that approximately 50 pupils were packed into the classroom. In class, we had to put our hands over our hearts, unless the teacher asked us a question, in which case we could only raise our right hand to answer; otherwise we had to remain fairly still, which was different from kindergarten, where children were asked to put their hands behind them.

At this stage, students who received the highest scores in tests were considered the most outstanding students. At the end of each semester, they would receive a certificate as a prize, while the rest of the students didn't get anything.

People in China face unimaginable stress at a very young age. Although the system has received all types of criticism, no major changes seem to be taking place. The life we live is not an easy one. We deal with insurmountable pressure from parents,

teachers and ourselves to succeed in life.

It is common for most parents to pursue high scores and a fixed entrance rate. It seems that the purpose of children's lives is only to enter a famous university. This single learning motivation makes children afraid of their grades falling, being ranked behind others, failing to enter university and their parents complaining. Therefore, when I studied in high school, I was under great pressure since most of the students were really excellent and the competition between us was extremely fierce. Because our critical aim was to get higher grades in the gaokao (the national university/college entrance examination), studying was our only priority. In line with this principle, we had to get up early in the morning and then hurry to the classroom to start our all-day learning.

During the daytime, we always had many classes and finally left with much homework. We couldn't finish all the homework until nearly midnight, so we hardly had time for relaxation and entertainment. For me, I was badly lacking in freedom; everything was restricted by horrible rules. As a result, my social circle was indeed small, which made me fearful to make new friends.

In order to prepare for the gaokao, I had to study harder than before. You couldn't imagine how tired I was having to study from Monday to Sunday without any break. Although it was a hard path, for 12 years this was the only thing I focused on.

Unfortunately, at that time I didn't know why I wanted to study at university and how I would choose my major, and I had no idea how I should proceed. This kind of system does not allow independent thinking and stunts individual interests and talents.

However, I insisted on doing my gaokao although I didn't understand why I should.

Nonetheless, in common with most teenagers, I passed the gaokao and became a freshman at Tianjin Foreign Studies University.

I was full of longing for life as a university student. I will never forget the day when I stepped through the gates of my university, excited and nervous, thinking that it might change my future. However, life at the university was not as satisfactory as I had expected. When I arrived at my university on the first day, I really felt that the school was very beautiful, but at the first sight of the small school campus, I felt some disappointment. Then, it was painful as I didn't know how to live by myself in a strange place. I felt perplexed because I was the only child in my family and I had never left them before.

When I chose my major, my parents thought I should study education and become a teacher as this would be a stable profession. However, I was very much at a loss in my mind outside of my daily professional study. I didn't know whether this major was suitable for me or not, or what it meant. I didn't know if the direction of development for this profession was what I sought. I didn't know how to study at university, and I didn't know where the road ahead led. How could I achieve my ideals step-by-step?

And what was my ideal?

The same is true of many university students I met. They know very little about the professions they choose. Many students simply follow the advice of their parents and 'choose a profession' for the convenience of employment. When we really want to think for ourselves, we are caught in the embarrassing situation of 'can't think'. Most

people just choose a hot major for a job, but they forget to pay attention to their interests, hobbies, and even the development of more comprehensive abilities and thinking skills.

Every graduation season, tens of thousands of graduates cannot find a job. Most enterprises' and companies' recruitment requirements are specified, needing two to three years of internship and work experience, and they do not recruit fresh graduates. There are also some large companies that use the qualifications of ultra-high-level degrees to keep ordinary fresh graduates out.

I have asked myself many times: Why do you want to go to university? Is it useful? What can university bring us? Where is the meaning of study?

When I was in second year, I had the idea of studying abroad for the first time. I went to a campus conference in my university and my lecturer invited a graduate who was studying for a PhD in Durham University to this conference. She introduced the life of Chinese students overseas and told us a lot of things about her study and life in England. I could not help but wonder what it would be like if our education system was designed this way.

Maybe I was in over my head, thinking way too far ahead at the time, but isn't a dream supposed to be like this? We seek the opportunity to study abroad for further education, being eager to obtain an advanced education and educational concepts. Thanks to my parents, they supported me to do so on one condition, that I return home after my studies (although this is not so easy any more).

Over time, I witnessed changes in myself after a few years' study in England. As there

were no parents around us to operate our daily life and solve problems for us, we foreign students had to manage our lives ourselves, including doing the cooking, laundry and finance. In the meantime, being very far away from home and parents, it wasn't easy to study abroad and I suffered from loneliness and homesickness. Independence is the most significant learning skill for me and my parents never taught me how to be independent.

Independence in basic life skills and independence in studies were both inevitable for me. My time abroad gave me the chance to enrich myself, both academically and culturally, and I was able to acquire deeper knowledge of my fields, which would also enhance my understanding of the definition of freedom. There are many reasons driving me to pursue future study. I enjoy satisfaction and happiness gained through the process of learning. In addition, I want to get a good job, be economically independent and contribute to my family. When I was a little girl, my father often talked about his colleague's child who was reading for a PhD at that time. I saw admiration and expectation in his eyes. I knew then that the thing that would make him most proud my achievement of academic success.

A person's life can go by so fast that people will forget what they say and what they do, but they never forget how they feel. My life is such.

What is the purpose of education? I have continued to ask myself why I go to university when I was at university in China. For people of our generation, living, working, making friends and dating, etc., seem to be doomed from the beginning. From the moment we stepped into kindergarten, we just learned for the sake of

learning. From an early age, we were required to become clever and cultivated, a talented and remarkable person. Parents and teachers taught us how to read books and how to count and practise addition and subtraction, without teaching us how to think and why we should learn. So, what's the meaning of education? What's the meaning of blindly learning to learn and living to live?

Getting good scores? Going to a famous university? Looking for a good job? Actually, none of them is the purpose of education. I think all of these are accessories and that what education really gives us is the ability to think. The purpose of education is to cultivate a person's sound cognitive as well as thinking style. Receiving education is not to learn knowledge, but to learn to 'think', to maintain a clear sense of judgment in the adult world day after day, and to think about the habitual things. That is real freedom. That is being educated, and understanding how to think.

If you ask me the meaning of being educated, I would take my research as an example, hoping that this was a journey on which I discovered and realised myself. Both myself and research participants could form their own independent thinking, which inspired and guided us to establish our own independent personality, thereby gaining the ability to judge and think. This is a process of growth.

Education is to let people understand things and to make people think independently, thereby allowing them to make more rational judgments, which also aims at making everyone freer and more independent in choosing their desired lifestyle.

2. An Outline of Research Intentions and Process

Overseas study has allowed me to learn about a different culture and society from a brand-new perspective. It has helped me to widen my horizons and develop a far broader outlook about things I had never experienced before. I was born in the 1990s and I didn't know what happened at Tiananmen Square in June 1989 until I set foot in England when I was 23 years old. It was only my parents and teachers who told me what was right and wrong. These adults taught me the existing facts about life and so-called right values, which they thought were correct for young people to learn. It seems that the only purpose we had is to enter a famous university, find a well-paid job, marry a wealthy person. Without studying abroad, I would never have discovered the politics and economics underlying particular politically sensitive events, such as the protest at Tiananmen Square, which were censored by the government. There is an old saying in China: Careless talk leads to trouble, and the less said the better. In fact, no one wants their mouth to be shut and not allowed to speak out, and no one wants to be insulted and slandered. However, with the ubiquitous CCTV and strict online public censorship system, where is freedom of speech? Under the leadership of the CCP dictatorship of the 'lifelong chairman', there is hardly an political freedom or democracy. In a society where citizens are accustomed to being censored and silenced, most would engage in habitual self-censorship and resist expressing themselves. Having never enjoyed freedom of speech, most do not even know the concept of freedom of speech. At the same time, there is no way, no space for change in China's political system. Even if you know that

your human rights have been violated, you know nothing can be done and cannot change the status quo.

I have spent my lifetime to date in school, both in China and England. I have witnessed the huge differences regarding education theory and practice. I am longing for freedom, longing for my parents' and teachers' understanding and caring, and I believe that what I have experienced is being experienced by thousands of Chinese young people as well. I believe that many of them may be feeling miserable. Like me, they are seeking freedom and opportunity; therefore, I hope more and more people can hear our voice.

As a research student, and one of thousands of young Chinese women, I can't help but ask why there are still such inconceivable issues and conflicts in China while various reforms are being implemented and its economy is being rapidly developed. How do we look at the development problems of the young generation, especially the development of women and the underlying causes of lack of critical thinking, and whether we can find effective solutions? We need to supply an answer.

For this reason, I began to pay attention to the growth and education of Chinese youth, especially young women, while my research interests have gradually turned to thinking about their various life experiences.

In addition, as I will be arguing in the thesis, current studies of women's development lack systematic and comprehensive research in China (Guan et al., 2010; Leung, 2003), and there is a tendency for people to simply to adopt Western feminist theory as a methodological basis, neglecting the Chinese female subjective consciousness, as

they fail to analyse the problems of women's development in a specific culture (Liu, 2011; Pan, 2004).

Thus, my study of the life history of young Chinese women in traditional and evolving contemporary Chinese culture seeks to fill the gap in research. This study creates a new way of conceiving of life history and its relationship to social, cultural and intellectual life. The main research questions are

1. What is the level of satisfaction of young Chinese women with their life experience (family, education & LGBT)?
2. How are these experiences shaped by traditional Chinese social patterns, cultural backgrounds, a unique political landscape and an inherent attachment to family values in their culture?

More specifically, the following sub-questions were framed:

1. What are the experiences of Chinese women in the family?
2. What are Chinese women's experiences of university life?
3. What are the experiences of gay Chinese women?
4. How do Chinese women respond to feminism?

In my thesis, I chose a narrative approach because it corresponds to my interests in freedom and personal growth. Narrative inquiry in my research aims to reveal the meaning behind social phenomena, pay attention to participants' viewpoints, and pay attention to how different people understand the meaning of their lives, so as to be able to deeply explore people's inner activities and thoughts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In this study, each participant is both the storyteller and the leading

character in each story. Chinese women's silence and subordinate position is the result of the oppression of women by male power discourse. Only when women realise the importance of their voice will they break away from their passive status. For this reason, Chinese women need an opportunity to tell their stories and make their 'voice' heard. Giving opportunities to Chinese women allows them construct their own stories instead of having the Chinese authorities and educators construct stories for them.

Following a small group of Chinese women for five years using a range of narrative methods, including life history interviews, focus groups, WeChat group videos/texts, photos, my personal research diary, as well as frequent email-exchanges with participants, young Chinese women's life stories were presented.

The research data collection started in September 2014 and ended in October 2018. The collection process lasted about five years and consisted of three one-on-one interviews, two face-to-face group discussions, three WeChat group videos and frequent WeChat texts or e-mail exchanges.

The first stage of field work was about female Chinese students' life experiences in HE in Tianjin from September to November 2014. It originally included nine female participants ranging from ages 21-30 across four universities. The following is a brief introduction to these nine participants.

In 2014, they were Anna, aged 22, senior student; Betty, aged 22, senior student; Candy, aged 22, senior student; Daisy, aged 22, senior student; Emma, aged 21, senior student; Fiona, aged 30, a bank clerk with a bachelor degree; Grace, aged 29,

an English teacher with a bachelor degree; Helen, aged 27, a civil servant with a master degree; and Ivy, aged 28, self-employed with a master degree.

Helen and Ivy withdrew from the interviews for personal reasons in 2015.

Over the course of the five years' research, significant changes were observed in participants' study, work or simply everyday life.

In 2018, the participants were: Anna, a second year postgraduate student in Tianjin, unmarried; Betty, a teacher at her hometown in Jiangxi Province, unmarried; Candy, an administrator in a foreign company in Tianjin, unmarried; Daisy, a financial manager working in Shanghai, living in a shared flat, unmarried; Emma, studied abroad in England from 2015-2016, with a master's degree in Sheffield University, and now working in an overseas study agency in Wuhan, unmarried; Fiona, used to be a bank clerk and was recently promoted in a local trading company, unmarried; Grace, an English teacher, married, with one child.

In the early stages of the study, I focused on understanding the process and feelings of the participants in terms of educational experience, the situation and attitude in family life, and initially to finding out the relevant keywords according to the interview materials of each participant. I then tried to identify the concepts and themes of the study by comparing the different attitudes of participants towards the same life event, such as the gaokao, campus interpersonal relationship, job hunting and employment, getting married through blind dates, etc. Through the above process, I was led initially to confirm two main lines of research, namely, family and university life experience, and subsequently to conduct an in-depth study.

During the study, it was a surprising finding that almost all the answers from participants were nearly identical. For myself, as one of them, the interview results were not shocking, given the way we were taught in school and at home. I would argue that young people from China rarely get the time or chance to use their imagination and freedom.

Therefore, I began the study at the second level by paying more attention to exploring the internal relationships between these keywords, concepts and themes, as well as the deep meaning behind them. I tried to avoid what may be overlooked in the process of collating the information, namely, the specific meaning of the participants in expressing their attitudes and what lay behind each conversation. In the process, I realised that the participants were constantly showing a life attitude demonstrating that they hated bondage and longed for freedom. Ostensibly, they were suppressed by heavy academic and parental control, showing an indifferent attitude to many issues, and following the same pattern. However, as the interviews proceeded, I could feel their inner dissatisfaction with real life, and that they were eager for more freedom, recognition and support. Nearly all the young people interviewed for this research seem to be rational, tolerant and understanding towards different life attitudes.

As a researcher, I want to break through and deviate from research convention. For this reason, I decided to explore a 'minority group' in society, those who might share differing opinions or life stories and could potentially have a significant impact on traditional concepts of women's identities in China. All this prompted me to expand

the scope of my research. I hope that my research will provide an in-depth analysis of objective existence and unavoidable social reality, so that more people can be affirmed by the public. I intend to take into account the possibility of the innovation required for the implementation of such an affirmation. The interview and analysis of LGBT population was added as an important topic for my research.

'Never-Give-Up' (an online nickname) gave me her consent to adopt her story in my study. She is a doctor in a clinic in Tianjin. We had an interview in October 2016 through WeChat when she was 26. Since the first interview, we have kept in touch with each other, sharing ideas and speaking quite openly. We also had a face-to-face interview in September 2017 in Tianjin.

As a friend, Never invited me to join their monthly gathering in Tianjin's 'Anxin' Home. After expressing my intentions, six women agreed to have a discuss with me about their life, ideas and their relations with others. In October 2017, an interview was carried out in 'Anxin' Home. The six participants were: Chen, aged 25, lesbian; Wu, aged 28, bisexual; Guo, aged 30, bisexual; Ye, aged 26, bisexual, bachelor degree; Deng, aged 28, lesbian; Bing, aged 32, bisexual, bachelor degree. Although there was only one informal group discussion with these six people, a lot of useful information and life experiences about LGBT were obtained for this research study.

From the beginning of the research interview, I only intended to conduct a single study trying to understand the current situation in higher education in China, and that was then expanded to the influence of family factors on the life experience of the participants, and how the participants break the shackles of traditional ideas,

seeking a breakthrough in self-awareness, and yearning for freedom and development. It makes this study more holistic and ground-breaking, and also improves the reliability of the study through the multifaceted analysis of the views of a particular group of people in a particular culture.

3. Layout

In my thesis, I use a narrative approach because it corresponds to my interest in freedom and personal link. Growth is the process of understanding the 'real' self (Schafer, 1977). Such understanding includes the desire to explore the self and seek social value, as well as conduct introverted self-reflection and learn how to accurately position oneself (Cole and Knowles, 2001). By talking about their own life experiences, guiding young people to understand and study the objects and phenomena in the world around them, at the same time guiding them to understand and study their inner world, they are able to achieve personal growth on the basis of knowing and perfecting themselves as individuals (McLaughlin and Tierney, 1993). This research process, through the narrative form, also represents the process of constructing self-subjectivity for the narrator herself; this construction process is mainly obtained through various descriptions of the individual and the others, the family, the society and the inner self (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000). Therefore, narrating becomes a means of self-growth (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). In the description of different life events, my participants have participated actively in various activities, such as family, school, society, etc., paying attention to their life experiences and value realisation in different situations.

The comprehensive and free development of human beings must include women

(Hekman, 1991). There are many differences between people. People divide human beings into different groups according to different standards, while inequality between men and women is extremely common. Female development is not only a matter of equality between men and women, but also involves the cultural system and political background of the entire society (Leung, 2003). Therefore, this thesis analyses the life experience of participants, investigates the current situation of young women from the perspective of pursuing freedom and development. It reveals the status and problems in women's development under the premise of absorbing the reasonable theoretical resources of Western postmodern feminism and reflecting the development status of Chinese women.

This thesis is divided into seven chapters.

Chapter 1 Introduction.

This chapter focuses on the basic work required for the completion of this research, wherein it points out that the status of young women is a fundamental issue that must be considered and studied.

Chapter 2 Literature Review.

This chapter provides a retrospective on the development history of Chinese women and the identification of their development status, emphasising the extensive but difficult participation of women in society. The traditional gender division of labour has changed, but it has not been completely broken; instead, it has been reproduced in a complicated and diversified way, which has seriously restricted the development of women.

The chapter discusses 'Stepping out of the family and going into society'; how to free women from their traditional role as housewives and reproductive tools, and the fight

for the right for them to participate extensively in social, economic, political and cultural activities, as the core objectives of women's development. Nowadays, a large proportion of women have already stepped out of the family to participate in society, while the actual progress of women in education and employment is very much in evidence.

However, women's struggles for family status and social participation are not proceeding very smoothly. Under the influence of a feudal patriarchal culture, the culture that 'males are supposed to be worth more than the other sex' exerts comprehensive control over women at all levels, whether in family, education, employment, or marriage. This impasse vividly reflects the difficult situation of the current development of Chinese women. What exactly is the current development status of Chinese women?

Legal equality doesn't mean actual equality regarding the marginalisation of female social participation if there is conflict and confusion about their roles in participating in society: how should this be reflected in the female subjective consciousness? Traditional culture still influences people with strong inertia and becomes a huge cultural barrier that hinders women's development.

Chapter 3 Methodology.

The research goal will be achieved through life history interview and group interview. This chapter mainly introduces the purpose and significance of the research, the research ideas and methods, the innovations and reflexivity, as well as the validity of the research. This thesis, as the theoretical basis of postmodern feminism, emphasises that young women today need to envisage their own special nature, and break traditional cultural expectations on the premise that both sexes can get rid of gender

repression and achieve a fuller existence.

This chapter aims to explain why the method of life history is considered useful in analysing Chinese women's experiences. First, an introduction to narrative inquiry and the life history method will be given, which provides a general overview of the background and development to understand the methodological innovation involved. Then, a few examples are given to illustrate how the life history research method can be carried out and some practical issues are considered by looking at techniques for doing life history within the Chinese context in particular.

The second part of this chapter reviews the development of postmodern feminism in China, analyses the reason it can develop via a flexible route which will suit for the special circumstances in China, and then works out an unusual path for Chinese women's development.

In the third part of this chapter, the approach of photo elicitation is introduced in order to enhance the effectiveness and reliability of the life history method. In order to protect participants' privacy and identities, photo elicitation was not widely used in the study, but readers can still find some useful and content-rich images in later chapters.

This research is situated in the contemporary context of concern about the equality of gender and education for Chinese women. Life history, thus, has the potential to create opportunities for women to voice their opinions.

This chapter identifies key events, significant people, life chapters, stress and problems with daily life, personal ideology, future narratives and life themes that run through all the life stories as units of analysis. It involves units of private analysis, such as family, marriage, social, etc., and professional analysis units (education, training and occupation).

Chapter 4 Family Life.

In China, there is a traditional idiom "望子成龙". It means that parents hope their children can have a bright future. Chinese parents pay extraordinary attention to their children's growth as they think that their children, even when very young, must not lose at the starting line.

Therefore, family education has become the focus of family life. For the post-80s generation who have just become parents, they are particularly afraid that their children will repeatedly suffer the experiences they had when they were young, but what they are more worried about is that an improper family relationship will impede their children's lives. As a mother, I fully understand all these pressures put upon us. For this reason, family relationships regarding education, employment and marriage are one the key areas of focus of this study.

Hence, in terms of its special status and influence, family education plays a decisive role in the growth of children. The education level, life values and life attitudes of parents will have an imperceptible influence on their children.

The unprecedented changes in society have brought tremendous changes in people's lifestyles and ideas. Facing such huge changes, some people can follow the trend, some are at a loss, and some others are self-sufficient. The social changes have deeply affected the changes in family ethical values and this has caused further changes in the family's functional structure. The most obvious thing in China today is the collapse of traditional large extended families and the establishment of small nuclear families, accompanied by a shift in values and educational concepts, along with a transformation in values and educational concepts.

Hence, the concept of family education has changed from 'multiple children's

education' to 'the only child's education'. The reduction in the number of children in the average family has caused parents to spend a lot more time and energy on their children. Under the influence of traditional culture, it is natural for parents to hold high hopes for their children.

However, parents find it difficult to educate their children. In recent years, there have been many student-related thought-provoking incidents, such as cases of postgraduate students committing intentional robbery, college students committing poisoning, student suicide, middle school violence, a 13-year-old girl attacking a man and leaving the victim in a cesspool, etc. Each of these incidents has made people more concerned about the reality and future of Chinese families and society.

Education has become the target of public criticism. Most people blame the problem on today's education system, but I don't think this is the case. I believe it is today's family that should be blamed. The situation of modern family education is not a cause for optimism. There are many problems, such as the shortage and wrong direction of family education.

However, present research on the family environment, child development and family education in China is still in its infancy. This research is not comprehensive, and there are no studies or models of practice with local characteristics. Based on the above considerations, this chapter seeks, deeply and comprehensively, to understand the problems existing in current family life through analysis of our participants' life stories and interviews. The chapter particularly focuses on education, marriage, leaving China and employment.

Chapter 5 Women's Experiences of Higher Education (HE) in China.

Chinese parents can endure a thrifty life, but they never hesitate to spend a lot of

money on their children's education. In recent years, with the improvement of the economy and living standards, parents are even more eager to take action to ensure their children will not lose at the starting line of education. The culture of examination is so powerful that children are infused with the content of the national university entrance examination (known as 'gaokao' in Chinese) as soon as they start talking. The focus on the gaokao, even in primary school, has come to dominate the lives of children, even of the entire family.

If there is any area of reform that could cause concern among everyone and even trigger social shock in the field of education in China, then it must be the gaokao. It has been 40 years since the resumption of the gaokao in 1977, which has had a major impact on Chinese society, where constant innovation has been realised based on social development and educational needs.

The gaokao is difficult to reform because it is too tied up with social responsibility. Hence, from time to time, it gets lost, gets into trouble and occupies the wrong zone, meaning that, while it can be tinkered with from the original basis, it is hard to achieve a fundamental breakthrough. Entering higher education through the gaokao to university, is particularly important as the last link the entire education chain. Although the pace of reform in China's universities has never ceased, and corresponding measures and policies have been introduced one after another, China's higher education reform is still severely criticised by scholars and educators. This emphasises to us the need to re-examine the current education model and the role of teachers in China's HE sector.

In this chapter, I adopt the gaokao as an entry point to analyse deeply the shortcomings of China's higher education system. Based on an analysis of the effect of

the gaokao on the main body of university students, through interviews and group discussions, we will seek to analyse students' psychological expectations and actual gaps, approach the true state of the participants to the maximum extent, and strive to present the status of Chinese higher education objectively in terms of its modes of education and campus construction.

Chapter 6 LGBT Lives in China.

Over time, through several interviews, I began to realise that most of the participants only wanted to talk about their dissatisfaction without attempting to change anything. I was curious and astonished at their responses. I wanted to let people off the hook for not sticking to traditional sexual conventions and also provided a platform for people to break the traditions as well as embody their own unique views and lifestyles. Therefore, I was dealing with a so-called taboo subject in my study; the LGBT issue had surfaced. The chapter explains how I conducted research with LGBT participants.

With the continuous opening of social thoughts and the introduction of European and American cultures, the LGBT group, as one of the marginal groups in society, has gradually drawn more and more public attention in recent years; in particular, it has been discussed and understood by more and more young people. Chinese traditional culture itself lacks vitality and has not developed along with the development of society. China's traditional culture attaches great importance to people and society, but neglects the cultivation of equality, rational education and innovative thinking on the part of people, which leads to a poverty in the concepts of independence, equality and democracy.

Youth, then, proves to be the transition period for individuals to grow from immaturity to maturity. The individuals in this period tend to maturity, self-consciousness is

strengthened and they have a deeper understanding of themselves and society. This understanding is constantly separated from, if it does not abandon entirely, the concept of family and the shackles of traditional culture. Such a transformation has triggered people's re-cognition of themselves and the repositioning of their roles. It has been reflected in minority groups, such as the LGBT group, which have begun to step out into the public domain.

Hence, contemporary Chinese youth grow up within the intertwining of tradition and reality, especially young women, who are deeply influenced by feminism, and have their own values and judgement criteria, while their self-awareness is gradually increased. Under the pressure of traditional culture and concepts, the younger generation's view of LGBT is extremely important. In moving from a very marginalised group to a mainstream group, this group has gradually appeared in the public view. By striving for equal status and the right to speak up, they hope to be respected by society.

In a contemporary Chinese society that emphasises fairness and openness, this group is still discriminated against. This chapter aims to reveal the survival status of the LGBT group through life histories, informal focus groups and three years of continuous interviews with the participants, analysing their thoughts and living conditions, providing them with relatively fair treatment and as little discrimination as possible. The LGBT group is suffering from this invisible pressure from society. Many of them are oppressed emotionally. They face constant collisions between traditional values, including filial piety, and forging a self-identity and achieving sexual freedom.

Chapter 7 Conclusion.

The research in this thesis indicates that modern young women in China face a complex

environment and find themselves in a situation in which the social economy and social environment are developing rapidly, but the social culture is deeply confined by traditional thought. These young women feel pressure from, and are challenged by all aspects of life, such as social values, family structure and function, the educational system, traditions around mate selection and the employment situation in different forms and degrees in their development of a distinct identity.

Firstly, there are considerable inequalities in both the economic and psychological aspects of university students. Some graduates have relatively poor family conditions and economic problems have brought them great pressure. They are also eager to socialise with others, but most of them do not want to participate in all kinds of social activities. Instead, what they can strive to achieve is to study hard and get good scores in exams.

Secondly, modern young women are experiencing more and more pressure from their parents' expectations. They prefer to focus on the realisation of self-worth in daily life and yearn for a space where they can give full play to themselves, do whatever they want to do, and so be recognised and respected by others and society as well. As a consequence, they have gradually developed an independent consciousness. However, within the traditional Chinese family, more emphasis is placed on achievement than communication with regards to the children's education.

Moreover, such young people have been taught and had their experience reinforced by the negative attitudes of their parents. Parents' views and their ways of bringing up children in the family are directly related to the formation of young people's initial personality and behaviour. Young people are more likely to cultivate a personality of positive optimism, and respond positively to their parents' opinions in a family

environment in which relationships are based on mutual trust and respect. Instead, these young women are cultivated personalities full of inferiority, timidity, depression and lacking in confidence within a family environment in which relationships are fraught with indifference, estrangement and distrust. This has a very negative impact on their self-growth, especially given that they are eager for the guidance and concern of their parents.

Thirdly, although there are many conflicts and divergences between parents and their children, the traditional pattern of relationships between them is gradually changing. Parents are no longer held as the absolute authority in the family, and the vast majority of parents have begun to respect the wishes of their children, looking for equality in communication with them. Traditional parents define successful education as achieving high scores in exams, gaining admission into a good university leading to finding a good job, and having a stable family. However, because young people are currently living in such a rapidly changing social environment where a variety of values are intertwined and new ideas collide violently, they are full of confusion about what they think and feel about education, career and their gender and sexual identity. This confusion inevitably leads to the transformation of how they view education--from a fixed and constrained concept to an more liberal concept.

Fourthly, young Chinese women nowadays are always caught in the conflict and confusion between the ideal and reality. On the one hand, they emphasise self-reliance and want to choose their own life path in terms of development, but they yield to their surroundings and are influenced by interpersonal relationships and family. On the other hand, they are pursuing a conflicting life, since they cannot liberate themselves from the traditional culture.

As mentioned above, young Chinese women are facing enormous pressures in terms of survival, education, the workplace, marriage, filial piety and other factors. How do they cope with these pressures? Do they have a living space for themselves within the bondage of tradition? This chapter will provide substantial detail to propose a solution. Under the influence of traditional culture and the unique economic and political conditions of China, the question of how to promote young women's social status is the kernel and aim of social concerns. In the fight for women's subject position, postmodern feminism also pays attention to exploring their diverse positions.

In addition, postmodern feminism has focused on the growing importance of women's subjectivity. It not only emphasises the power of female discourse, but also discusses the establishment of female identity and social position. The challenge of 'patriarchy' and the concept of 'gender' have opened a new horizon for the entire society to re-evaluate women, which is not only for women striving for their own subjectivity, but also as a social issue that requires the support and participation of the whole society, including men. The development of modern feminism, especially the emergence of postmodern feminism, has led to the perception that the progress of women cannot be achieved by rejecting the male, but must include the support and participation of the male and more effective communication with and collaboration with men. Without women's wisdom in society, or men's support in the family, neither society nor the family is complete. Along with men adjusting their mindset and shifting their roles, and becoming more involved in the domestic sphere, such as by sharing the burden of housework, women are simultaneously seeking more power in the public sphere of career and community. The development of the

female identity is a real issue and its realisation is dependent upon a number of conditions. There is a long way to go, and it is a way full of contradiction and conflict as well as full of hope for all young Chinese women.

This chapter ends with some plans for postdoctoral study. Based on life history study, this thesis attempts to select an appropriate way for participants to express their thoughts and describe their life experiences in detail. The factors affecting the life experience of young women are clearly classified; however, methods for protecting women's rights and promoting the development of an independent female identity, particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, require further study.

Chapter 2 Research Background and Literature Review

In recent years, Chinese research in the social sciences and humanities has given increasing attention to women and gender (Fong, 2002; Tsui and Rich, 2002; Veeck et al., 2003; Liu and Carpenter, 2005). The All-China Women's Federation, the official national body responsible, since 1949, for the organisation and administration of women's affairs, has sponsored much of this discussion, particularly in areas concerning women's economic and social status (www.womenofchina.cn, 2019). Women's employment, education, health and reproduction are becoming popular topics in debates about women and the reform programme.

With the radical changes in Chinese culture experienced throughout Chinese history, the portrayals and roles of Chinese women have likewise differed over time. In this chapter, I will examine broadly the impacts of Chinese culture on Chinese women in certain significant respects relating to the common experiences of women. I will do so by presenting a review of relevant studies on traditional Chinese values and cultural attitudes towards women. The review will explore the changes and developments in women's current situations in terms of family, education and social background.

1. Family Relationship and Culture

Each family is a basic unit of any society, in which people form their habits and develop their own values (Zhai and Hu, 2015). Children are influenced by the family

culture into which they are born; when they grow up, the family culture tells them who they are and which groups they belong to. It is common for people to carry their family's values into adulthood through numerous attitudes and behaviours acquired in childhood. 'Even those who later reject all or part of the family culture often discover that they are not entirely free of their early influences' (Yang and He, 2014, p.42). Although they promise themselves that they will never repeat the mistakes of their own family, certain cultural attitudes and responses are so ingrained among family members that they continue to affect their thinking and behaviour, whether those individuals are aware of such influence or not (Keating et al., 2013). Therefore, it is easy to conclude that family is important to every human being's life in any society.

Traditional Chinese Parenting

Chinese Confucian doctrine has influenced Chinese people for over two thousand years. One of the key virtues in Confucian philosophy is Xiao (孝) (filial piety) which involves respecting one's elders, parents and ancestors (Yan and Jiang, 2005). Xiao plays a very important role in Chinese families, and, to a certain extent, it rules the relationship between parents and their children.

Greatly influenced by Confucius and his disciples, the relationships among family members are regulated by the hierarchical order based on generation, age and gender. Confucianism offers a protocol for proper family life (Berling, 1982). Thus, the hierarchy of generation-age-gender determines an individual's status, encompassing

their roles, privileges, duties and liabilities within the family (Lin, 2016). Family members clearly know their status in the family by referring to this order: to whom does one owe respect and obedience? In Chinese culture, one's position in the family is much more important than personal characteristics: people of the elder generation are superior to those of the younger generation for no reason (Chen, 2005). As it is so often apparent, filial piety requires children to be pleasant, supportive and subordinate to their parents. Because the relationship between father and child is incredibly important, children are supposed to obey and take care of their parents (Deutsch, 2006). During marriage, the couple has to give birth to a baby as soon as possible since carrying on the family line is regarded as a form of filial piety; as Mencius argued, 'failure to produce an heir is the worst of the three un-filial acts' (Luo, 2009, p.50).

A Classic Traditional Chinese Family

Hierarchy is very strict in a traditional Chinese family (Cao, 2010). Generally speaking, the grandfather, normally the eldest male in the family, is the most important and authoritative. He is in charge of the whole family, and anything in dispute should be taken to him to find a final solution. As the key figure in the family, whether he is working or not, his decisions are inviolable. Only when he is too old to deal with these things will power be handed over to his son. In a typical Chinese family, the grandmother takes care of everyone's daily life, including managing meals, clothing, weddings and other family occasions, etc. She is responsible for doing the chores or

supervising her daughters-in-law to do their housework. She takes orders from her husband, and then gives them to all the females in the family. The father comes next in the hierarchy of a Chinese family. Normally, he is the breadwinner and his job is to make sure that everyone in the family has food to eat and clothes to wear. His position is second to the grandfather and grandmother, but superior to his wife and sons. In the past, traditionally, the mother fulfilled the role of housewife. She did not have to work like a man, but she had to take care of all the chores for the family, including looking after the grandparents and their own children. Nowadays, many mothers have their own jobs, but it seems that all the housework remains their responsibility, and their role as a housewife has not changed even though they hold a job outside the home. The children are at the bottom of the family; they are free from all chores, and their first and only job is to study. They are supposed to look after everyone and behave themselves at the same time. In a traditional Chinese family, the norm of hierarchy gives parents the power to criticise their children openly and vigorously when there is a conflict, and young children should never contradict what their parents say (Chen, 2005; Deutsch, 2006; He, 2008; Luo, 2009).

Change from Hierarchy to Equality

Cultures are dynamic systems that do not exist in a vacuum, so they are subject to change (Samovar et al., 2009). The family is an important unit in a society; the relationship between parents and children not only determines the harmony of a family, but also the nature of the children's future. During different periods of

history, the parent-child relationship has had different characteristics and patterns. Along with the tide of a changing Chinese economy, modernisation, industrialisation, urbanisation and the input of Western culture (Peng, 2012), through, for example Western movies, TV-series and fast food, the Chinese traditional parent-child relationship has found it difficult to adapt to the Chinese social transformation, the changing family patterns and the new educational system. Parent-child relationships have transformed from being traditional to being modern.

In the old social pattern, with the family as the basic social unit, the capital goods of a family were under the control of the parents. The system at that time banned children from having private property, and stated that the distribution of the property should be decided by the parents (Wang, 2013); therefore, the relationship between parent and children was such that the latter were subordinate to the former. However, after the reform and opening-up and the changes in the Chinese economic system, individuals became more financially independent, which weakened the power and authority of parents at home and led to greater equality in the parent-child relationship (Li, 2013). Most importantly, the parents' conceptions of educating their children have changed. Children are no longer regarded as parents' private property and parents have no right to control them completely or interfere in their children's careers and destiny.

2. The Changing Role of Chinese Women

Female subjective consciousness refers to women's self-understanding of their

independent subject status and value in social and family life. It is the consciousness of women as subject to their position, role and value in the objective world (Ortner, 1974). Specifically, women can consciously realise and fulfil their own social mission and family responsibilities, while knowing their own emotional characteristics, and, in the meantime, they can also participate in social life in a unique way, affirming and realising their own needs and values.

The reason why postmodern feminism emphasises the subjectivity of women is that, in the traditional social life and family life, Chinese women are not economically independent; that is, they have no political rights, are dominated and controlled by men in the family, and their legitimate rights cannot be protected (Leung, 2003; Liu, 2011). These women have a psychological dependency on the more powerful members of the family and society and blindly obey authority due to their low status; moreover, they also lack subjective consciousness.

The key issue is to seek the development of women so as to change their position as subordinates and objects for thousands of years and, hence, to awaken the self-subjective consciousness of women and establish their subjective status as human beings (McGinn and Oh, 2017). In traditional Chinese society, the dominant position of women is distorted by traditional patriarchal culture (Luo, 1995). As the subject of experience and the driving discourse of authority, men have ignored the existence of women for thousands years. The absence of women's experiences in recorded history means that men are the natural rulers of society, controlling what is deemed worthy of chronicling as history.

Men have full autonomy and control, both in society and at home. They can fully display and develop their skills and attributes and command trust and respect. On the other hand, women have always been apathetic, neglected and despised due to their low status, which has made them obedient and dependent upon other, hindering the development of a subjective consciousness, and leading to a lack of self-esteem and recognition of their individual needs. (Tian,2011).

In addition, the subjectivity of human beings is constructed by mainstream culture and composed of mainstream social discourse (Ridgeway, 2009). However, male hegemonic discourse currently still occupies the mainstream discourse in Chinese society (Liu, 2011). Therefore, women must construct their own subjectivity and achieve self-development by standing up for female values, based on their own experience and on the basis of respect for everyone (including both men and women).

The Development of Chinese Women's Social Status

Women have faced significant barriers to achieving social value because of the general favouritism that Chinese culture displays towards boys (Cheung, 1996; Croll, 2000). Hence, many families stress the importance of the boy. The patrilineal family will continue with birth of boys, not girls. As far as girls are concerned, when they marry a man and have a baby, that baby will take the father's surname. Hence, girls do not get the same treatment as boys, which is perhaps why there are more male than female students in the higher-level education system. Girls may not be

encouraged to achieve as much as boys. This issue is particularly profound given China's one-child policy, which applies to the vast majority of Chinese families.

The preference of Chinese parents for sons is replicated in countries throughout East Asia and South Asia, and across to the Middle East and North Africa (Chi, 1989; Croll, 2000). Sons are preferred because they have higher wage-earning ability, continue the family line and usually take responsibility for the care of parents in illness and old age (Hillier, 1988; Deutsch, 2006). There are also specific local reasons for their being preferred; for example, in India, this relates to the expense of the dowry; and in South Korea and China, it relates to their deep-rooted Confucian values and patriarchal family systems (Croll, 2000).

A preference for sons has led to postnatal discrimination against girls, which has resulted in practices ranging from infanticide to neglect of healthcare and nutrition, often ending in premature mortality. But, in the 1980s, ultrasound technology started to become available for diagnostic purposes in many Asian countries and the opportunity to use the new technology for gender selection was soon exploited. In countries where there is a combination of a preference for sons, a nuclear family culture and easy access to sex-selective technologies, very serious and unprecedented sex-ratio imbalances have emerged (Chan et al., 2006).

Loss and Awakening of Chinese Female Subjective Consciousness

In China, women are bound by traditional culture and are particularly relegated by traditional consciousness. They lack an independent personality, subject identity and subject value; silently accepting the feudal enlightenment of 'three from four virtues', they regard themselves as passive family accessory (Qi, 2009). In Chinese patriarchal society, for more than two thousand years women could not enjoy the universal rights of women as human beings, only being able to assume unilateral obligations by honouring their parents-in-law, serving their husbands, raising their children and doing housework (Wu, 2010). Chinese feudal culture, which lasted for more than two thousand years, has always had a strong patriarchal flavour.

Under the influence of Western feminism, a certain amount of advanced Chinese female subjective consciousness began to sprout and awaken by the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century (Leung, 2003). Leung (2003) adds that Chinese women have started to realise that they are not material accessories, but subjects with independent personalities, and they have also begun to realise that the relationship between the family and society is changeable. They began to pursue their own independent spirit and personality. They began to ask for the right to education, the right to freedom of marriage, the right to the economic independence of women and the right of women to political participation, indicating that women's awareness of rights has been constantly deepening.

Gender Roles

In Chinese tradition, men and women do separate things proper to their gender: 'Man tills, woman weaves'. The woman's sphere is 'inside' and the man's outside, yet each is seen as critical to the maintenance of the household economy (Cheung, 1996). In a Chinese family, the man is defined as the 'breadwinner' and the women as 'housekeeper'.

It is believed that, given the last decades of social and economic development, the increase in women's entry into the labour force has caused a shift in the role of women from the private to the public sphere. However, changes in the role of men have not generally kept up with women's role shift (Lu and Zheng, 1995). As such, under the predominantly patriarchal definition of gender roles, which has lasted for several centuries, men tend to hold less egalitarian attitudes than women do. On the other hand, from the perspective of personal interest, women tend to support egalitarian gender roles (Lu and Zheng, 1995).

Recent research shows that women and men who have senior high and college education are more likely than counterparts educated to a low level to be liberal in their attitudes toward the general conceptualisation of gender division in society and between families (Zhang, 2008). In addition, their urban experience is also an important factor influencing their attitudes toward women's family roles. Men whose fathers have professional jobs are more likely than their counterparts to be liberal in terms of gender role attitudes (Guo, 2013).

In addition, the modern scientific and technological revolution has not only broken down traditional gender roles, but also changed the definitions of masculinity and femininity (Leung, 2003; Liu, 2011). With the increasing popularity of science and democratic awareness amongst people, women have acquired the desire to obtain knowledge, and gradually won the right to be educated by struggling and breaking through the outworn idea that a woman with virtue is one without abilities. They have begun to leave their family and go into society to pursue their careers, which has changed the situation for men, who have had to undertake some of work in the domestic sphere. Finally, they have gradually gained equal rights to men in politics and the economy. Therefore, the traditional imbalance of the genders lasting thousands of years is being eroded.

The traditional gender relationship has also been shaken radically for, in the new social structure, the contrast between the roles of gender has undergone a dramatic transformation. The modern scientific and technological revolution has broken the limitations of 'dependent harmony' and brought gender relationships into a new stage of 'independent harmony'. As times have changed, the fierce modern scientific and technological revolution has caused an amazing transformation in the methods of production, of life, of communication and of the way of thinking among men and women. Human society is bound to get past necessity and reach freedom, where it will inevitably achieve 'freedom harmony' between genders.

3. Traditional Chinese Ethics in Women and Education

Considering the status of women in ancient Chinese society, women today have come a long way (Hagedorn and Zhang, 2010). In ancient Chinese culture, the role of the women was largely restricted to their homes. A lot of research focused on the role of family background and culture influences on educational achievement, with researchers believing that the factor of family background is an important factor in determining individual levels of attainment (Coleman et al., 1966; Zhai and Hu, 2015). Family structure, family decision-making and family relationships are important factors influencing women's educational outcomes (Buchmann and Hannum, 2001).

Family is a crucial environment where the development and socialisation of adolescent persons can be influenced to a great extent. The Chinese hold strong ideas of rank while their family structures are complex, resulting in Chinese girls having very strong family values. As a result, very few girls were able to escape the pressure of the traditional family-oriented influence of Chinese culture. They were perceived as a liability until they reached the age of marriage when they were given away to another family. Going back to the 1920s (Luo, 1995), girls were shut up at home when they reached puberty with no further access to the outside world, and no voice of their own. In addition, they were forbidden to speak even to their husband, except behind a closed bedroom door at night.

Chinese women have experienced severe gender discrimination over five thousand years of civilisation (Lei et al., 1993), thanks to Confucian ideology that breeds prejudiced attitudes towards women and favours men. In spite of a century of

revolution, traditional attitudes towards daughters persist and a woman's role has continued to be defined in terms of her being a wife and a mother (Lei, Chen and Xiong, 1993; Fan, 1998; Liu and Carpenter, 2005). Traditionally, the birth of a girl was (and may still be) not a happy event because a daughter can contribute little to her family in terms of material resources or care for her parents in their old age. Thus, parents tried to ensure that their daughters married well. Education for a daughter was deemed irrelevant and even dangerous in that it could jeopardise her chances of a good marriage.

This tradition remains strong and the Chinese language continues to structure and reflect the way in which the Chinese see and express gender in phrases such as 'men respected, women despised (男尊女卑)', 'when husband calls, wife follows (夫唱妇随)'. Marriage was considered the single most important event in a woman's life because it was her career or livelihood. Once married, a woman traditionally becomes the property of her husband's family and is relegated to the world of house and community. A daughter is usually defined as a commodity on which money is spent (赔钱货)', and 'a daughter married is like spilled water (嫁出去的女儿泼出去的水)'.

A cultural explanation offers insight into the gender disparity in educational enrolment. Women's social value was always considered in terms of how well they serve men. According to Confucian doctrines, 'Women and treacherous people are difficult to raise (女人与小人难养也)', 'a girl without intelligence and talent is one of virtue (女子无才便是德)'(Mao, 1984). In Confucius' mind, women and villains are

identical but, because of the status of women in traditional Chinese culture, a woman has no higher position than a villain (Chen, 2005). Therefore, educational opportunities enjoyed by Chinese women are far poorer than those available to men, as they were considered unworthy of a privilege like education.

In traditional Chinese families, only girls born into wealthy families had the opportunity to attend school. Even so, they only received moral education that preached the virtue of women being obedient wives and nurturing mothers (Liu and Carpenter, 2005). When the resources were inadequate to support each child, sons were always preferentially chosen to go to school (Hagedorn and Zhang, 2010). A survey conducted in Hangzhou University (Lin, 2018) asked male and female students about their attitudes towards a dual-career family.

Of the male students, 28% agreed with the following statement compared with 68% of the female students: 'No matter how successful a women's career is, she must be a good wife and a wise mother at the same time.' In response to the statement, 'A happy family life is most important to me', an overwhelming majority of both male (91%) and female (89%) students agreed. In addition, 91% of the women hoped their husbands' careers would be more successful than their own. In the same survey, conducted in Beijing, 76.5% of female students recognised a contradiction between being successful in their profession and being able to have a happy family life.

This approach supports the findings of Parmar (1988), who reported on a young Asian woman who, on approaching a teacher for advice, was told:

What's the point of giving you any advice? Stop dreaming and be realistic. You're probably going to be married off anyway, so don't waste time educating yourself. (Parmar, 1988,p.109)

The development of women is seriously restricted by the backward thinking of their parents. In rural areas, especially in some poor areas, parents generally have low education levels. They persist in old concepts and timeworn ideas. Some parents think that their daughter will get married sooner or later, and their daughter usually doesn't have financial relationships with the mother's family anymore after they get married. Therefore, these parents are unwilling to spend too much money on training or educating their daughters. Studies have shown that, regarding the reasons why parents do not attach importance to the education of their daughters, out of a choice of answers, 55.9% of the population chose 'This is what the tradition should be', 24.2% of people choose 'Daughters will get married sooner or later' (Li, 2006). These old ideas seriously restrict the possibility of women receiving an education.

In addition, the opportunity for some females to receive education is seriously constrained by traditional ideas. Those ideas clearly reflect traditional stereotypes such as the 'female's most important job is to assist the husband and bring up children' and ideas which clearly reflect the traditional gender division of the labour system, such as 'men are career-oriented, women are family-oriented.' Even some marriage concepts, such as 'it's better to marry a rich man than to do a good job', as well as the gender stereotypes of feminine weakness and obedience and being 'an understanding wife and mother' all leave deep traces in the hearts of many females,

and also have a subtle impact on them. With acquiescence to this gender stereotype, women consciously use traditional gender roles to restrain themselves, so that they are bound to varying degrees in many respects, particularly in terms of their learning, career and even marriage. Meanwhile, the opportunity for some women to receive an education is also seriously constrained by these kinds of traditional roles of the female. Women in a higher education tend to be at an age suitable for marriage and giving birth to a child. They have to make a choice between 'getting married' and 'starting a business'. Under the influence of traditional ideas and customs, the roles of females in the domestic sphere of the family are always more important than their roles in the public sphere of work and career, regardless of their educational level. Even if most women go to university and receive a higher education, they have to be housewives after they get married and have children, and they will not be successful in their careers in the future. This concept of overly strengthening women's sense of family responsibility weakens the entrepreneurial potential of females. As a result, women have to succumb to traditional pressure, give up opportunities or the pursuit of a career and further study to return to the family when faced with a choice between family and career (Ye, 2007). Therefore, this has repercussions on the education of girls. It is a fact that women who have a higher degree of education tend to find it more difficult to get married. There is also some cultural bias, such as treating a woman with a PhD as a 'third sex'. All these phenomena have also forced a lot of women to give up any chance of further education.

A traditional Chinese woman believes that men and women are unequal in nature. Because, in China, men do their own work, they have lots of time to make it perfect. But for a woman, it is for example, her obligation to take care of her child, do the housework and work. Hence, each night she is obliged stay up very late. Women always talk about having to make difficult choices between opting to spend more time on their job or choosing instead to spend time with their children. Furthermore, the financial circumstances of the family has a direct impact on women's access to education. With the deepening of China's reform and opening up, the division between rich and poor is becoming more and more serious, the income gap between urban and rural residents is widening, and the inequality of education in China is also growing or expanding. Students from more privileged homes can receive better preschool education, receive more out-of-school tutoring, go to 'aristocratic' schools and even choose to go abroad for further study. Female students whose family's financial circumstances are good or whose financial burden is not heavy may also receive higher education. But students with poor family conditions are not likely to receive any out-of-school tutoring. When the economic level of the family is relatively low, parents have to use their children as assistants to sustain their livelihoods, to further their means of living as far as possible. Girls are more likely than boys to be deprived of their right to education when their parents are unable to pay high tuition fees. In order to guarantee the educational opportunities of the boys, some parents even choose to sacrifice their daughters' access to education. In such cases, girls often have to give up their opportunity to receive an education. The economic level

of the family has a direct impact on women's access to education. Children born into a family with a higher economic level have more access to school than children born into a family with a lower income level (Yuan, 2007). Whether women can access high school education directly determines their access to higher education.

In addition, although the opportunities for women to enrol in higher education are increasing, most of these opportunities are taken up by urban female students. Differences in higher education admission opportunities still exist and are significant (Xie et al., 2008). Both in terms of overall distribution and professional distribution, the opportunities for rural women to enrol are much lower than those for urban women. The proportion of female university students from rural areas is lower than that of male students from rural areas (Wang, 1998). As we can see from the analysis, the economic level of the family, especially the economic level of the rural family, has a direct impact on women's access to higher education.

In China, education at or above the senior high school level is not compulsory. However, family investment in education is increasing with the reform of the educational system and the marketisation of education. In addition, since children at this stage are capable of working, if the children go to school, parents have to invest in tuition fees, as well as time resources that could otherwise generate income for their families. This has led to a significant increase in the material capital and opportunity cost for families financing higher education for their daughters (Du, 2008). In this case, parents will consider the return on their investment in the education of their children. If children do not go to school, they can help parents do

the housework or go out to work, which can help lighten the family's economic burden. And, if the children go to school, not only can they not help the family to earn money, but there is even a need to spend more money. This makes parents think that it is actually a waste of money to let a daughter go to school because, if she does poorly in school and it is impossible for her to go to university, they might think it is better for their daughter to go out and make money early, which may make it more likely that the daughter drops out of school. This hinders women's access to higher education to some extent. Admission policies provide another reason for why female enrolment has been levelling off for the past 20 years (Fan, 1998). In recent years, female applicants to institutes of higher learning have also experienced institutional discrimination. There are reports that women are less likely to be admitted, even if they are as qualified as men. Women who are admitted need higher scores than the men. In one investigation, the Henan, Hubei and Hunan provinces all reported a policy of adding two to four extra marks to the scores of female candidates in the National Higher Education Entry Examinations as a form of positive discrimination (Wu and Zhong, 2014). In 2012, eight universities in southeast China's Jiangsu Province administered more stringent admission requirements for female applicants and adjusted their admission ratios between male and female applicants for certain courses (Zhao et al., 2013). The finding was that this requirement deprives women of access to a fair education and violates many laws, including the Education Law of the People's Republic of China and the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women. In

addition, even when admitted to higher education institutions, women still face obstacles. Gender discrimination exists within the institutions. Female students are often directed into traditional female studies and professions and often receive less attention from teachers than male students do. In a survey conducted by the National Women's Association in five engineering universities in Beijing (Ma et al., 2016), 36.9% of the answers from 622 female students point to the fact that professors pay more attention in the classroom to male students.

In both rural and urban cases, the belief that girls were intellectually, physically and emotionally inferior to boys—an old belief newly clothed in scientific garb—helps to legitimise the limiting of educational and career opportunities for girls. (Honig and Hershatler, 1988, p.387)

Historically and sociologically, Chinese society is man-oriented and man-centred. Women are regarded as inferior in society and have been discriminated against such a long time with their subordinated position in both social and family life reflecting a society dominated by men. It is this kind of phenomenon that has been unavoidably embodied in education.

Social Reforms that have Reduced Inequality

As a result of these long-held beliefs in China, women have historically been disadvantaged in terms of educational opportunities compared with men (Cheung, 1996; Veeck, et al., 2003). Gender inequality in Chinese society places men in a much better position to attain greater power and resources than women. Since New China was founded in 1949, especially since the adoption of the reform and opening-up

policy in the 1970s, and along with the development of China's economy, it has enabled women to gain better access to social resources (Bauer et al., 1992; Croll, 1995). Although boys were valued more highly than girls in traditional Chinese culture, due to the one-child policy many parents eventually started to have a girl as their single child. This indicates that cultural norms can be changed, or at least weakened to some extent, by policy interventions (Li and Cooney, 1993).

In addition, the 1992 Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests was established to protect women's legal rights in culture, education and the family (Liu and Bao, 2009). It embodied the pursuit of equality between men and women by writing it into the Constitution. Furthermore, according to Chinese Education Law Article 9, all citizens, regardless of ethnic group, race, sex, occupation, property status or religious belief, shall enjoy equal opportunities for social resources (Xinhua News Agency, 1999). The Chinese government is also seeking effective measures to protect and promote equality in education. The Tenth Five Year Plan for National Education, issued by the Chinese government in 2001, clearly stresses the principles of equality and justice and paid specific attention to the education of vulnerable groups (Feng, 2008). The success of urban economic development depends on education and the talents it produces.

The slogan from the Chinese Education Bureau states that, to promote competitiveness, the key factor is to improve the quality and competitiveness of education (Zong and Ding, 2013). Official statistics state that 95% of urban parents hope their children will attend university (China Daily, 1999). As in most parenting

situations, they believe that a higher education for their child is an effective way to promote social and economic success for their families. One report found that an average of 20-25% of urban parents' leisure time is spent on assisting their children with their studies (Wang and Gao, 2000).

According to the fifth national census¹ in 2000, the average number of years that Chinese women received education was seven, which is one and a half years more than in 1990, while the gap between the genders narrowed to half a year during that decade. It is thus evident that women have more opportunities to enjoy the rights and opportunities to receive education.

Chinese Education System

Education in China is a state-run system of public education managed by the Ministry of Education. All citizens must attend school for at least nine years. The government provides primary education for six years, with children starting at age six or seven years, followed by six years of secondary education for ages 12-18 years. There are three years of middle school and three years of high school.

Chinese citizens must attend school for at least nine years. According to data from China's Ministry of Education in 2007, China has a 99% attendance rate for primary school (www.unicef.org, 2019). Under China's 'Law on Nine-Year Compulsory Education', primary school is tuition-free.

However, students must pay a small tuition fee after the compulsory nine years of education during middle and high school. In 1985, the government abolished

¹Report of gender equality and women's development in China (2005)

tax-funded higher education, requiring university applicants to compete for scholarships based on academic ability. In the early 1980s, the government allowed the establishment of the first private school.

China has experienced a major expansion in education, increasing the number of undergraduates and people who hold doctoral degrees five-fold in 10 years. The number of HE institutions in China has more than doubled in the past decade, from 1,022 to 2,263 in 2010. By 2011, the number of students in China enrolled in degree courses had risen from 1 million in 1997 to 5 million (www.unicef.org, 2019; The New York Times, 2010; The Economist, 2011).

In China, education is always an important part of people's life. When they are three years old, children are sent to the kindergarten. From then on, their learning career begins. They are taught to obey what teachers say to them. Breaking the school rules is forbidden. No matter who they are, once they sit in the classroom, they must listen to the teacher's words carefully, write down the important points and review them after class; otherwise they may fail in the exam.

Chinese education has an obvious feature that, in order to pass all kinds of exams, students need to remember a lot of words, sentences or articles. That is why a lot of people consider Chinese education as exam-oriented education. People test a student's ability by grade and many companies show their preference to graduates with advanced diplomas in employment. However, are the high grade and advanced diploma really equal to high ability or profound knowledge? It is universally acknowledged that, today, the only way to select a talented person in China is academic qualifications.

-----Wenjun's diary

Educational Opportunities for Chinese Women Students

Owing to the one-child policy, families place higher expectations on their children. Parents want to support children by giving them access to a better education (Beijing Review, 1999; Veeck et al., 2003). Well-educated people have more consumption

capacity and higher living standards. This incentive encourages more children to pursue higher education. Although the purpose of the one-child policy was not to improve women's status, it does create more opportunities for girls in urban areas to receive higher education (Fong, 2002; Veeck et al., 2003). It forces families to change their traditional concepts about sons being the only hope for the entire family.

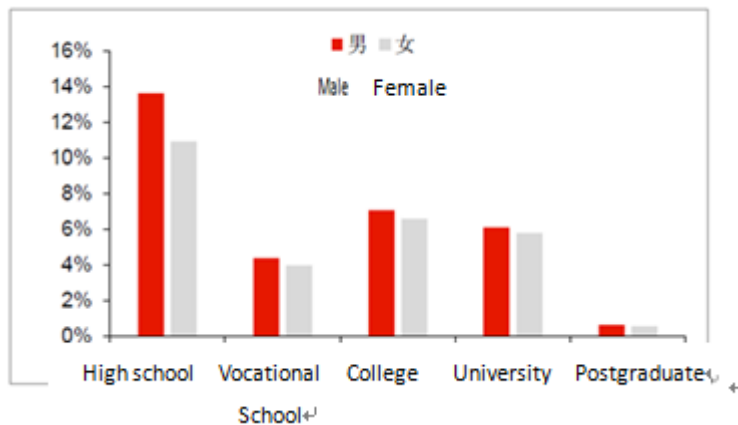
Many couples in urban areas have to accept the idea that their daughters offer the only hope of supporting the family. Parents depend on their daughters to support them in the future. According to those parents, daughters represent their hopes, so their daughters' happiness and future become the most important purpose for the family. In order to help their daughters to pursue happiness and a bright future, parents do not insist on instilling traditional concepts in them.

Parents would rather inspire their daughters to honour the family by becoming successful in education. Therefore, daughters in urban areas are encouraged to pursue higher education, which offers them a path leading to a successful career.

According to the *China Statistical Yearbook* (2016), the proportion of women receiving undergraduate education increased from 0.88% in 2000 to 5.76% in 2015, with an almost six-fold increase. From the point of view of academic qualifications (Table 1), in 2016, there was no significant difference in the proportion of women and men receiving college, undergraduate and postgraduate higher education. With the development of social economy and the popularisation of the thought of the concept equality between men and women, the education level of women is

obviously improved, and, in turn, has also enhanced the overall status of women receiving education.

Table 1. Basic Statistics on Students by Level and Type of Education (2016)



Source: China Statistical Yearbook, 2017.

The Development of Equality in Education

Since the implementation of the reform and the opening-up of China, alongside the one-child policy, women's social status has improved on levels (Fiorentine, 1993). Women's education levels have significantly increased. A survey on the social status of women in Shanghai from 2000 to 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2011) showed that 62% of Shanghai women aged 18-64 years had received high school or higher education in 2010, an increase from 25.8% in 1990 and 44.5% in 2000. Those who received junior college or higher education also increased to 32% in 2010, from 3.3% in 1990 and 12.4% in 2000.

More significantly, women under the age of 30 had received around 13.8 years of education, which is 0.18 years more than men, while 44.6% held a bachelor's degree or above, which is 6.6% higher than men. However, although the levels of education

have increased dramatically, women's participation in social decision-making and management was still low. The numbers of women employed in state bodies, political parties and mass organisations, enterprises and public institutions remained less than half that of men.

The data also showed that more than 53% of married women had carried out a big part or nearly all of the household chores of cooking, washing dishes, doing laundry, cleaning, and taking care of the children. In the survey, 59.1% of the participants said they believed that men are superior or more favoured in occupational status, while 50.4% of the married participants said that husbands made the larger economic contribution to the family. At the same time, gender discrimination still existed to some extent, wherein the survey showed about 3.3% women had encountered the situation of being refused job interviews or for promotion because of their gender. Meanwhile, 4.1% had encountered unequal pay for equal work compared to men, while 1.8% had suffered the loss of their jobs because of marriage, pregnancy or childbirth.

Another study released by the Ministry of Education in 2013 (China Statistics Yearbook, 2013) showed that the percentage of women students enrolled in Chinese universities has been increasing over the last 10 years. In 2012, the number of female students enrolled in universities exceeded male students by 647,800, with male students accounting for 48.65% and female students for 51.35%. In addition, the statistics also indicated that the number of female postgraduate students in 2010 in China exceeded male postgraduate students by almost 10,000, with female

graduates accounting for 50.36% of the total number. In 2012, the number of female postgraduates exceeded male postgraduates by more than 40,000.

According to Liu Hai Feng (1999), the increased number of female university students is closely related to China's current 'gaokao' system. The three required subjects in the 'gaokao' are Chinese, Mathematics and English. Chinese and English belong to the humanities, which are stereotypically favoured by women students.

Women who were born after the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy and the one-child policy have a stronger desire to be educated as a result of increasingly fierce competition for jobs (Duan, 2003; Veeck et al., 2003). They believe that education is critical to their life and key to their future success (Hesketh et al., 2005). This is in stark contrast with those born in earlier days who are still subjected to the strong influence of traditional culture (Hagedorn and Zhong, 2010).

However, it should be noted that although, on the surface, women's status in China has been improving constantly, especially in HE, in fact, the social situation that men are in a dominant and women in a subordinate position has not changed fundamentally, and men still remain in a dominant and women in a dominated position respectively.

At present, a large number of female university students in China are around 20 years old, and, thus, young and active. In comparison with traditional Chinese women, they have more distinct personality characteristics owing to the influence of the era (Ma, 2012). For example, they have a stronger independent consciousness, creative and practical ability, while their personalised development is fast. Hence, they have

independent thoughts, pursue personal growth, the liberation of individuality, spiritual independence and perfection, strengthening their self-concept under the impact of modern thought trends; moreover, they are open-minded and avant-garde, while their values and outlook on life tends towards diversification (Wu, 2010). In addition, modern women have an active mind, distinct personalities and a rich imagination etc. (Huang et al., 2014). Therefore, they are more receptive to new things.

In order to ascertain the public's opinions of young Chinese women and explore the issue of whether they live in an environment in which public opinion towards them is good, I inputted the key words 'Young Chinese women' into a Baidu² search after selecting the news column, to collect information, including reports from the national newspapers and local newspapers, and messages online. This search collected information reflecting the actual condition, as reported by newspapers and the main networks, of young Chinese women.

There were 674 articles about young Chinese women in 2003. Furthermore, the number of such reports increased to 34,100 in 2018, which is more than fifty times. These figures indicate that the media has attached great importance to this group and it has become one of its focuses. According to the contents of these reports, young women were described as victims and labelled with negative, positive and neutral signs. A large number of reports focused on the following items, including 'body', 'work', 'emotions' and 'daily life'.

²Baidu is the largest Chinese language search engine.

Here, positive images refer to those elements that are positive in having a good social effect. You can find them in these reports, in examples such as *'A poor woman student who born in late 1980s helps the old by picking up junk showing love and respect'*, *'Women graduates work as officials to promote the construction of a new village'*, etc. Negative images refer to behaviour, including deprivation, self-indulgence, and crime, etc. For example, *'Special 4,000 Yuan, Readme: Self-indulgence in the bar'*, *'Cohabitation, drug trafficking in a vehicle'*.

Victims are referred to as being cheated, insulted and hurt. For example, "a young lady was killed by her former boyfriend since the guy refused to separate; she was raped while in a drunken state at a netizen's birthday party." Neutral images have no positive meanings; for example, a female university student came third in the Miss International Contest.

Searching under 'Young Chinese women' throws up a number of new problems that require us to think very carefully.

Firstly, according to the search results, I found that young women were described as victims in most reports; their physiological and psychological weaknesses were represented. Since 2008, the situation has changed. There have been more positive reports in online media, which have changed the negative stereotypes about women. But the existing positive reports were not comprehensive, only focusing on their work. There were few reports on learning and research, social justice, mental health and family status, which shows that the existing reports on young women have

limitations. The opinions expressed are narrow and targeted, so they fail to represent objective and true images of young Chinese women to some extent.

Secondly, most of the reports focused on the following items including 'body', 'work', 'emotion' and 'daily life'. Among them, reports about item, body, occupied the largest proportion. Work was the second focus, but these reports ignored the items 'equality' and 'development'. Finally, in the patriarchal culture, women are classified as a 'dependent class' under a male-dominated vision, which is deeply rooted in the mind of the public. Media reports about young women reflect and strengthen gender prejudice, influencing their readers. Once the public recognises the stereotype, they then express similar opinions. Gradually, gender prejudice is strengthened repeatedly, thus forming a vicious cycle.

The results were the topics selected, such as body, emotion and daily life, thus, avoiding topics related to women's contributions in the social and political realms which are regarded more highly by society than one's physical looks, emotional well-being and domestic life which constitute stereotypical definitions of women. This means that current society has ignored the option to highlight women's social characteristics and their weaknesses in social status and ability. Images of young Chinese women shaped by mass media echo the stereotype of a 'subordinate class' in reality. Due to the real environment and media construction, the subordinate role of women is widely accepted, which perpetuates gender inequality in a patriarchal society.

In order to change the present situation, women need the right to speak out. Postmodern feminism asserts that 'discourse is power', stressing the importance of women's discourse. In traditional Chinese culture, society is constructed by male discourse, while women are always without a vocabulary. Hence, in order to emancipate themselves from traditional male-dominated society, women must acquire and produce their own discourse.

Review of Chinese Higher Education

In December 1977, the Chinese government reformed the examination for higher education, which marked the Chinese education system's reformation from the 'Great Cultural Revolution' and ended 'the recommended systems for entrance of higher education' (Mullins, 2005). As a consequence, all students were encouraged to follow this policy and they began to understand that their fortune was no longer left to the tender mercy of officials at various levels, but depended on the one's efforts and performance in examinations, and students began to make a greater effort in an all-time concentration on learning. We should be aware that this was a great achievement in the development of Chinese HE and it was a positive movement to expedite science and technology in China. This factor was also fundamental for the current Chinese higher education.

Higher Education in China

Education in China is a state-run system of public education controlled and managed by the Ministry of Education. Higher education in China has played a significant part

in economic growth, scientific progress and social development in the country by grooming talents and experts for the construction of socialist modernisation. China has a degree system, including Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees that are also open to foreign students.

The higher education segment of the Chinese education system carries some aspects of both the US and the UK system with a stronger similarity to the US system. Two-and three-year colleges, which are also referred to as short-cycle colleges, typically awarding associate degrees, exist next to typical four-year colleges and universities which offer academic as well as vocational courses leading to Bachelor's degrees or higher. Master's degree and PhDs are offered by universities and research institutions (MoE, 2005). It is worth noting that China opts for both three and four-year programmes, of which the latter is only offered at four-year colleges and universities, while the former can often be studied at any kind of higher education institution. In contrast to four-year programmes, the three-year programmes usually do not lead to a bachelor's degree. However, if a student chooses to enrol for an additional two-year period as part of the three-year programme, this student could receive a bachelor's degree (Education China, 2007).

Women in Higher Education in China

In China, women enjoy the same rights and opportunities as men to receive an education. Such rights and opportunities are clearly defined in China's Education Law, Compulsory Education Law and Vocational Education Law (Tian, 2015). The state takes concrete measures and actions to ensure that girls received a nine-year

compulsory education and that women have more opportunities to receive secondary and higher education. As a result, the proportion of women in all types of schools at all levels has increased considerably. In 2004, the number of girl students in universities of higher learning nationwide has reached 6,090,000, accounting for 45.7% of all students in such universities. The proportion of women postgraduate and doctoral students was 44.2% and 31.4%, respectively (China Statistical Yearbook, 2005). In recent years, the Chinese government has introduced the national student loan system and national scholarships for students at universities (Xue, 2015), providing loans with discounted interest rates and scholarships to poor students (including girls) to help them complete their studies. Meanwhile, the government encourages enterprises, private institutions and individuals to donate to education and to help women students with financial difficulties to receive an education (Yan, 2006).

Higher education is the most important stage of education and, therefore, often the yardstick of a country's academic level. The following section will take a brief look at higher education in China.

As we have seen, higher education used to be 'elite education', with only very few students lucky enough to enter the system. However, in 1999, China began to dramatically expand its higher education system (China Statistical Yearbook, 1999). The decision to expand further was most likely a response to pressure from the people due to the increase in students graduating from secondary schools. Since then, more and more Chinese students have achieved access to higher education. In

addition, postgraduate education is the fastest growing sector. This enrolment growth indicates that China has entered the stage of popular education. The student population of China's schools of higher learning has been the world's largest since 2003 (Wang, 2006).

Some Problems in China's Higher Education

The university entrance examination (the gaokao) in China takes place in June and, for those students who have taken the exam, it is the soul-destroying culmination of months of study. June 7th and 8th are two days that Chinese high school students have lived for throughout their first 18 years, as the peak of their learning career. For me, the gaokao robs Chinese students of curiosity, creativity and childhood. As we all know, currently the only way to select a talented person in China is the gaokao. That is to say, we test a person's academic ability only through examinations. Therefore, students work in order to achieve high points. They do not care about whether they grasp the learning concepts or not. This means their ability to think through creative ideas and practice may not be that good. In fact, students' abilities to deal with problems are weak. Without creativity and innovation, the development of China's higher education system is not sustainable. It is more important for an educator to stimulate creativity in the undergraduate than teach content knowledge only.

In addition, unfair policy is a very important issue. We all know that national policy is quite loose for Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Tianjin and many urban cities. The chances of examinees in Beijing entering university are much greater than the chances for those in any other cities in our country. On this issue, the government

cannot give lawful and reasonable answers. Why can't we get a fair policy in the same country? Here is an example of my own experience. I remember when I was a sophomore, I had a part-time job during the summer holidays. The child I taught was in junior high school. This year he will participate in the Mid-term Examination. He wants to go to a senior high school in Tianjin city. The reason is very simple it would mean that he can go to a famous university more easily. But a large sum of money is needed to place him in the new school.

What's more, due to China's special residence registration policy, students have to go back to the provinces of their official residence to take the gaokao (Fu, 2013), even if they have spent their entire lives in a different city. As a result, students have to familiarise themselves with new materials when they go back, as the test varies from province to province.

In summary, it would indeed be remarkable if developments in higher education of this scale are attained without tremendous challenges. Firstly, the question of distribution of opportunities between urban and rural areas needs to be addressed. Secondly, the issue of unemployment of university graduates seems to be both relevant and pivotal enough to be considered. Thirdly, the quality of higher education must be addressed.

4. Summary of Present Research on Young Chinese Women

Since the introduction of economic reform and the initiation of the opening-up policy,

China has been experiencing unprecedented development in its economy and an increased influence from Western culture, leading to changing social expectations and rising living standards (Hung et al., 2005). This transformation has offered women, especially post-1980s young Chinese women, the possibility to redefine their position as today's women.

The one-child policy was implemented in 1979, resulting in over 90% of urban children in China being only-children (Liu, 2006), though, the practice is still hard to enforce in rural areas. Consequently, it brought about a fundamental change in family structure and an increased educational opportunity for urban girls unrelated to the child's gender. The post-80s young urban women with better education and increased economic independence are more concerned with their individual desires and more prone to the influences of both Western and traditional Chinese culture.

In Western countries, women have more opportunities to pursue HE, which directly improves their social position (Leathwood, 2006). Women are trying to change the way they experience their everyday lives so that their existence can realise their freedom and equality, and, in the meantime, so that they can fully serve society (hooks, 1993).

However, since research on women is developing rapidly in the field of education, it also exposes many problems. These issues are mainly represented by women's marginalisation in enrolment opportunities, access to resources and professional advancement and employment. Feminist perspectives of education have focused on curriculum design and content. When the feminist Nel Noddings (1999) analysed the

gender discrimination of women in the process of receiving education from the perspective of feminism, and she deeply criticises the traditional education, arguing that school education should strike a balance between school culture and women's culture, and that female characteristics need to be re-recognised and attention must be paid to them (Xu, 2010). Feminist education theory, which appeared in the 1980s, sought to improve students' gender awareness, especially in terms of the subject status of women (Xiao, 2008).

Recently, there have been more and more opportunities for women to access higher education. Carole Leathwood and Barbara Read (2008), who take a feminist perspective to examine current changes in HE and women's participation in it, argued that, while an increase in the number of women showed women have gained equality in HE, universities are still dominated by men in terms of academic and managerial level positions.

People in China have not given enough attention to the problems and constraints on women's education over a long period of time. There are few positive achievements to be noted in the study of Chinese women's higher education. Moreover, the existing results have been studied from the inherent traditional male perspective, and their views are one-sided and incomplete. Since 1999, with the rapid increase in the pace of popularisation of higher education and the general improvement in the current situation in women's education, researchers began to discuss the issues related to women's education through various disciplines and from various angles. In terms of the study of women's higher education, the paper *Chinese Women's Higher Education*

from the Perspective of Feminism by He Xuelian (2004) holds that the problem with Chinese higher education is that the gender ratio of women in higher education in China is obviously different from the gender ratio in the overall population. In Wang Xiangli's article, *The Main Achievements and Problems of Women's Higher Education in China after the Founding of the People's Republic of China*, which was published in 2005, found, through a questionnaire survey of colleges and universities, that social class affects the opportunities for women to receive higher education; when class has an impact on the economic difficulties of the family and the educational level of the parents, and the family often pays less attention to the education of women. In the article, *A study on Gender Equality in Higher Education in China from the Perspective of Feminism*(2008), Du Jing analysed and concluded that the factors that impinge on women's access to education mainly include politics, economic development level, cultural concepts and family factors from the perspective of feminism. She believed that a very different educational environment for men and women is created through the uneven distribution of men and women in the professions and the unequal interaction between teachers and male and female students in the teaching process. These factors have an impact on the extent of equality between men and women in the social sphere, thus restricting the all-round development of women.

5. The Direction of Women's Study in China

The living conditions experienced by women have been significantly improved due to the improvement of women's educational level. The status and role of women in the

family and society have changed dramatically. On the one hand, it has attracted the attention of society; on the other hand, it has gradually become the focus of academic discussion. During this period, the main concerns are as follows:

(1) The status of women in the marriage and the family. Women's position in family life has been greatly improved due to the awakening of women's self-consciousness, and the gender gap is also narrowing. However, we also find that the status of women within family life is not so ideal, since we still live in a social reality under the influence of the feudal thought that 'men are superior to women'. Empirical research by Du Juan (2019) shows that about 20% of Chinese women have experienced violence from intimate partners, such as husbands and boyfriends, and there has been no significant change in the past decade. Among them, 9.4% of women have experienced serious violence, causing serious physical and mental harm. In the meantime, there is still an imbalance in the division of labour with regards to housework. Liu Aiyu et al. (2015) indicate in their article, *Gender division of housework in double-paid families: economic dependence, gender concepts or emotional expressions*, that, except for a very small amount of physical work, most of the housework is still done by women. Meanwhile, women also have to engage in social work, even if they make the same efforts as men; they do not receive equal payment.

(2) The situation and existing problems in women's employment.

Although the employment situation for women is improving, some shortcomings still exist, such as employment discrimination. The population of women is roughly the

same as that of men, but the proportion of employed women in an industry is much lower than that of men. Among the unemployed, the older and less educated women make up the majority. It is rather difficult for these women to be re-employed and the level of positions that women can engage in and their remuneration are relatively low. According to *Phase III Research Group of Chinese Woman's Social Status Survey* (2011), in the urban and rural low-income group, women accounted for 59.8% and 65.7% of employed people, respectively, 19.6% and 31.4% higher than men. The average annual income of working women in urban and rural areas is only 67.3% and 56.0% of that of men. In addition, there are some hot spots for researchers, for example, men and women are paid differently for work of equal value, there is a lack of labour security for women and sexual harassment of women in the workplace.

(3) The breakthrough in women's self-worth and self-awareness.

Since women have begun receiving a higher education, they are further improving their cultural awareness and subjective consciousness, and also increasing in terms of a willingness to define themselves; thus, women are changing their view of marriage and values. They emphasise that their marriage must be based on love; they have begun to have their own requirements and pursuits in life, hoping to take their destiny into their own hands. According to the report by Zong Jinsha and Li Xueping (2010), *A Study on the Lesbian Research in China nearly a Decade*, the phenomenon of being gay is not new to Chinese society, but the impression of the main body of gay groups has always been negative.

There are also few studies on the in-depth observation and identification of LGBTs. A

study of the living conditions of gay groups is also required, as times have changed. Under the influence of multiculturalism, research on the life of the gay community, such as their emotional life, and their experience of love and marriage can help Chinese society to develop initiatives in gender education and improve the status of the gay community.

6.The Significance of My Research

With an aim to look at the current situation of young women's lives and the problems of education, this research attempts to break the long tradition of conventions that has systematically constructed the Chinese hierarchically in male-centred terms and the failure of women's status to keep pace. Women should construct their own distinctive discourse of power as well as eradicate traditional thinking modes to wake up their subjectivity on the basis of their distinctive positions and experiences within the context of family life, social roles, education, etc.

1. To study the main dilemmas of contemporary Chinese women in their personal, family and social life. The traditional male-dominated society in China is severely lacking in women's subjectivity and culture. Patriarchal discourses construct women as subordinate. Postmodern feminism implements a new opportunity for self-reflection and a new understanding of the self for feminist theory. From the perspective of postmodern feminism, women from different classes, nationalities, ages, occupations, family environments, regional cultures and marginalised people should enter the new prospect of feminism and thoroughly criticise traditional

ideology and culture. Although there are many studies on Chinese women, the studies on the life experiences of young women are very limited. With the changing background of the times, 'young women' have been recognised as making up a major group in society; therefore, their life experiences, the new characteristics of social roles, whether new problems have arisen, the specific manifestations and causes of these problems, and how to effectively solve these problems should be studied in depth. This research focuses on the personal, family, and social life of young women, and strives to restore their life stories.

2. Taking the gaokao as the starting point, the current situation in Chinese higher education is analysed. Since the large-scale expansion of colleges and universities in 1999, the number and proportion of females receiving higher education has accounted for 'half the country' in Chinese higher education. However, the faster the development of women's higher education, the more problems are exposed. Among them, the issue of gender equality and differences in women's higher education are particularly prominent. There are not many research studies on Chinese women's higher education, and the existing results are arguably all researched from the overwhelmingly traditional male perspective, and their views are one-sided and incomplete. This study focuses on women's higher education in China from the perspective of postmodern feminism, and aims to analyse the problems existing in higher education and its influencing factors.

3. At present, although LGBT is still a sensitive and marginal topic in China, this phenomenon has attracted increasing attention and heated discussion. The lesbian

community has also become more active with the deepening of research on LGBT issues in the society. This life pattern has always existed, but has only recently and gradually become public. The attention given to LGBT people in mainland China is mainly related to the prevention of HIV. Since lesbian women do not need to withstand the stress of HIV as much as men, they receive little attention. Therefore, lesbians also need more understanding and care. The reason that I chose this topic is to understand different life experiences. I do not make any value judgments, I just wanted to record that in such a society, there are some people we know or we don't know, who prefer a different way of life. It seems that a small group of people need to live in another way, who live, feel, suffer and love differently.

In short, although Chinese women have achieved unprecedented progress , at the same time, regardless of historical or practical reasons, the phenomenon of discrimination, oppression and even destruction of females has not disappeared, and the obstacles impinging on women's status are far from being eliminated. Women's all-round improvement still faces many problems. Therefore, it is important to fully recognise and understand the current realities of Chinese society, figure out the current situation of Chinese women's family and social positions, explore the root causes of women's reconstruction issues, and discover the path of further development of Chinese women and seek the substantial achievement of their transformation.

7. Conclusion

Chinese society is in profound transformation, which brings both opportunities and challenges to young Chinese women. Within the background of a society in transition, the most sensitive groups with knowledge are being influenced by the impact of social transformation and are facing a conflict of values. In the process of values clarification, young people have often been confused; for example, the pressure of competition, an intensified culture, conflict of values, confusion over social roles and the social polarisation arising from the issue of university graduates' employment, all these could be more clearer. In addition, the high expectation from parents who expect their children to become successful is another pressure.

As Attane (2012) has pointed out:

In China inequalities between the genders remain not only as regards to access to education, employment, and health, but also in matters of inheritance, salaries, political representation, and decision-making within the family (Attane, 2012, pp.6-7).

At the same time, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences pointed out that, by 2020, there will be 24 million more young Chinese men than women (Li et al., 2009). The Chinese government has admitted that the imbalance between the genders is indeed a social problem, and has begun to encourage parents to value and raise daughters.

The social status of women was extremely low in feudal China, but, when Western culture came to China, more and more women were seen as being capable of being highly educated and a certain group of women began to realise that they needed to break the social constraints and promote self-development. Postmodern feminism

proposes that the key to women's liberation is to free women from the subordinate and the object status that has existed for thousands of years. The goal is, hence, to awaken a woman's self-consciousness as a person and to establish a woman's independent status as a person.

The main essence of Chinese women is twisted by traditional culture. Therefore, redefining women's values and social status should only be based on the reinterpretation of traditional or male-centred culture which defines the essential characteristics of women. Chinese society should seek and acknowledge the real self-worth of women again, through effective communication and exchange, in order to achieve the full development of Chinese women.

Chapter 3 Methodology

1. The General Aims and Research Questions

The aims of this study are to advance understanding of the life experience of young Chinese women. The objectives are to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What is the level of satisfaction of young Chinese women with their life experience (family, education and LGBT)?
- (2) How are these experiences shaped by traditional Chinese social patterns, cultural backgrounds, a unique political landscape and an inherent attachment to family values in their culture?

This thesis is formed mainly from the following elements in the name of answering the research sub-questions:

- (1) What are the experiences of Chinese women in the family?
- (2) What are Chinese women's experiences of university life?
- (3) What are the experiences of gay Chinese women?
- (4) How do Chinese women respond to feminism?

2. A Discussion of Narrative Research

In social science research, narrative inquiry is increasingly legitimised as a qualitative research design (Bruner, 1996). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) define narrative inquiry incisively as 'stories lived and told' and 'the making of meaning from personal experience via a process of reflection in which storytelling is the key element and in

which metaphors and folk knowledge take their place' (Clandinin and Huber, 2010, p.16). In a similar vein, Jenlink et al. (2001) believe that narrative is a specific genre of qualitative research that offers researchers the opportunity to enhance understanding of an event or phenomenon through story-telling. Narrative inquiry is a narrative form operating through storytelling to highlight the integration of experiences in the past, present and future which, in some sense, serves as the identification of stories and knowledge of the individuals themselves.

Through the recounting of a story, we proceed to follow the footsteps of participants and listen to their voices. We study individuals and groups through individual narratives, group narratives, and, in doing so, we study their past, present and future. Narrative is not only used to explain, but also to find meaning.

A story is a testament of a life and a way of expressing of human existence in the world (Bamberg, 2006). It carries many secrets and information about human society. As long as the human race exists, stories will continue to be told (Freeman, 1997). Therefore, for women, the story is also a basic element of life (Personal Narratives Group, 1989).

Narrative analysis is a method for bringing an interpretation to a deeper level of understanding and meaning. In this study, each woman is both the storyteller and the protagonist of every story. Stories can be an important path to truth. Finding this kind of 'truth' is an important mission of qualitative research. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest adopting new criteria for determining reliability and validity, such as verisimilitude and transferability. A narrative is a more authentic presentation of the

life of a woman than any theory.

With the development and reform of the economic system, the status of Chinese women has improved along with the enhancement of their economic capability. In particular, the awakening of women's own gender consciousness has greatly promoted the progress of women (Li and Bai, 2017). No matter whether it is in the family or in society, women's economic, political, ideological, cultural and legal rights have been respected and protected to a certain extent (Guo, 2013). However, it should be noted that the prospects for women's development are provided by opportunities that are not fully realised (Leung, 2013). To some extent, women's development even presents an unpromising situation. They also face many embarrassing situations.

At the same time, behind the general embarrassment, the experiences of some special groups, such as LGBT, are hidden. They are under more pressure and subject to more unfairness than most woman. Women not only have to work, but also play the role of housewife. Most of them suffer in silence from unfair treatment from all sides in a state of collective aphasia. Very few can speak out for themselves and for the progress of women.

Female silence is the result of the oppression of women by male power discourse (Weir, 2013). Only when women realise the importance of their voice will they break the status quo. This is also in line with postmodern feminism, which advocates the development of women's own discourse based on the real experiences of women (Liu, 2011).

There is limited research on Chinese women's living conditions. In particular, the life experience of Chinese women students has neither been fully explored nor fully understood. To fill the research gap, Chinese women need an opportunity to tell their stories and make their 'voice' heard. Giving opportunities to Chinese women is to have them construct their own stories instead of having the authorities and educators construct stories for them.

In the face of such practical needs, 'narrative' has a unique value and significance because, through narrative, women have the opportunity to reflect on what they are doing and thinking, the opportunity to discover problems and explore the unknown, the opportunity to break out of the norm and to seek transcendence and innovation. Although educational research requires complex thinking, there is no denying that life experience is the content and foundation of thinking (Bamberg, 2006). If we separate people from experience, then we fundamentally deny people's sociality. When people narrate, they are more likely to salvage those evocable impressions from the deep well of memory and state them (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Therefore, we can understand and become familiar with the world of women. Of course, different individuals will experience different events, while the same event can even bring up different emotional experiences in the hearts of different people. It is because of such differences between people that the narrative becomes 'colourful' (Freeman, 2003). Postmodernists try to turn 'grand narratives' into 'micro narratives' (Giroux, 2004). This 'micro narrative' is 'storytelling', which is a way of understanding the living existence and experience of human beings themselves (Ricoeur, 1991). Influenced by

the trend of postmodernism, the study of any social problem is not only a precise description of the facts, but also an expression of attitude (Hekman,1991) and a way for researchers to communicate with the world (Farganis, 1997). In terms of research into Chinese women's issues, 'it is precisely because researchers attach importance to the differences in people's understanding of women's roles in the diverse social environment that they focus on the study of Chinese women's issues, thus emphasising the overall study within a specific cultural background' (Leung, 2003, p.364).

Therefore, narrative inquiry in my research aims to reveal the meaning behind social phenomena, paying attention to participants' viewpoints, and paying attention to how different people understand the meaning of their lives, so as to be able to deeply explore the narrative research of people's inner thoughts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

At the same time, narratives bring the researcher closer to the real situation of the research problem and promote reflection on the part of the participants (Elliot, 2005). Moreover, narrative inquiry is concerned with the details of research objects, the special events and activities that affect people in daily life. By observing the world through the eyes of the interviewees based on their experiences and feelings, researchers can bring the research closer to the truth (Genette, 1979).

Characteristics of Women's Narrative Inquiry

In the context of women's studies, narrative inquiry as a research methodology could

add a new dimension when used with sensitivity and reflexivity (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). The aim of this section is to reflect on the possibilities of narrative inquiry research by giving a voice to Chinese women.

Women's identities are central to their beliefs, values and practices that guide their actions within and outside the family. Being a woman is not easy and the transformation from different roles is also difficult and complex for them, involving numerous dilemmas and challenges within this process. When facing these dilemmas and challenges, it is a good opportunity to seek the true self in negotiating with them. Narrative inquiry is a discipline seeking to understand how people make sense of and order their lives (Li, 2010). My narrative inquiry aims to explore Chinese women's experiences within the Chinese social and cultural context in order to understand and interpret the inherent meanings of their experiences through the narrative form. In addition, this kind of research study does not just record women's actions, but describes in detail their social networks, their emotions and their interpersonal communications (Xu and Connelly, 2009).

3. Theoretical Framework

In the West, a combination of postmodernism and feminism may be very natural (Farganis, 1997; Aronson, 2003; Zhou et al., 2005). In the 1990s, a school of thought called postmodern feminism came to the fore (Nicholson, 1989). This approach is related to the field of culture and ideology, and, thus, plays an important role in the liberation and development of women across the world (Tanesini, 1999). Postmodern

feminism is the development of traditional feminism in the contemporary era, that is, the development of feminism with a 'postmodern turn' under the influence of postmodernism. Its purpose is to transcend the limitations of traditional feminism itself and promote the further improvement and development of feminism per se.

The body of theories that is postmodern feminism is huge and loose with many schools of thought (Foucault, 1988; Nicholson, 1989; Lovibond, 1989; Farganis, 1997). There are no unified thoughts among the main schools, which are rich in content and complex; some of them even conflict with each other, but they are all characterised by subversion, challenge and diversity. They all stand against the modern patriarchal mode and modern dualism, universalism, essentialism and other ideas. At the same time, they have lost enthusiasm for the establishment of grand theories in the pursuit of social and political equality between men and women. They no longer pursue unity, but pay more attention to differences between women, between men and women, and between different nations,, races and classes. Postmodern feminism hopes to transform the influence of patriarchy on women, assert female discourse and build new gender-based identities by dissolving the current male-female conception, masculine thinking logic and male hegemony (Bacchi, 1990; Best, 1995). The theoretical perspective can be clarified in the following aspects.

Discourse and Power View of Postmodern Feminism

Seeking the origins of postmodern feminist ideas, people often refer to postmodern philosophers such as Foucault and Derrida (Hall, 2001; Chen, 2007), believing that

they have an important influence on the formation of postmodern feminist theory. Amongst them, Foucault's theory and method are highly praised and favoured by postmodern feminism. Despite the fierce criticism of some feminists, it is undeniable that postmodern feminist theory has indeed been influenced by Foucault (Martin, 1988; Phelan, 1990). The doctrine of power and discourse power (Hall, 2001) is very important. Foucault's discourse on discourse and subject makes feminism aware of the importance of being inside and outside the discourse, competing for discourse power, and provides a new way of thinking about reshaping women's subjects (McLaren, 2002).

One of the ambitions of postmodern feminism is to create women's words. It asserts the belief that 'the world is in the words of men'. Moreover, in the view of postmodern feminists, men are the words of the world and 'everything we ask for can be put in a nutshell, and that is our own voice'. (Hekman, 1991, p.44-46). Women's right to speak is not based on who is gifted, but on the consciousness and mastery of their own dialogue, so that their true experience, feelings and thoughts can enter the language they can listen to their true inner voice (Sawicki, 1991).

Exploring the path of women's liberation is an unchanging topic in the development of feminism. In traditional feminist theory, liberal feminism appeals to women's liberation from the perspective of social and legal rights, while socialist feminism will overthrow the 'patriarchal system' and 'capitalist system' as ways to achieve liberation (Pan, 2004). Radical feminism repairs the path of women's liberation by strengthening the physiological differences between the two sexes and carrying out

the biotechnology revolution (Yu and Qin, 2017). Despite their diverse views and opinions, they have the following things in common: they study women's issues from the perspective of social systems and in specific material terms, while they overlook the ubiquitous cultural status and linguistic features influenced by patriarchal power.

As Western countries enter the post-industrial age, discourse has been mentioned as occupying a central place in human society. Derrida once asserted that 'everything does not exist outside the text, trying to use the theory of discourse to deny material reality' (Chen, 2007, p.15). As a core concept in postmodernism, 'discourse' is the meaningful expression of spoken or written language, a set of linguistic expressions that reflect social, cognitive and rhetorical practices (McLaren, 2002); it is the language of power that reflects, influences and inhibits these practices. (Bone et al., 2007).

We can, thus, view discourse itself is a kind of 'power'. In Foucault's lexicon, discourse and power are inseparable, while power is achieved through discourse. 'Discourse' and 'power' are established in the same way. The mastery of any method of dialogue is the mastery of a method of power. Whoever has mastered the words will have power (Phelan, 1990).

Throughout history, women have lived in the male hegemonic discourses created by men (Wu, 2010). They have been writing their own history in male discourse, playing a role in patriarchal mythology and lingering on the edge of discourse (Hartsock, 1990). Although traditional feminism attempts to break this 'patriarchal' discourse, they are more-or-less absent or lacking awareness in the construction of women's

own discourse (Weir, 2013). Inspired by the theory of discourse and power, postmodern feminism has shifted their focus of research from the social system and ideology of patriarchy to the study of its language, culture and discourse; it explores aspects of women's language, discourse and culture (McNay, 1992). It deconstructs the norms of gender and, in this way, opens up women's resistance space.

In postmodern feminism, discourse and power are not only a real power, but also a creative force of social reality: 'Discourse not only constitutes the place and stage of power struggle, but also becomes the means and weapon of power struggle. The transformation of the discourse system will inevitably lead to changes in social power relations' (Feng and Li, 2011, p.49). Therefore, in order to resist the existing order, it is necessary to construct women's own words. A major change in postmodern feminist theory is to move from ideology to discourse (Wu, 2010).

The purpose of the women's movement should not be to obtain equal rights and status with men, but to doubt all status and power in order to avoid simply reversing the original opposing parties (Giroux, 2004).

Postmodern feminism raises the difference, emphasises the ambiguity of boundaries and dispels the dual opposition between men and women, so advocating the establishment of a kind of gender. In a unique way, it presents a vivid and inclusive ideal society that is equal and harmonious (Best, 1995). In the eyes of postmodern feminism, the 'female' experience in the broad sense is not established. The real existence is the different female individuals formed by having a different economic status, political situation, ethnic background, class attributes, geographical

environment and other factors (Bacchi, 1990).

Through emphasis on the complexity of women's experience, postmodern feminism, thus, recognises the legitimacy of the marginalised population perspectives that traditional feminism ignores and the legitimacy of the problems relevant to them. At the same time, respect for differences and pluralism are also subject to the sympathy of postmodern feminists and actively give voice to marginal and vulnerable groups such as LGBT women, with these feminists devoting themselves to the struggle of difference, weakness and survival (Kessler, 2011; Liu, 2011).

On the basis of the above discussion, the differences within postmodern feminism can be summarised as follows.

First, the difference between men and women is promoted, and the specific equality between men and women is emphasised on the basis of differences, thus eliminating the theory of minimising differences or maximising differences advocated by traditional feminism which departs from the circular logic of patriarchal thinking. The second objective is to emphasise the differences and diversity of women's internal experience and advocate the construction of a 'woman's concept' of multiple identities and a feminist theory that fits them.

A Denial of Binary Opposition

It can be seen that postmodern feminism has taken a bigger step forward in exploring the root causes of gender inequality than traditional feminism which attributes the cause to law and education, or to economic oppression, or to gender differences, or to a collection of all the above (Hekman, 1991).

Although traditional feminism also points out that a society's culture is one of the reasons for women's submission, the reference of traditional feminism to culture is generally only a surface phenomenon, ignoring the more essential disclosure and analysis of culture. As an important traditional cultural factor, metaphysical binary opposition is considered the root of gender inequality by postmodern feminists. They also believe that the main ideas of binary opposition determine the social reality of gender inequality (Aronson, 2003). In the meantime, inspired by the deconstruction of binary opposition, postmodern feminism has challenged the deeply rooted patriarchal ideology, which makes a great effort to enhance social gender consciousness and realise the equality of men and women (Liu, 2011). This approach provides favourable conditions for the theoretical construction and political practice of feminism.

Next, in pursuing equality in differences, postmodern feminism replaces the traditional abstract gender equality concept with a new gender equality-based concept of equality between men and women (Aronson, 2003). The traditional concept of 'equality between men and women', as a product of the concept of patriarchy, requires not only that women should move closer to men, but also of itself represents abstract and unachievable utopias (Barrett, 1987). Postmodern feminism recognises the existence of class differences and racial differences between men and women, so recognising prior class identity, national identity and then gender identity to conclude that, when women approach the essence of bringing about gender equality, many gaps exist between ideals and reality that are difficult to bridge, such

as class and ethnicity (Leung, 2003; Yang, 2010).

Therefore, postmodern feminism regards 'equality between men and women' as the basis of admitting the unique nature of personality and personality differences between men and women (Bacchi, 1990). This equality is not for women to enter the male field, but to use male standards to claim women's rights and to measure women's liberation, for women to strive to be as womanly as they choose (being a woman). In this way, postmodern feminism has a broader space and a wider range of means in its efforts to achieve equality between men and women.

It is no longer the same as in the past, simply treating all men as enemies of oppressed women and striving to achieve the same status as them. Instead, it allows women to find the best way to be themselves in several different ways. Thus, men can act as women's allies or friends. Postmodern feminism is devoted to seeking equality among differences and showing individuality and independence in equal relationships.

A Denial of the Traditional Concept of Gender

In the traditional Chinese gender system, the male is superior to the female, the male is synonymous with the public realm while the female is synonymous to the private realm and male labour is more likely to be outdoors while female labour is confined to the indoors. Stereotyped gender concepts such as 'male-dominated and female-subordinate' still exist in people's subconscious, which is a major obstacle to achieving equality between men and women, also seriously restricting the social advancement of Chinese women (Liu, 2017).

It is important to consider the interests and development needs of different groups of women (The Information Office of the State Council of the PRC, 2005).³ Affected by China's social and economic development, women are increasingly divided into groups with different interests and different levels of development (Ren, 2010; Liu, 2017). Not only do professional women face occupational ceilings, but female university students encounter employment difficulties, while some vulnerable groups of women, such as full-time mothers and LGBT groups face greater social and life pressures, which go beyond gender-specific issues. Social principles of equality can address these issues by empowering women on an individual level as well as at the community level.

Postmodern Feminism is Particularly Necessary in China

Traditional Chinese women are basically confined in specific and narrow spaces by social classes, regions and nationalities, with different living conditions and diverse and complicated family relationships. Therefore, a generalised 'female experience' does not exist (Feng and Li, 2011). In contrast, postmodern feminism is a theory that pursues equality in differences with its view of women's development based on different women's experiences and is of positive significance to the improvement of women's status in China.

In traditional Chinese society, under the influence of an ancient feudal culture and

• ³ The State Council Information Office is an administrative office under the State Council, the chief administrative body of the PRC. It is the chief information office of the Chinese government: <http://www.china.org.cn/e-china/politicalsystem/stateCouncil.htm>

the patriarchal system, women's subjective consciousness and independent tendencies were always restrained and oppressed by the mainstream consciousness. Such deprivation of subject identity marginalises women and makes them subordinate to men. They never take the initiative to establish their own gender consciousness in society, but play the so-called 'female role' according to men's expectations while maintaining men's dominance in unique ways (Guo, 2013). Since the 1990s, with the introduction of Western academic thought into China (Leung, 2003), postmodernism has gradually become a perspective and methodology adopted by Chinese feminism.

Postmodern feminism is initiated by women themselves, starting from women's own experience, seeking the cultural root of the loss of women's subjective consciousness, so as to break male mainstream society and the subjective construction of male chauvinism as its ideology (Li and Bai, 2017).

The improvement of women's status lies in giving women a voice and constructing women's consciousness. Postmodern feminism emphasises differences, constructs female subject consciousness, foregrounds female culture and promotes the gender development mode of 'harmony but differences', which provides new perspectives and concepts for the improvement and development of Chinese women's status.

The influence of postmodern feminism on Chinese society is not only limited to the structure of theories and methods, it is of a more subversive significance. The so-called men and women are not only endowed and moulded by society, but also by individual self-cognition (Li and Bai, 2017). Hence, the definition of male and female

also changes qualitatively. For example, in China, a few decades ago, people classified 'feminine appearance' as being marked by dependence, meekness, obedience, timidity, inwardness, long hair, and a love of dressing up, and classified 'masculine appearance' as being marked by independence, fortitude, independence, bravery, propriety, short hair and a lack of decoration.

But, in the past two decades, more and more Chinese women have become independent, and have begun to reflect on their social values and achievements, with short hair and brush cuts. It has become fashionable for women to wear men's clothes. Corresponding to this, more and more men are 'tender and soft as water' and 'cream boys' have become beautiful in girls' eyes. Postmodern feminism is deconstructing traditional cultural stereotypes and transforming traditional texts and discourses in order to create new cultural types more in line with women's development.

For Chinese women, the improvement of their economic status and the acquisition of political and legal rights provide the basis for gender equality. However, the improvement of political status is not the ultimate goal, because it only enables women to obtain extrinsic conditions for survival and does not affirm women's rights and endow them with intrinsic value. The improvement of women's status also needs to be further deepened at the social level, while the deep-rooted patriarchal culture needs to be further criticised and transformed, both theoretically and ideologically.

Social progress means cultural progress and exploring the development of women from the cultural perspective is a unique feature of postmodern feminism. Different

from traditional feminism, which sought women's liberation from the perspective of social reform and social policies, postmodern feminism points its criticism at the whole of culture and explores the patriarchy behind it. Therefore, to truly eliminate gender inequality, we must carry out a profound cultural revolution at the micro level, while criticising gender inequality in the field of society, culture and ideology.

My Effort to Explore the 'Truth'

Every time I return to China from the UK for a holiday, I complain about the difficulty of surfing the Internet. Fibre broadband is installed in my home, and the Internet speed is very fast, so in fact, I am complaining about the lack of access to many websites rather than the internet speed, especially when I need to use Google to check information and Facebook to contact friends in the UK. In fact, there are many websites that cannot be accessed in mainland China. In addition, the world's largest search engine -- (Google), the world's largest financial network -- (Bloomberg), the world's largest social platforms -- (Facebook and Twitter), the world's largest video network -- (YouTube), and the world's largest picture sharing platform -- (Instagram), the world's largest encyclopaedia-- (Wikipedia) and the world famous radio station -- (BBC Chinese), are sometimes inaccessible or partially blocked. Strangely, I have not been able to find the specific reason why these sites were blocked. Taking Google as an example, after being blocked for so many years, I can neither find the court judgement nor the notice of administrative enforcement. The Chinese government spokesman simply said that this was 'administering the Internet according to law', but the specific legal provisions violated by the website and how it endangers national security could not be pinpointed. I had no choice but to find the cause myself.

-----Wenjun's Diary

Postmodernism emphasises diversity and pluralism. Everyone's views and perspectives on issues cannot fully reflect social reality, and are inevitably influenced by the observer's own standpoint, views, and interests. At the same time, no one's perspective can fully explain the richness and complexity of any social image. The discussion of the 'truth' is no longer a simple judgment of true and false, right and

wrong. The analysis of the 'truth' needs to include an investigation into the political, social and cultural context(s), framing the analysis within these different contexts in order to transcend a monolithic view of the 'truth'. Foucault (2000) believes that truth does not depend on the content but on the system; the system of society determines the language society can accept and determines the boundary between the centre and the border. Because truth is constructed by discourse, the construction of discourse must not only satisfy certain rules and structure, but also has to satisfy specific contexts and social backgrounds, otherwise it will be suppressed by the powers that be. This has been repeatedly verified by Chinese history; for example, the burning of books, the burying alive of Confucian scholars in the Qin dynasty, and the execution of a Qing dynasty author. Therefore, the premise for a truth to be established is that the power of discourse is first established.

The characteristics of postmodernism are opposed to essentialism, universalism and grand narratives, and are characterised by an adherence to subjectivism and a general suspicion of reason (Williams and Sewpaul, 2004). All these factors directly result in the postmodernists' indifference to the power of authority, their scepticism of the 'truth' and of an objective 'natural reality'. However, postmodernism's criticism towards modernity is not to deny the existence of reason, history, and humanity, but to deconstruct and subvert the absolute belief in these concepts. Therefore, the criticism and elimination of the traditional view of authority and truth aims to exalt the multiple, the partial and the unusual.

Traditionally, people always believe that truth is immutable, but, in fact, the understanding of truth is often different in different societies. In Foucault's view, truth is not an independent, single point of knowledge, but a system that includes 'a knowledge base, technology, science, and discourse' (Foucault, 1979, p.22-23). People often choose the things they are interested in, and in this way other existences are intentionally or unintentionally excluded. Therefore, postmodernism opposes the traditional view of truth, and advocates relativity, diversity and uncertainty, emphasising that truth is closely related to discourse (or power). Postmodern feminists question the objectivity and neutrality of knowledge and believe that knowledge is the result of the operation of power.

Features about China's 'Truth'

With the popularity of the Internet, anyone can express their views and opinions through this platform, and even vent their dissatisfaction. To some extent, the Internet can better express emotions and feelings, so traditional media is gradually losing their monopoly of the existing possibility. In fact, many hot issues in the information age will cause public debate. With the deep excavation of hot issues, the topics of public discussion are gradually separated from the events and touch on the deeper issues of social contradictions. However, more and more social events involve sensitive words, so governmental or official actions such as deleting comments and prohibiting comments often occur. At the same time, some seemingly useful official information has not actually been rigorously screened and even this information itself is false, so people's grievances and suspicions about the Chinese government

are deepening. It is obvious that the Chinese authorities have always enjoyed seeking similarity in diversity, reducing complex political problems to simple messages. As ordinary Chinese citizens, we have only one thing to do - listen to the party leadership and do whatever they say. The Chinese government is more concerned with the evocation of patriotic feeling than with the objective reporting of events. For example, using Baidu (the largest search engine in mainland China) and Google to search 'Tiananmen' respectively, the homepage results are completely different, and Google's top three pages cannot be found in Baidu. Obviously, the word - 'Tiananmen' has been censored on Baidu, and some websites have been blocked. I believe that everyone here should know why Google is blocked in mainland China.

Traditional Chinese society attaches importance to education as a means to 'educate the people', usually combining politics with education, striving for integrity and order, ignoring individual rights and freedom, and hampering students' independent spirit and autonomy. In the past 100 years, several major changes have taken place in China's state and political system, but the relationship between education and politics has not changed. Under the existing cultural traditions and systems, it is difficult for the Chinese education system to obtain true independence and autonomy. China's education needs to break away from the shackles of politics and cultivate people's free will and independent thinking abilities. In contrast, in my experience, Western education is more concerned with the individual, emphasising independence and the rational, while balancing the practical aspects of education with the intrinsic value of acquiring knowledge.

In the wake of Derrida's deconstruction, we cannot rely solely on what the author explains in the text (Chen, 2007), because the article has nothing to do with the author as soon as it is completed or published. To understand the author's central idea, we must exclude the author, separating him/her from the work, and analyse the political, social, historical and cultural factors that have given rise to it. At the same time, the postmodernist philosopher Foucault believes that our social life is defined by language, but language itself is full of relationships of power and domination (Hall, 2001). This means that, fundamentally, the intellectual claims are actually just claims of authority; it is a bullying strategy used by the strong to force the weak to accept their ideological views. In a sense, there is no such thing as 'truth'. Anyone who claims to know 'truth' is actually trying to oppress us instead of educating us. It is difficult to depoliticise factual issues, especially when we feel that the 'other party/government' is ridiculous or stubborn. Our understanding of the truth has been determined by our cognitive prejudice and political ideology. So how do we get out of this dilemma?

Facts and objective evidence will always be overwhelmed by existing beliefs and powers. If leaders use deception and illusion as a means to gain support, then the truth will always be hidden. To understand the truth, we need to consider the larger political, cultural, and social contexts in which real information may be exposed.

Chinese Youth and their Search for Truth

So, when I discuss the 'truth' in my research, what exactly is being discussed? As part of people's lives, on the one hand, the 'truth' is practical in nature; on the other hand,

the 'truth' itself is misleading. Due to the diversity of people, the truth itself and individuals' perceptions of the truth are diverse. Among the many factors that influence the 'truth', human subjectivity plays a decisive role. When many so-called experts, scholars or government officials give speeches, they are reluctant to understand or care about the reasons behind the problem, but just continuously express various seemingly justified opinions or statements.

Only those people with real-life experience and thought can gradually understand that truth is not absolute, that is to say, official or authoritative reports are not convincing at all. With the development of people's cognition, the truth is constantly developing. For example, while gender was considered to be an objective fact in the past, now it is difficult for us to reconcile this seemingly irresistible fact with consideration for and understanding of LGBT people.

Contemporary youths' understanding of 'the truth' cannot be achieved only through 'teaching', but also through first-hand experience. Young people cannot live in a closed environment. We need to get out of campus, understand social conditions, know basic national conditions, and improve our ability to think and judge problems.

If the government fails to provide a result that convinces the public, or rushes to a conclusion to calm public opinion, or makes up excuses to avoid the problem, and even reverses black and whites and pointing to a deer calls it a horse, we can question them. Young people need to break the monopoly of the power discourse of

official media and realise that interpretations and observations of a single event should be based upon multiple perspectives.

4. Women's Right to Speak Out: Life History Approach

Introduction

Life is marked by a sequence of events. In general, individuals are born, enter school, graduate, are employed, marry, give birth, migrate, or may be divorced, become widowed and ultimately die. These events and their consequences on people and societies are the objects of research in the social sciences. Because of the above happens at a specific point in a person's life, at a particular time in a particular place, the best way to analyse its significance is to take into account the time, place and sequence of these moments. (Rajulton, 1992). Research providing this information is called life history study.

Life history study is based on the premise that researchers understand or make sense of storytellers' lives through the narratives of their lives. Accounting to Bruner (1990), it is through telling stories about ourselves and others that we come to understand who we are, who others are and what the relationship is between us and others.

In an effort to advance the use of life history in educational research, this section will firstly reveal the definition of life history in social sciences research. Two related questions will be answered: (a) what are the benefits of life history research? and (b) what are the potential risks of life history research? In my study, I will focus on young women in Chinese society, where my own research interests are located.

Theoretical Thinking on Life History

When theoretical considerations are taken into account, a lot of philosophical questions about the relationship between research methodology and truth are going to develop (Griffiths, 1998). According to Altheide and Johnson (1994), 'the social world is an interpreted world' (p.489). Different interpreters with different life experiences are likely to make different interpretations, leading to different descriptions of reality. In fact, it is difficult to imagine that any two individuals would have the same life experiences and attitudes; therefore, people are bound to interpret the world differently (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). As Woods (1987) has reminded us:

Life histories can inform our thinking about the personal engagement with social structure, with implications for some of the most prominent public issues of the day (Woods, 1987, p.130).

Interpretation in life history research is an inquiry process carried out by participants themselves, as Marsick (1989) comments:

Life history as a qualitative research methodology highlights the concerns of the interpretive tradition in which it is rooted for reporting the perspectives of people in the situation being studied (Marsick, 1989, p.1).

In epistemology, life history is a way of reproducing knowledge, which asserts that knowledge comes via personal experience (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). Life history research tries to see how society works, to describe social reality and to answer specific questions about the specific instances of social reality from participants' life stories. As Rapport (1999) points out, personal 'narrative is a means by which

individuals existentially apprehend their own lives' (Rapport, 1999, p.4). Hence, life history with personal experiences is considered to be methodologically empirical in nature.

According to the life history methodology, researchers may observe how relationships are conditioned by various factors while inferring connections between the seemingly different factors observed to create a composite picture of a self and its relationships with others.

As Joannnou (1995) suggests, 'although the self may only exist as a story that can be told about the self, what is told about the self is not always the same story, and much will depend on how it is told and by whom' (Joannnou, 1995, p.32).

In general, I think that the arguments advanced by life history researchers have a good deal of validity, that is, we always describe how people interpret the events they participate in, so the only question is how accurately they do it.

Researchers perform life history study by talking to people in formal or informal interviews and in quick exchanges, while interviewers can participate in and observe their ordinary activities, and by watching and listening as they go about their life. The nearer researchers get to the conditions in which the participants actually express their life experiences, the more accurate researchers' descriptions of those meanings are likely to be. In addition, life is a processual matter rather than a static state, as Woods (1999) notes: 'social life is ongoing, developing, fluctuating, becoming. It never arrives or ends' (Woods, 1999, p.4).

As researchers, we ought to respect that confusion and fluidity. In practice, we should

only respect participants' ideas about the world they perceive if we want to understand their actions, reasons and motives. Life history could get closer to the real thing when people recount what happened to them in their own words.

Knowledge within a life history study is not passively received, but actively built up by the experiential world. According to constructivist conceptions, knowledge is individually constructed and socially co-constructed by participants based on their interpretations of experiences in a society (Bodner, 1986). The constructivist theory seeks to explain an active process of knowledge construction based on experience within an individual, social and contextual framework (Bodner, 1986). Constructivism in educational research emphasises personal meaning and seeks to relate new ideas to experience (Duffy and Jonassen, 1992). In my opinion, I think the constructivist theory is humanistic. Its educational theory can lead researchers and participants into a new world. It emphasises an authentic learning experience and a realistic environment (Campbell and Davidson, 1994). Hence, researchers can broaden their view and acquire more knowledge.

A life history interview is an active process in which participants construct new ideas or concepts through life stories' narration based upon their current/past knowledge. Participants tell life stories in order to answer research questions rather than just showing their life as a review of the past life. It is important to note that life history is intended to provide stages for designing research environments to support constructive research.

Research Strategy

As a methodological approach, life history attempts to make central the subjectivities of research participants' life experiences to the production of knowledge in the social science (Goodson, 1988). Qualitative research stresses understanding meaning within contexts. The life stories as remembered by the participants are collective memories of culture and context as individual experiences. By asking participants to recollect instances and their feelings at the time, life history seems to abandon objective empiricism for the subjective approach. As researchers, we are constantly aware of the need to 'check the facts' by comparing documents, research diaries, reading other literature texts, which, as Jordanova warns, 'do not offer access to what was, only what was said about it' (Jordanova, 2000, p.85).

Life histories are shaped by the interaction of external and internal factors (Stearns, 2000). Given that the life history method is applied in the study, it is important to note how the environment affects individuals of different family backgrounds, life stages or social experience, and how personal feelings or characteristics are connected to each other and how they interact with each other (Roff, 1992).

In this study, life history has the potential to create opportunities for women to voice their opinions in China. According to Altheide and Johnson (1994), the social world is an interpreted world. Different interpreters who have had different life experiences are likely to make different interpretations, leading to different descriptions of reality. In reality, it is difficult to imagine that any two individuals would have the same life experiences and attitudes (Goodson and Sikes, 2001).

In general, life history aims to understand life as lived in the present and influenced by personal, institutional and social histories (Cole, 1994). Interpretation in life history is a process of inquiry carried out by participants themselves, as Marsick (1989) comments:

Life history as a qualitative research methodology highlights the concerns of the interpretive tradition in which it is rooted for reporting the perspectives of people in the situation being studied (Marsick, 1989, p.1).

It is a method fit for capturing and interpreting women's voices. As Munro (1991, pp.3-4) points out, 'life histories are especially well-suited to investigations of cultures specific to certain groups of people, such as Chinese women's social status.'

In narrating the life experiences of women in a Chinese context, I hope to gain a unique and authentic understanding of 'how motives and practices reflect the intimate intersection of institutional and individual experience' (Dhunpath, 2000, p.544). Within the field of women's studies, this means working with women participants in order to compensate for the lack of relevant research on women in China.

Life history gains an understanding of the meaning humans attach to social events with a close understanding of the research context through qualitative data. A realisation from the researcher of the study is also a part of the research process. Life history research depends on the relationships between larger social contexts and personal daily life experiences. The idea behind adopting life history stems from the fact that both interviewee and interviewer can become witnesses during research.

According to Kuhn (2002), 'telling stories about the past is a key moment in the

making of our selves' (p.2). Memory ties together all related affecting factors, such as personal, cultural, social, historical and familial aspects. Memory can interpret how those factors influence each other. Life history is made up of the actual elements used to express interactions because it is strictly linked with social relationships. Therefore, we can make a stronger statement: Life history reflects the state of social interaction. In other words, life history is an important approach for establishing the relationship when elements of external factors (such as social, economic, cultural and family) and individuals interact.

Life history research involves an attempt to describe relationships that exist in reality, very often within a single organisation. Life history will be interpretivist in nature, depending on the approach of the researcher, the data collected and the analytical techniques employed (Galliers, 1991). Reality can be captured in greater detail by an observer-researcher, with the analysis of more variables than is typically possible in experimental and survey research. Life history study can be considered weak as it is typically restricted to a single subject and it is difficult to generalise findings since it is hard to find similar life histories with similar participants that can be analysed in a statistically meaningful way (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994).

At the heart of life history research is a story or a collection of stories. Doing life history research involves eliciting and documenting these narratives. Life history research can use of a variety of methods, including storytelling, diary studies, biographies, memories and photos (Cole and Knowles, 2001). Within this range of methodological possibilities, I position myself as a life history researcher. While the

distinction between narrative and life history research is not always obvious, Cole and Knowles (2001) regard 'life history research as taking narrative one step further; that is, life history research goes beyond the individual or the personal and places narrative accounts and interpretations within a broader context' (p.20). They go on to note that, among others, these contexts include 'cultural, political, familial, educational, and religious spheres' (p.20).

By collecting the life stories of Chinese women, I hope to understand how they can become proficient in work and study while living in a traditional Chinese society. While life history research often focuses on one aspect of a person's life, a history of personal growth is inextricably linked to the individual's socio-cultural context.

5. Research Method Application

To Put Life History into Practice

My study is concerned with the equality of education and gender amongst young Chinese women in contemporary China. The general impression of contemporary Chinese women is that they fall short in their professional roles (Du, 2008). The study sets out to gather information about what influences the advancement of women's social positions and what impedes their advancement.

For a long period of time, life history research has been neglected or even rejected in serious academic inquiry (Watson, 1976; Bertaux, 1981; Morin, 1982; Fischer, 1983). This neglect has changed more recently in two ways, due to: (a) feminist researchers being concerned with women's histories (Stacey, 1991; Reinharz, 1994); and (b) those

researchers being concerned with recording disappearing ways of life (Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame, 1981; Cruikshank, 1990). However, little has been done by researchers in the area of Chinese education.

Life history has been called a 'common denominator' in social science research due to its providing a common research framework for analysing others by asking the question 'in what way is this person like, or unlike, myself?' (Frank, 1979, p.73). Generally speaking, in a life history study, individuals are asked, at certain times in an interview, about their experiences in the past (Rajulton, 1992). Reynolds (1995) has defined it as 'in the Right Place at the Right Time' (Reynolds, 1995, p.129).

There are two classic approaches to narrating an event through a retrospective life experience. First, either all the participating subjects or selected subjects are asked about particular events, experienced from a specific time in the past up to the time of interview or to a stipulated time in the past. For example: Are you satisfied with the university facilities, such as student accommodation, bathroom, restaurant and gym? Second, certain events (such as entering primary school) are measured indirectly by comparing it to the current status (such as entering university). For example: Do you think your education qualifies you for your current position?

Researchers collecting life histories go beyond and should bring more multidimensional considerations to each life story and engage in what Bertaux-Wiame (1981) calls 'listening beyond, meaning trying to hear, beyond the words of a given person, the speech of a social culture' (Bertaux-Wiame, 1981, p.260)

Using Photo Elicitation to Make Sense of Life History

In my study, I encouraged participants to bring photographs and reflect on them. Investigating female students' experiences of their university life by adopting visual images, photo elicitation is a means of studying how educational experiences influence women students' perceptions of education and gender equality. This section will provide a brief introduction of some ways in which social researchers can incorporate visual images, especially photos, into social research together with a discussion of why the author used this method in the research.

Most researchers prefer to use tape recorders rather than rely solely on note-taking. However, an audio recording only captures what is said, so it cannot be a complete, perfect representation of an interview. Because of researchers' reliance on participants' narratives to collect data and feedback, it has some potential limits (Carter and Mankoff, 2005); there is no way to prove the extent to which participants' information matches actual events due to the lack of an objective observer.

However, visual images can reduce this concern. Informants are captured in special moments, usually by taking a photo, and are asked about the event during interview. Thus, for photographs, capture is instant, and represents an objective point of view, as evidenced by Walton (1995) who highlighted that the photograph is an important visual medium which exists everywhere we look. Visual images are a very effective medium for expressing feelings and opinions, often more so than words alone.

There is now a growing tendency to involve visual materials in sociological research (Prosser, 1998), as well as to invoke sociological perspectives in educational studies

and human geography. When applying the life history method, images can be of great service when the participants, for whatever reason, are less capable of expressing or reluctant to express themselves in written or verbal form and when abstract feelings or opinions are to be explored which are otherwise difficult to express (Moss et al., 2007).

Nowadays, photographs are widely used in daily life and inevitably produce an effect on society and individuals. However, this effect can be either good or bad; for example, they can be used to show how history has been improperly used for certain political aims or other purposes (Zhang, 2010). When one person thinks in this way and then tells others, other people will consider it as the truth even if they do not understand that truth. Therefore, when photographs record things, we, as audiences, should refrain from expressing our personal opinion so that others may discover their own responses to and interpretations of the events recorded in photographs.

In research, photographs are raw materials with the potential for interpretation (Kuhn, 2002). As such, researchers should carefully consider how best to use them.

On the one hand, consider the picture's context, whether it makes the subject and the surrounding seem far more real and intimate. In her book *Family Secrets*, Kuhn (2002, p.8), has emphasised that researchers should consider 'where, when, how, by whom and why was the photograph taken'. A good photo captures a genuine expression or an unguarded moment; these typically come about only when something is happening at the site. On the other hand, researchers should place themselves as subjects in the photographs, engage in those moments and live with

the situation, which can lead to a much deeper understanding of the point than by simply seeing or hearing participants' narration.

In my research, I employ photography as a recorder, to reproduce the scene in retrospect in order to excavate details that might have been missed in real time. The function of photography is to immortalise a fleeting moment in time in an eternal visual image. Ordinary people experience happiness, sadness and worry.

Photographs can present any situation to audiences directly which people have never seen before or rarely experienced. The participants reflected directly on the photographs because they gave concrete details of everyday life, activities and the contexts in which they occurred, while providing data about community life. For example, one of my participants in the preliminary interview stated:

I like to take photographs to capture a moment that I can later share with my family and friends so they can see what my life is like.

Another participant told me, 'I have plenty of albums filled with photos that tell stories from my childhood - where I lived, what I loved, and who I was.' She thought these might be the best childhood memories.

Hence, visual images can easily resurrect past memories and accompanying emotions; they are invaluable for the purpose of stimulating people to reconstruct and recount past experiences (Schwartz, 1994). People record in photographs many of the important events in family life and create a strong sense of belonging for growing up, in which the camera captures key moments and photos record the details of life. Humanity has a long history of recording, expressing and spreading information

through images (Banks, 2001). Photographs are becoming more and more widely accepted in qualitative research (Rich and Chalfen, 1999; Kress, 2003) because they preserve the important moments of people's lives to some extent.

In this research, the specific research questions pinpointed in the project are to seek out the different life experiences that female student participants brought through the use of still photographs when they came to the research interview. By trying to find out how and why they chose to carry the particular set of photographs, the reasons for their choices will become meaningful and indispensable. By using photographs for this research, the researcher has attempted to construct a record about culture (Worth, 1980). For these reasons, photo-elicitation was chosen to be employed in the research.

However, in order to protect the privacy of the participants, photo-elicitation was only applied in the Chinese Higher Education chapter. Nowadays, with more and more photographs being taken and displayed, the threat to privacy is especially acute. Photo-elicitation is merely a technique which assists in enhancing the quality of my research. If there is a conflict between preserving my participants' privacy and collecting data, I would not hesitate to protect my participants' privacy.

First Stage of Field Work

How and where to begin my research study required some strategic planning because the act of bringing photos would serve the participants' life history narration for my research activities and aims. Data produced during this stage required closer

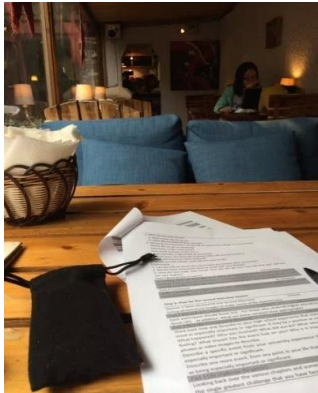
communication with participants, which determined the value of the data in the study. Therefore, I made my research visible so that all participants could be made aware of my objectives. Based on this plan of study, a detailed narration for the first stage interview session was constructed regarding Chinese female students' life experiences within HE in Tianjin from September to November 2014.

I identified nine female participants ranging in age from 21-30 years across four universities in Tianjin. Five of them were the only child in their family, while the rest were from a non-single child families. Six came from cities and three from the countryside and five of them were in their senior year in the university. With this study, the intention was to examine the participants' satisfaction levels with Chinese HE and their campus life in order to use the information collected as a reference for further studies.

All of them were introduced by my friends, but I had never met them before. Initially they sought to identify with me and understand my position, when I told them that they were being invited to take part in a research study as part of a PhD project. A detailed information sheet was given to all potential participants, including the aims and purposes of the study and what was required of them should they volunteer to be a participant. I sent frequent emails to the potential participants in order to establish a trust. Finally, nine gave their permission to take part in the study. During the participant selection process, I kept field notes detailing my observations and the results of informal interviews. Individual interviews were held at a coffee shop, which seemed to be the most comfortable environment to relax in and conduct the

interviews in (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Coffee shop where interviews were conducted



I arrived with my interview questions and a tape recorder. The interviews centred on discussions of participants' university experiences. I told my participants that I would use the photos they brought as illustrations. I stressed that I was trying to gain a better understanding of their life experiences and that the participants were always key to the interview. I explained that I wanted to write about the truth of the current Chinese HE situation and to show people what it is like to use photographs in research. I told my participants that I wanted to ask a series of questions about their university experiences. Then all the participants were asked to bring some photos to prompt comments. I did little to guide their responses.

During the interviews, I wrote field notes. After an introduction, I was able to play a more active role during the interviews. I could draw upon data from previous interviews in order to probe for overlaps and importance in response. In this way, I began comparing the comments made by different participants. The following is a sample of the kind of data generated in the interview.

With the quick development of China's market economy and the need for rapid social

change in society, expanding HE has moved China from the first stage of elite HE to the second stage of mass HE (Wei, 2017). Researchers such as Heyneman and Loxley (1983) observe that the presence of basic infrastructures and facilities such as libraries are strongly correlated with educational achievement. In China, the economic expansion and increase in the numbers of HE students outstripped the expansion of campus facilities, and coincided with rising living costs (Quan and Liao, 2007). Universities could not keep up with the pace of increased enrolment. Not only are there shortages in university and campus facilities; universities are also backward in management and culture, thereby limiting educational equality and achievement in universities. For these reasons, I asked my participants the following questions:

Question 1: Are you satisfied with the facilities in the university, such as, student accommodation, bathrooms and lavatories, cafes and gyms?

Daisy: No, I am not satisfied with them. First of all, we are six girls sharing one dormitory which is only 25-square-metres. Um, I don't really have, uh, enough space, enough for me to develop myself. Dormitory rooms are small and crowded. Secondly, the six-person dorms do not have our own toilets, so we have to share a public toilet in the corridor.

Candy:...a sweltering room without air-conditioning in summer and the dorm gate which is closed at 11pm. However, in the winter, without enough heaters, I get dressed whilst under the duvet.

Fiona: There is no air conditioning. I remembered once it was hot in the summer, nearly 35 degrees when we were there...the condition of the dormitory is really poor with only one room, no lavatory.

Daisy: Showers at home are a simple walk to the bathroom. However, it is a process at university to take a shower; it involves gathering up a shower basket, towel, sandals, shampoo, and some outfits for change. The most important thing is bringing your campus smart card⁴ and money to pay the shower fee.

Emma: In the dormitory toilet, there is no soap or paper towels...I have to remember to bring the items from the dorm room to the toilet. And I also have

⁴The campus smartcard can be used on campus for various facilities for the student, to purchase food, drinks, books, borrow books, look up material, take a bath and so on.

to bring my smart card with me when I go to bathhouse. For me, taking a shower in the university's bathhouse is a bad experience because bathing has become a sort of race. It charges students for the amount of time in a shower. Before entering the bathhouse, students pay for the amount of time they want in the shower using a smartcard. The clock starts recording the minute when the tap is turned on. It pauses when a button is pressed for soap. The smartcard reader at each tap shows the time. No money, no water. Compared to the old shower system, which charged 3 yuan for each person regardless of the time spent in the shower. Obviously, this change is a lucrative change for the university. But it can be embarrassing when I don't finish showering in time. Once, I had to ask the staff of the bathhouse to help me buy extra time. I hope in the future we are allowed to pay only after we have finished the shower.

Grace:For me, sometimes when my roommates are busy at their personal issues, I would be all alone in the dormitory. Of course, I am not complaining here. I don't feel lonely. I like it quiet, for I can get down concentrating on my studies.

Figure 2



A set of pictures of a typical Chinese university dormitory (from research participants)

Figure 3



The women's bathroom and toilet area (from the research participants).



The university's boiler water station during busy time and school hours (from the research participants and author)

With society's demand for inter-disciplinary graduates with a good command of knowledge and skills, there is an ever-increasing need for HE of a high enough standard to meet employs' demands. The employment scene is constrained by historical, economic and political factors, as well as the expectations and attitudes of graduates (Tan, 2017). The competition for jobs amongst graduates has intensified significantly in recent years. Indeed, many graduates face unemployment upon graduation.

Obviously, university exam-oriented education has some disadvantages, like the disconnection between theory and practice that can result in students with high scores graduating with inadequate skills. In the study, the researcher wants to investigate the quality of HE, the experience of the students and how much their

graduation achieves. Therefore, the next question is about their life after graduation.

Question 2: Do you think your education prepared you for your current position?

Betty: Not really, because there is there is a disjuncture between theory and practice. What we learned is book knowledge. We are unfamiliar with the practical world as we have spent all the time in university learning theories, and not getting practical experience through trial and error.

Fiona: A graduate, can look back on her gaokao experience with satisfaction, but knows that her joy is far from universal. There are so many students in China, and it's become very hard to find a fair and effective way to assess and evaluate students. I'm enjoying a lot of success now, but some of my close friends have ended up at substandard universities. For me, the exam was a good thing - but for most Chinese students, it's really problematic.

Of all the responses and complaints I heard from my participants during my interviews, complaints about campus life were the most frequent. Regarding these complaints, I asked two additional questions about university management. Firstly, what strategies are most effective in the management of university resources? Secondly, what limitations have you observed in the management of the university from your interactions with senior university staff and your personal experiences in the university?

However, unfortunately, almost all the participants gave me no answers to those questions. It was surprising for there not to be any objections. In fact, these silent students are simply the inevitable product of an education style that has changed little since Confucian scholars sat mutely at their masters' feet (Luo, 1995; Yan and Wen, 2007). China has always had the tradition of showing great respect to teachers and schools. Although students should be the centre of a university, in China, the authorities are always the centre and students are only the participants. Furthermore, given that most of them are the only child in their family, many students are

self-centred and arrogant, and too spoilt to live in less than pampered conditions.

Having unrealistic expectations and perceptions of themselves and the world, they lack resilience and the ability to endure hardship.

These findings also show that individual characteristics, such as gender, academic achievement and personal living habits, have a significant influence on campus culture. From the perspective of gender, the limitations of campus dorm rooms and bath times are very critical and real questions. Despite the vast and continuing improvements of living conditions offered by universities, they still do not meet the expectations of the students. In terms of personal living habits, the interpersonal environment of the university has a stronger influence on the students from big cities than on those from rural areas.

Campus facilities require improvement. A student's university experience is a reflection of society at large and the universities are constrained both by the cultural milieu of society as well as its economics and the funds available to them. The majority of university students are single-child families, who are used to the comforts of home, and therefore, find living on campus a challenge as they struggle to manage living independently for the first time in their lives and to cope with the undesirable challenging behaviour of others.

Longitudinal Fieldwork

When I first started my research, I realised that I could not have a comprehensive understanding of the life experience of the participants by simply conducting a study

of their education. The interview materials, restricted to one aspect of the interview, were also very limited, and the interviews were confined to educational topics, which greatly reduced the participants' interest in participating in the research. At the same time, I also found that I needed to get to know comprehensive information about the participants. The participants were especially impacted by their parents' views and their relationship with their parents. Common responses shared by most participants during the interview about their studies were: such as 'That's what my mother said to me', 'Dad asked me to do this', 'If I hadn't done what they asked me to do, my parents would be unhappy and even sad' or 'I hope Mom and Dad would listen to me', 'I want to have my own space at home and have the right to make my own decisions', etc.

This feedback made me re-think the direction of my research and realise that if I could understand their family dynamics, then I could perhaps help them find ways towards personal growth. In the long run, if parents know nothing about their children's growth, but often proceed according to their own experience and interests, ignoring the needs of their children in terms of personal growth, and forcing their children to curtail or suppress their own desires, then surely, this is a hardly a good parent-child relationship. The family environment has a profound impact on people, so I extended the research direction to the family life of the participants.

Since my research is limited by geographical boundaries, this part of the research is mainly conducted based on WeChat interviews, observation diaries, and contact through email and WeChat messages, which is available anytime and anywhere. The WeChat interviews can be divided into three parts

(1) A brief WeChat interview about LGBT was carried out in August 2015. The participants were Anna, Fiona and Emma. It was a freestyle interview; each participant could express any ideas and opinions.

(2) Four participants (Anna, Betty, Candy, Fiona and Daisy) held a video chat together in April, 2017. The main interview questions were: (please see Appendix 2 for full research questions.)

Do you think there is a generation gap between you and your parents?

Have you ever felt that your ideas are always different from your parents?

How is your generation different from your parents?

(3) The other online WeChat group interview, regarding their life after graduating from university, took place in August, 2017 between Anna, Betty, Daisy, Fiona and Grace. (Please see Appendix 3 for interview questions.)

I am very satisfied with the information obtained from these interviews. First of all, the participants were very interested in the topic of the interview. They were the protagonists for the entire interview. In many cases, even before I started asking questions, they began to tell about their stories. They were especially vocal about studying abroad and employment. This is a huge contrast to the interviews I conducted in the early stages of my research. Despite my best efforts to elicit participant response, I got monosyllabic answers to my questions and no elaboration. The participants then were unwilling or unable to express themselves. However, in the interviews three years later, I saw participants who were full of confidence, and discernment, believing in the pursuit of freedom and possessing the courage to speak

their true feelings. I believe that no matter what the results of the research are, I've seen a marked change in the attitude of the participants, and I also saw hope for my research. Secondly, through these early interviews, I also learned about their family dynamics and their circumstances. These interview materials provided me with a rich basis for the next stage of my research.

6. Fieldwork Reflection

A Breakthrough in the Traditional Telling Pattern: Exploring Hidden Life Stories

During the first few interviews, it was surprising to find that almost all the answers from the participants were nearly identical. They complained about the lack of university support facilities, the shortcomings of the Chinese education system, and the authoritarianism of their parents. For me, as one of them, the interview results were not shocking, given the way that we were taught in schools and at home.

Chinese students rarely get the time or chance to use their imagination and exercise their freedom. Right from the day that we enter school, we are pushed into a culture of exams and more exams to achieve so-called success. And, to pass those exams, we are made to learn by fixed standard rules. Teachers dare not encourage students to think outside the box. For each Chinese student, there's hardly any room for themselves, either in class or at home.

However, previous researchers (Wang, 2007) have suggested that individuals with higher education levels seem to be more rational, tolerant and understanding

towards different life attitudes. As a researcher, I want to break through and deviate from traditional conventions. For this reason, I decided to explore the life histories of LGBT women in China. As shown in the survey by Liang and Wang (2014), the Chinese public's acceptance of homosexuality is increasing and younger, unmarried and better-educated Chinese people with higher social status and higher incomes have more tolerant attitudes.

In addition, university students, undergraduates, women and younger students also have more tolerant attitudes. University students, as representatives with higher education, are likely to be more open-minded and accepting of new thoughts and opinions. Moreover, their perceptions and attitudes can promote positive perceptions and attitudes about LGBT among the general public. Therefore as I sought to study aspects of society that were unconventional and even taboo, I happened upon the topic of the LGBT lifestyle.

According to a national television programme broadcast in 2005, approximately 90% of LGBT men chose to get married due to social pressure. Their wives did not know about their sexual orientation (*Guangzhou Daily*, 2012). The authorities seemed to neither encourage nor discourage this. It is my opinion that Chinese should be more understanding toward gays and lesbians and stop discriminating against them. Silence is not a solution.

To understand the 'real' LGBT world, I became a member of a LGBT online community and read many articles about LGBT life, making several friends to chat with. In order to obtain the most authentic first-hand information, I pretended to be a gay woman.

At that time, I believed it was the only way to get their attention and their trust. I even considered it was a smart way to let them sound off and tell me exactly what their stories were. By speaking to them at this level, I gained their trust. It was only when my supervisors pointed out that this methodology of collecting data was unethical and I realise I had made an error.

If I hadn't recognised the seriousness of the problem, I would have had a huge problem with my study. As a result, I apologised to people in the LGBT community and explained my academic intentions and answered their questions as honestly as I could. I told them about my research interests and what I was trying to do. Two of them granted me interviews, but only one gave me her consent to adopt her life story in my report without revealing her name. I had a lot of contact with Never-Give-Up and kept in touch with her for more than three years during the process of the research; I mainly communicated with him through interviews, WeChat and emails. I met Never-Give-Up in Tianjin in October 2017 and we had a very in-depth interview (Appendix 5). She introduced me to the volunteers of Aixin Home with whom I communicated through email and collated from these communications notes for my research.

Interview as a Method for Qualitative Research

The life history interview seeks to collect the meanings of central themes in the life world of participants. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say (Kvale, 1996). Kvale (1996) believes that this kind of

interview seeks to uncover both the factual details and the meaning and significance of narrated experiences. Life history interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. Interviews may be useful as follow-up on certain participants for further questions, e.g. to investigate their responses further (McNamara, 1999). It should be recognised that interviews were completed by the interviewer based on what the participants said, especially for the life history research, which is a far more personal form of research than questionnaires. In personal interviews, the interviewer works directly with the participants.

Unlike with mail surveys, the interviewer has the opportunity to probe or ask follow-up questions. Therefore, the interviewer is both observer and analyst and interpreter and has to be well-trained in how to respond to any contingency. My research study includes two types of interviews. On the one hand, informal, conversational interviews were carried out. There were no predetermined questions to be asked in order to remain as open and flexible as possible to the participants' personality and priorities.

During the interview, the interviewer 'went with the flow'. On the other hand, in general interview guide approach combined informal conversational interviews, with the intention of ensuring that the same general areas of information were collected from each interviewee. This provides more focus than the conversational approach, but still allows a degree of freedom and flexibility in getting the information from the interviewees.

The aim of life history research is a complete, detailed description, but the

researchers may only know roughly in advance what they are looking for. The researcher in the study is the data-gathering agent, collecting data in both the verbal and visual modes. It is subjective to some extent and both the participants' and the interviewer's interpretation of events is important, i.e. it uses participant observation and in-depth interviews. The data collection and analysis process are more 'rich', time-consuming and less able to be generalised.

Researchers tend to become subjectively immersed in the subject matter. Hence, the personality or thinking style of the researchers and the culture of the organisation is under-recognised as a key fact in a preferred choice of a life history study. Ethical research behaviour acts as a guide for how researchers within a particular study should act and make decisions. Researchers commonly strive to encourage ethical practices, not only to be morally correct, but also to gain whatever research advantages can be achieved in projecting an ethical image to research participants (Lincoln and Guba, 1989; Xi, 2002).

Creating, distributing and continually improving the code of ethics of a project is one important step researchers can take to establish an ethical workplace, while another step is to set up a direction that is responsible for ensuring the research's practices are ethical (Shultz and Brender-Ilan, 2004; Zerbe et al., 2008). Researchers can feel confident that a potential research action will be considered ethical by the general public if it is consistent with the standards; this includes the golden rule of needing to act in a way you would expect others to act toward you (McIntyre, 2003).

Researchers should always ask: Would I feel comfortable explaining to a participant

why I took this action or is the proposed action ethical or legal? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and a better relationship?

However, when we have got an ethical dilemma at hand, the question we can pose is:

How do we decide what to do, particularly in life history research?

7. Validity

The research in interpretive areas shows the influences of interaction and personal experience; this is far removed from the positivist model (Goodson and Sikes, 2001).

My study's life history interviews were spurred by interpretive needs which focus on interaction and inclusion, addressing how personal life experiences are influenced by others and by society.

The requirement for inclusion is how much an individual needs to socially interact and connect with others. Such a requirement refers to emotional connections between people and how much individuals seek to build a relationship with one another, especially relationships on a one-on-one basis (Schutz, 1958). A life history study examines the behaviour of individuals towards others. When researchers want to evaluate someone's life story, there is a need to provide accurate concrete representations of abstract concepts, for instance, feelings, achievements or aptitude. Life history research is based on interpretive paradigms of studying individuals and their multiple characteristics, differing behaviours, attitudes and opinions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001). Consequently, the advantages are in locating meaningful observations of artefacts. It gives the opportunity to understand and

make sense of others' perspectives as they are shaped by the social construction (Taylor, 2008). That is, researchers can obtain a complete understanding of the meaning, insights and reasons for human actions (Bryman, 2001). It should be emphasised that it is difficult to be objective in human research, rather than in a scientific setting, which is completely different from the positivistic paradigm. Whilst research through positivism attempts to discover the truth in controlled conditions which are observable scientifically, it is unsuitable for investigating every phenomenon in educational settings, especially with regard to feelings, values and aptitude (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998). Thus, generalisations are challenging in life history research, because of the complexity of participants' stories and characteristics, which is also in line with key ideas of postmodernism. Participants are crucial in life history research, whilst researchers can view situations using different approach to answer research questions via interpretive study. The function of epistemology in an interpretive paradigm is for acquiring knowledge through investigation of the phenomena in multiple ways, as the social context is different from natural science. Therefore, interpretivism emphasises that social phenomena have different meanings. Consequently, different researchers might arrive at different conclusions for the same observations. Here, the interpretivist approach seeks meaning and understanding in terms of the female participants' attitudes towards China and situations involving both participant and researcher subjectivity. Thus, the qualities sought here are authenticity and trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is a fundamental criterion emphasising honesty and validity in the research study. Only credible people can be

truly respected by others. As a researcher, it is crucial to develop trusting relationships with research participants and to interact and observe in different contexts over time through a complex and deep understanding of the phenomenon. It is also necessary to apply multiple data collection methods, such as group and individual interviews, diaries and literature. After every interview, I should return to the participants to see if the interpretation makes sense and is reflective of their experience.

When choosing research participants, I had to consider many aspects of potential participants, including LGBT. Additionally, I located myself in the interview taking care to acknowledge my own bias, whilst also tracking my personal ideas to attempt to compare my responses to those of the participants.

8. Ethical Issues

On one occasion, I heard about one of my colleagues who had complained bitterly of having a 'very bad' experience. The entire process of interview was marked by interruption and rejection, which was her experience during her research. But the story made me stop and think about just what constituted 'proper treatment' throughout the research interviews.

I think that ethical issues always come down to being kind or unkind, behaving in ways which are likely to injure others or likely to avoid such injury. Research behaviour is not inherently good or evil, except that it may hurt someone, or not. The rules for good research interviews reflect the underlying ethical concern.

To be moral or not to be moral, that is the question to pose. In current Chinese society, people may do things without morality for their own profit or personal goals, such as cheating in commerce or drug trafficking. To my mind, the problem of academic ethics is extremely serious. Education research is extremely crucial for its development and, without morality and honesty will become unreliable. Ethics is a part of being human, because people have many moral roles and have moral relationships and obligations.

Social science researchers, therefore, have moral obligations too, and relationships with research subjects. Life history researchers should use their own moral experiences, while ethical research rules should make sense to both interviewers and interviewees.

During my research study, right from the beginning of each interview, both myself and participants were expected to be truthful.

In my research, I try to avoid using participants for convenience research because they live nearby or because they can be exploited if they are poor. Using interview data from unethical research will almost certainly exploit or harm participants (Wellington, 2000). As regards professional ethics, researchers have many considerations to take into account (Zhang, 2007; Jiang et al., 2012). They also suggest that what is most important is not the professional achievements, but the professional ethics. However, other people disagree with this, believing that research study should bring us high-tech innovations and we all benefit from them regardless of the professional ethics. As far as I am concerned, I would prefer the former.

Unlike other people, researchers can have significant influence on society and their words and actions in research can affect many people, especially students and intellectuals. In other words, they can change their values in the research studies that they undertake. Therefore, researchers should be committed to maintaining a level of integrity in their study project, ensuring that they are genuine and honest in professional research ethics. In addition, keeping a fair and impartial attitude to all research participants is another important element in research.

According to the recent reports in the newspapers and online, academic fraud issues in China have become more and more common in academic circles (Xi, 2002; Tang et al., 2007) to the point where these problems can seriously damage the social value system and intellectual credibility. Although advances in social science research depend on those researchers who adhere to the spirit of the study, the core of which is true innovation, researchers lacking in professional ethics cannot reach the pinnacle of their pursuit. It is of the upmost importance that we focus our attention on research ethics.

I have encountered some ethical problems during fieldwork, which I had to consider hard in the following research study:

Firstly, according to Apfelbaum (2001):

The issue of communicating across cultural boundaries is a major challenge to the very foundations of our dominant theoretical frameworks. (Apfelbaum, 2001, p.32)

Participating in this research could have been potentially off-putting to people because of the need to bring up very private matters which could burden the subjects

psychologically and ethically. As a researcher, what one must do is to appreciate fully the diversity of beliefs and values that may be present in society and professionally respect everyone's individuality, even if some characteristics may challenge the researcher's own notions. On the other hand, sometimes one must be insistent about obtaining information critical to the research, even if the participants seem unwilling to open up, otherwise the data will be incomplete and unusable. In a word, there is a fine line to walk and a tricky balance to strike for the researcher conducting life history studies. Secondly, the education system is intricately linked to the state of political affairs in a country, which may involve sensitive topics. In China, the subject of government policies is particularly sensitive, which may discourage people from talking openly in a research setting. Thirdly, selecting the most suitable participants and building a good working relationship with them can be tricky, but they are key to the success of this study.

The recruitment procedure was a complex process and the study stretched over a long period of time, so there was a great degree of unpredictability. The participants' right to withdraw had to be respected, but, from the perspective of the researcher, it became especially important to select those who were likely to stay on for the whole project. Therefore, it was crucial that participants thoroughly understood the aims and methods of this study and what taking part entailed.

As a social researcher, it is very common to encounter ethical dilemmas in research and academic work. Therefore, handling sensitive research participants and data need deserves special attention. Researchers need to be sensitive about how the risk

of harm due to confidentiality and privacy issues may happen or exist in special ethnic groups, especially in the particular environment in China where the quality of research is not only constrained by the participants themselves, but also by the social environment. Perhaps one of the most valuable solutions for researchers is being both an interviewee and interviewer in the study. Researchers need to be especially careful that they don't abuse the power between interviewees and themselves. For me, I believe that trust can only be sustained by mutual care, concern and understanding. The most important point during the research process is that all participants need to feel that they are protected and respected.

Ethical Procedures and Processes

Looking back at the entire research process, it was difficult to achieve 'value neutrality' in a pure sense. No matter which research method was chosen, there was always likely to be different levels of value involvement in each link of the research design, research data collection, research process control, and interpretation of research conclusions. As educational research that focused on people, we must recognise these fundamental issues and realise ethical awareness. Firstly, I sent my research project with informed consent to the University Ethics Committee for approval, I made it clear that I would respect the confidentiality and anonymity of my research participants; avoid any harm to them; and, in addition, ensured they would participate in the study voluntarily. After receiving ethical approval and respondent's consent forms (see Appendices 6 & 7), the research work was officially launched, in

line with the following aspects: 1. the participants participated fully autonomously; 2. the interview model had Chinese characteristics. 3. respect and equality were always shown.

Maintaining the Privacy and Autonomy of Participants

For researchers, respect is an element of building trust between people, maintaining the privacy of participants, and respecting their right to choose is a vital link in social research. During the interview, especially during interview with Never-Give-Up, I deeply understood the importance of protecting the participant's privacy. Any exposure of the relevant information about the respondent may lead to a certain degree of harm for her. Even though she agreed to interview and exposing her life experience, while I was soliciting her opinions in each interview and during later data processing, I constantly asked whether the relevant experience could be written up as part of the research. During the interview, I attached great importance to the life values of each participant. In particular, when conducting personal and family interviews, I often obtained private information about others. Later analysis of the data required the participant to provide appropriate private information. Therefore, how to define confidential research guidelines is really important topic for me to ponder. In the interview with Betty, she repeatedly mentioned unpleasant memories in her childhood. She was abused, verbally insulted, and even beaten by her father over and over again. These painful life experiences greatly affected her personality development as an adult. Betty later mentioned that her family environment in

childhood was the last thing she wanted to look back on. She longed for the respect and love of her parents. She also aspired to build a warm home by herself. If I want to get good results, I need participants to be actively involved in the interviews; I needed them actively think actively about issues related to themselves, proactively develop plans, work hard to implement plans, in order to encourage them to speak from their hearts.

Interactive Interview Model in China's Local Context

On the one hand, the traditional Chinese cultural background and interpersonal relationships are conducive to increasing the participant's sense of dependence on researchers, and making the research work better and smoother; on the other hand, it may cause negative effects, and the relationship between researchers and participants may not be as pure as a professional research relationship, which will have a certain impact on the research itself. How to grasp the 'balance' of this association is indeed one of the topics worth thinking about.

In fact, it is difficult to completely exclude subjective emotions in the actual operation process, because it is not easy to establish a professional relationship between the researcher and the participant. At first, the researcher usually communicates with the participant as a friend to obtain their trust so that in-depth research interviews can be conducted. The objects of this study are mainly young women and marginalised groups. Taking LGBT groups as an example, their unfair social status and the quagmire of moral discrimination not only puts them in a disadvantaged position

in the social sense, but also in a significantly weaker position in the relationship between researcher and participants. I pretended to be a lesbian during the initial interview to gain their trust and gain more information through the interview. When I realised the seriousness of this wrong practice, I informed them of my true identity as a researcher, and I hoped to get their forgiveness and conducted further research interviews. There was always a temptation for them to protect themselves, as a result, many participants' resistance and perfunctory attitude towards any 'visit' was very obvious. Different identities of researchers will cause various interactions between researcher and participants. Participants will act in different ways when facing a person from the same group or a female researcher. If the disguised identity is revealed, the distrust between the two groups in the interaction will increase, and it will be difficult to maintain the research interview.

In order to avoid this situation, I had to pay attention to and reflect on research methods and related issues of research ethics throughout the research process. This research covers many sensitive topics, including politics, freedom, democracy, LGBT, gender relations, and many other topics. This also prompted me to constantly think about how to get participants to talk, how to get more authentic information when talking with them, how to help participants reduce the psychological burden and how to implement the principle of confidentiality. I needed to rely on myself to communicate with participants through equal interaction and exchange. In addition to how to persuade them to accept my interview questions, and how to encourage them to give answers on many sensitive topics according to their own situation was

also the biggest test I faced during the interviews. During the conversation, I needed to pay attention to how to mobilise and how to obtain informed consent and how to effectively implement the ethical principles of respect, equality, and lack of harm. During the interview, what I felt most deeply was the need to establish a trust relationship with participants through equal communication.

Chinese people have the characteristic of 'dare not say no', and are deeply influenced by a 'culture of obedience', so I often encountered situations with high response rates but low data quality. For example, during the interview process, some issues were involved, such as the harsh discipline of parents, dissatisfaction with the gaokao system, and the serious lack of effective university management. Since participants were deeply affected by traditional culture, they simply expressed their attitudes but often did not take action. This has become part of the culture in China today, that is, a culture of obedience. This is not only an act of self-protection by the respondents based on the unpredictability of the investigation risks, but also an involuntary collective unconscious that has been shaped by Chinese society for a long time shaped by dominant discourses. This kind of answer is mostly empty, catered to, and only rests in words. Neither does the participant show her own thinking and judgment, nor does she intend to take action on what is just an attitude. This kind of collective behaviour is closely related to Chinese traditional thoughts, such as the 'harmony is a virtue', 'hide one's inadequacy by keeping quiet', and 'the doctrine of mean' in traditional culture. It reflects the confusion and hesitation of a part of the Chinese youth, who in accord with the inertial thinking and one-way thinking that has

been instilled for many years, never surpasses the appearance of things to go deep into the core of things to explore the root behind social phenomena and the contractions, problems and risks hidden behind the appearance. Most people endeavour to avoid being isolated because of holding certain attitudes and beliefs. Thus, when the number of people expressing leading opinions increases, they will abandon the original ideas and attitudes and choose to converge with the leading opinions. Therefore, for any subject interview, the first response of participants is 'If my (true) answer does not conform to the mainstream of society, what impact will it have? What responsibilities may I have to bear?' etc. This influence is so great in China that it can be labelled as 'reactionary' (such as politically sensitive topics), or personal moral issues (such as topics related to homosexuality), or simply concerns of participants (how would researchers use the results of these interviews). Under the influence of this mentality, participants give as many 'expected answers' in line with mainstream society to reduce their own risks.

How could I minimise participants' anxiety so they could show themselves without burdens and compromises? How could I minimise the impact of this so-called 'culture of obedience' in interviews? They are the toughest questions I faced in the early days of my research. Through constant exploration and summarisation, I believe that researchers should understand participants' concerns and the risks they face. Through the process of informed consent, I will try to objectively analyse the risks that the research may bring to the participants and inform them of the protective measures I will take (such as confidentiality), so as to reduce the psychological

burden of the participants and encourage them to open their hearts as far as possible. Through continuous communication, I kept abreast of their living conditions, family background, and potential barriers to interviews; I carefully considered whether the choice of interview time and place would affect the respondents' informed consent. For example, firstly, I decided to choose a convenient time for participants, and safe and secure interview environment that participants were familiar with. I decided that after participants arrive, I would actively indicate where they should sit and let them choose drinks and snacks freely. Secondly, I decided to try to create a space suitable for interaction with each other through the design of some situations. I decided to take the chat as an opening, to try to move away from the modelled interview process, and give the participants maximum freedom so that they could speak freely. Thirdly, I decided to pay great attention to their speaking attitude, the way they were chatting, and the interaction of body language, so that participants could participate in interviews without psychological burden and stress, so as to promote the further development and deepening of the research, and thus make it closer to 'real' life experience.

Respect and Equality

Respect and equality are fundamental ethical principles in educational research. These attitudes are not only a written commitment, but involve respect and equality from the heart. This is especially needed for research on young women and LGBT people. Therefore, I decided to avoid suggestive and misleading statements and took

care in the interview, because I knew my role was only a researcher, not a moral judge in any sense. At the same time, I decided to constantly review and adjust my attitude and position, and used a respectful attitude as it affected the authenticity of a respondent's attitude and expression. Imagine how a person who looked down on LGBT people in her heart could recognise and understand this group of people in depth? How could a researcher with mislabelling of 'morbidity' and 'abnormality' in mind comprehend a group of people living in a complex family environment? Only with a sincere heart could I try to look at situations from their standpoints that were different from my life experience, and studied various social phenomena from the perspective of a researcher. Taking my disguise of a lesbian as an example, this violated ethical norms completely. It was not only disrespectful to the research objects, but also had a serious adverse effect on me. Therefore, I entered this research using my real identity. Although the respondent sometimes refused to cooperate because of my real identity, my real identity was the guarantee or establishing a long-term and reliable research relationship for the respondent who trusted me. This point was fully proved by 'Never-Give-Up's cooperation. The research relationship of respect and equality was not only reflected in respect for the personality and rights of the participants, but also for the researchers.

9. Research Reflexivity

It is certainly true that the position of women in society has undergone a dramatic change in recent years. Most of the young women will go and find jobs after they

graduate, because, after they have grown up, they must shoulder family responsibilities. After the women get married, most of them will continue working to reduce family pressures, such as those from house loans, day-to-day spending and supporting the elderly. Considering the complexity and diversity of the community of Chinese women, what I have attempted to engage with are the obstacles to the development of professional women in urban China as a special social community and countermeasures to eliminate these obstacles.

Since many traditional customs and beliefs limit women's development, I believe that women's social status can only be achieved by eliminating all these traditional obstacles. However, there is still a long way to go to change people's traditional thoughts and beliefs.

The importance of gender equality is increasingly recognised in Chinese contemporary society. It is now believed to be valuable to promote the exchange of ideas around women's social status and the quality of their education.

Nowadays, young Chinese women tend to finish their study by undertaking some study in a foreign country. When I was in my second year of university, I had the wish to study abroad. Luckily, my dream came true after graduating from university. Since 2009, I have witnessed the changes in myself after a few years of study in England. Cultural differences and language are the two biggest challenges; it took time to adjust myself to the different society.

When I came to England, I had a very good impression: people are open-minded, and they are easy to make friends with. They like to share their stories about jobs, family,

and friends. There is no discrimination against international students and this made me feel warm in a strange place.

However, when I first studied in English class, I felt uncomfortable. The teaching style is different from that of Chinese teachers. Chinese students are very good at sitting tests, but there are other differences. China is a highly respectful country, so it has a higher power distance between people. The higher the position people have, the more respect they should get. Therefore, all the students in school have to stand up and say hello to teachers before the class begins; moreover, they have to give thanks by bowing after class.

In the classroom, everyone is quiet and the teacher can keep talking for forty-five minutes. Students must raise their hands and get permission from the teacher before asking/answering questions. It is totally different in England. I was so confused and frustrated initially that I lost my direction because the teachers were not with me all the time. We spent more time on the textbooks. Teachers in England understood what I was suffering, and they gave me help and encouraged me as much as they could. This interaction is very helpful building a relationship between teacher and student.

As an international student, I have experienced the huge difference between social culture and the education system. All these experiences led me to a deeper belief that I wanted to be a female researcher because I wanted to have the right to speak in the professional field. Moreover, I am an ambitious girl and don't want to be looked down upon by Chinese society.

Compared with the past, the role of women in modern China has changed to a large extent. As for me, one of the contemporary university graduates, born in the era of reform and opening up to the outside world and growing up in the transitional period of society, I have assumed some new generational characteristics. With the development in the level of human civilisation and society, people's thoughts have begun to change and be more liberated. Women in China are allowed to receive as high an education as they desire. Some of us even take a great step forward in studying abroad, with support from their families.

Not only do Chinese women climb the freedom ladder, but they also deal with family matters in a balanced way. We should act as motivators of peaceful relationships in the family, playing a leading role in improving family life. As wives, women tend to be consistent supporters of their husbands, consoling them when they struggle with their work. As mothers, women take care of their lovely children heart and soul, encouraging children to be useful people for the society and country.

As daughters-in-law, women will spend some time with the elderly helping with the problems of ageing. Moreover, it is also inevitable for housewives to do some routine things. Specifically, most women are required to make breakfast, lunch and dinner for the family members and do some washing and cleaning as well. Therefore, there is still an equality gap between women and men in China, which maintains age-old traditions and still involves discrimination against women, even though they have a chance to receive a higher level of education.

I have been thinking about the relationship between family and freedom for quite a

long time. What's the point of a successful education? With the improvement of women's social level, how does this improvement influence their quality of life?

There are those who think that a university education is a step on the path to a highly paid career. It may be true that university graduates generally have higher salaries and receive more respect from society than those who do not attend university. However, students who think this is the only purpose of education are generally disappointed because the real purpose of education is to learn more in order to have a better life.

As an international student, I believe I am not a traditional Chinese woman, but I was influenced a lot by my parents. When my mother was pregnant, all my family believed she would have a baby boy. Fortunately, thanks to the one-child policy, my parents gave me all their love. My parents also supported me a great deal to study abroad.

Although I'm the only child in my family, they would like me to be independent. Some of the advantages of studying abroad are that young people can broaden their horizons, meet different people and experience different cultures. This is important for our future career development. As a researcher, I have attempted to better understand advanced research concepts and skills in women's higher education since this area has negative connotations when it comes to women's equality.

China provides an interesting context in which to investigate this issue knowing the changing role of women in China. In the research, I position myself as both a research participant and researcher. On the one hand, it improves my own understanding of

how women students learn, how women students grow, how experiences at home and in school help or impede their equality of education (physical, social and emotional). On the other hand, we should consider the significance of being a participant and a researcher, raising questions, collecting relevant data and analysing them to seek answers that will, in turn, be applied in the research setting, or in interaction with other participants.

I mentioned earlier that my research study is a systematic search for answers to the questions about social development and women's status, fostering the development of a knowledge base in the contemporary Chinese situation. In this regard, I am at an advantage and, in fact, in an enviable position. My research questions relate to the life experiences of young Chinese women; what motivates them, why some enjoy their life stories while others do not. At the same time, my role as a research participant has enhanced my feelings of competence, while empowering me as a researcher to find solutions based on evidence. Hence, I am a researcher in action. However, there are some obstacles in the process.

First, I needed to learn how to carry out the interview as planned. In my study, there were two methods available for me to use to recruit participants. One was to recruit my friends' friends, a method which would allow me to develop a good relationship with the members directly, without raising their suspicion. I could use the open-ended questions within more structured, fixed-choice categories of answers (daily life experiences and university life) or use interview and photo evidence.

Second, another methodological issue arises from the cultural clash between the

participants and myself. When I encountered these differences, I had to suspend my own taken-for granted feelings and be able to reflect on our culturally formed attitudes, character and life choices from the perspective of others.

After reading *Researching Dealers and Smugglers* (Adler, 2000), I have a good mastery of qualitative research. It is characterised by an emphasis on understanding other people's perspectives and their experiences, with the interpretations and meaning they bring and give to events and situations. We can, thus, obtain some first-hand data from it. Hence, the data collected in a life history study typically take the form of spoken words rather than numbers.

10. Analysis of Data

In order to learn more about the life experience of the participants, I adopted many methods to obtain the data related to the life of young women in the study, such as interviews, focus groups, social media, diaries, and photos. Through collecting information diversely, the amount of first-hand information is not only increased, but we can also test whether the information obtained is true.

According to the preliminary outline of the interview (see Appendix 1), firstly, the author interviewed the participants about their personal growth background, educational experiences, key events in their growth, and their experience and understanding of life. Of course, the outline of the interview was only an overall presupposition of the questions to be asked in the interview. We were not completely confined to the outline that has been designed during the process of the interview.

When participants devoted themselves to telling their stories, I fully respected them and interviewed them according to their own ideas, without interrupting them. During the interview, the researcher focuses on the questions to be posed and asks the participants to tell their life experiences and feelings according to their own understanding. Before the interview, I asked the participants whether I could record the whole process of the interview, and then did so with the consent of each participant (see Appendix 6), and I also paid attention to observing the expression, tone and movement of the participants during the interview process. After the interview, I sorted out and summarised the recording materials. I picked up the important information for in-depth research while combing through for research issues.

In order to avoid the raised by adopting the methods of interviews and focus groups alone, I also adopted many other approaches to collecting the research materials, such as the exchanges by email, WeChat communication, etc. Meanwhile, I also collected some selective photos of the participants, growth diaries and other texts that could record the growth experience and growth process of each participant, always with the permission of the participants in this study. It expanded the field of vision of research through the collection and analysis of these materials. From the beginning of the interview, I only intended to conduct a single study trying to understand the current situation of higher education in China, and that than expanded to the influence of family factors on the life experiences of the participants, and how the participants break the shackles of traditional ideas, seek a breakthrough

in self-awareness, and yearn for freedom and development. It makes this study more reasonable and ground-breaking, and also improves the reliability of the study through the multifaceted analysis of the views of a particular group of people in a particular culture.

Before sorting out the data, I listened to all the recordings carefully and sorted out the words over and over again for the purpose of further familiarising myself with the data. In the past five years, I have accumulated more than 150,000 words in tracking interviews, sorting out interview recordings, emails and WeChat texts, my personal research diary and so on. These materials are quite messy but rather plentiful. How to make this seemingly miscellaneous data meaningful was a great challenge for me throughout the research process. On the basis of the collated text, I have read these materials carefully and repeatedly many times, trying to find and grasp the key words and themes related to the purpose of the research in the process of analysing the data. In order to learn about the life story of the participants' educational background, family relations, and their attitudes towards their process of growing up, I initially found out the relevant keywords based on interview notes. Then, I worked out the concepts and themes by analysing high-frequency words, such as the gaokao, campus relationship, employment, blind date, family and marriage problems. Based on above, two main lines, namely, family and university life experience, became two main directions of the research. Next, I began the study at the second level on this basis and I paid more attention to further exploring the internal relationship between these keywords, concepts and themes, as well as the deep meaning behind them. On

the basis of making an effort to find the interaction, I tried to avoid what may be overlooked in the process of collating the information, namely, the specific meaning of the participants in expressing their attitudes and what lay behind the conversation. In the process, I realised that the participants were constantly showing a life attitude that hated bondage and longed for freedom. Ostensibly, they were suppressed by heavy academic and parental control, showing an indifferent attitude to many issues, and following the same pattern. However, as the interviews proceeded, I could feel their inner dissatisfaction with real life, and that they were more eager for freedom, recognition and support. All this prompted me to expand the scope of my research. I hope that my research will provide an in-depth analysis of their objective existence and unavoidable social reality, so that more people can gain affirmation by the wider society. Therefore, I also set another topic for this study, namely, the interview and analysis of LGBT participants. At this point, I confirmed the three main lines of this study, namely, family life, university life experience, and LGBT and my interviews are conducted focusing on these three main lines in this study.

Chapter 4 Family Life

It is known that family values influence people's personalities deeply. Everyone belongs to a family and their behaviours are assuredly affected by their family's values (Gove and Huang, 2012). Parents set an example to their children, and growing up is the most important period for a person in terms of understanding the outside world and establishing their personalities. Their personalities and abilities are mainly cultivated through family experiences. Children spend most of their time with the family members, so they are influenced by them and form their own outlooks on the world, which may eventually influence their personal development in the future (Zhang and Hummert, 2001). With parents' sensitive, responsive, and predictable care, children develop the skills they need to survive the harsh competition in society. Parent-child relationships have a powerful effect on children's emotional well-being, their problem-solving abilities, and future capacity for establishing relationships (Youniss and Smollar, 1985). However, conflict is unavoidable in all types of relationships (Fisher and Steven, 2004). The parent-child relationship is not an exception, and the conflict between parents and their children is always regarded as an important social issue.

This part of the thesis mainly focuses on the Chinese parent-child relationship from the perspective of cultural values, analysing how children from traditional cultural backgrounds cope with family issues and how parent-centred family values change under the dual influence of Chinese traditional values and modern progressive

thought. It aims to answer the research question on how young women's experiences are shaped by Chinese traditional social patterns, cultural backgrounds, a unique political landscape and an inherent attachment to family values.

1. Family and Education

Many parents misunderstand children's education (Bian, 2005). Instead of appreciating their children, they can itch to over-amplify their weaknesses, or even worse, they compare the strengths of others' children with the weaknesses of their own in every respect (Dumlao and Renee, 2000). In fact, children need encouragement, recognition and appreciation. Parents intend to prod their children into action by taking other children as examples for their own children, but this leads to children's loss of confidence and collapse, resulting in inferiority complexes (Hao and Du, 2011). Interviews with participants Grace and Betty revealed shocking details (face-to-face interview, September 2014).

Wenjun: How is your relationship with your parents?

Grace: Well, it's difficult to answer. Complicated.

Wenjun: Do you mean you have conflicts or disagreements with your parents?

Grace: Yes...

Wenjun: How does it happen?

Grace: When a bunch of mothers gather together, they will most likely talk about their children. Sometimes, the parents compare their kids, even in front of them. This kind of behaviour is really hurtful to the children. But our parents believe it motivates us. Every time when I take part in an exam, my parents like to ask me about my friends' scores. I don't think it is right to compare their scores with mine. Even at home, I am always being compared with my sister in all aspects. For example, I am taller than my sister, but I am fatter than her. I hate being told to lose weight all the time. Just a few days ago, my parents and I had a quarrel. They told me that one neighbour's son had a good academic performance in the university, and then got the chance to study abroad. This news was widespread in our community. The boy's parents were very proud of

him, and other neighbours were very envious of them. Then, my mother said that if I can get the opportunity for further study, she would be very happy. I felt so sad when I heard this, and I shouted that I hated being compared with others. My parents are very stubborn (deep sigh); they always believe that their words are right. When they make some obvious mistakes, they hardly ever admit that and never apologise to me. This was just the same. After the conflict, we lived just the same way as before, like nothing happened.

The relationship between Grace and her parents is very typical in Chinese families. Chinese families are often dominated by Confucian ideas, which mean a child has obligations to the entire family. Chinese parents want their children to have a bright future, not only for their children's own good, but also for the honour they can bring to the family. Grace's parents may feel they are losing face if their daughter is not behaving well, and so they find some excellent model for Grace to follow. Grace suffers a lot, then quarrels with them. In this case, Grace adopted the competing style first, but this did not work for her parents. Finally, all the family members pretended that nothing had happened in order to maintain a harmonious relationship.

When Grace talked about weight-loss, I tried to discuss this interesting topic in detail. A survey shows that most Chinese people believe losing weight is one of the best ways to demonstrate their beauty and confidence in life (Wang, 2013). There are many reasons why people particularly care about weight and often try to lose it. In China, the aesthetic standards that slim people seem to be more beautiful hold a vital position in most people's views when appreciating people due to their appearance (Sun et al., 2013). When we watch TV, there are very many beautiful models, wearing

beautiful dresses with their skinny bodies; this sends out the message that, if you are skinny, you'll look gorgeous just like them.

Women are constantly trying to 'slim down'. The patriarchal standards mean that women ignore and become numbed to this phenomenon, lacking judgement and critical consciousness, and objectively accepting and maintaining this standard.

This phenomenon is evident in the group interviews with participants (Group interview, October 2014).

Anna: I just want to be thin. I lose weight because I want to be slim. It's popular now. How ugly it is to be fat, even though my boyfriend always says I don't need to lose weight. In fact, I know, he still likes skinny girls; his ex-girlfriends were very skinny.... So, I quietly lost weight without telling him, and then gave him a surprise.

Candy: Let me give you an example of a successful diet. My cousin, after losing weight, she became very beautiful, and then married my current brother-in-law; he is a rich man; now her life is very happy.

Anna: Yes, I agree. I lost weight when I was a kid. Didn't you find out? At that time, it was my mother who first found me fat, and then she began to control my diet. Then I lost a little weight. If I kept getting fatter, I would have become a little fat girl.

Grace: I don't agree. I think as long as I'm healthy, why should I care so much about my weight?

Daisy: I think it's better to be thin. Nowadays, when you're looking for a job, the skinny and beautiful girls are more popular and find it easier to find a job. That's what our school sisters are all like. For work and for ourselves, we need to lose weight.

Emma: No one is forcing me to lose weight, but I want to stay slim, just to be more perfect.

Daisy: Yeah, I would envy those models in magazines. Why do they have such a good figure? My ideal body shape is thin and bony...

The culture of slenderness pervades the women participants' thinking, making them feel it is right and causing them to want to reshape themselves according to the requirements of the culture. For a long time, men have been dominant in society,

and the definition of a woman's body as a whole is defined from the perspective of men in the ruling class (Song et al., 2000). Even in such an open and developed modern society, men always hold the power of domination, and the development of aesthetics and requirements for women's bodies follow the male vision (Dong, 2016). After a long period of development, society has gradually produced such ideas as 'young and beautiful girls are more popular with boys', 'beautiful girls are more likely to find jobs', and so on. Therefore, a general conclusion is drawn: influenced by traditional culture and influenced by both parents and the media, women, especially modern women, lose weight in order to please men; this demonstrates a lack of self-awareness of women, a kind of behaviour which submits to traditional culture. Grace was extremely disgusted with her father's request; she even expressed it with hate. However, she eventually chose to remain silent, with no real sense of resistance. Individuals cannot contend with the whole society, and the influence of the social environment on people is far beyond the individual's self-control. Individual weight loss seems to be an individual behaviour, people can make independent choices, and can lose or not lose weight. However, in this society with thin being representative of beauty, for a fat person or a person whose body does not meet the requirements, the psychological pressure from the outside world is often enormous; even if someone does not need to lose weight herself, she will be forced to lose weight by social pressures.

There is a generation gap between Chinese children and parents. Children are not willing to tell their thoughts to their parents. And, similarly, parents do not want to

share their thoughts with their children. When it is necessary for the family to make a vital decision, children are not allowed to express any opinions. They are just told the final decisions (Zhang, 2009).

Many parents only care about their children's academic records, whether their children can be admitted to renowned high schools or universities, and their children's physical condition, etc., but they ignore the children's mental health, thoughts and personalities (Zhong and Wu, 2007). However, what children really need is precisely what they ignore.

Betty once said to me:

My parents don't care about me! What they really care about is my school record! When I go back home, my parents always ask: 'Is your homework finished? How many points did you get in the exam? Other than that, they're not interested in what I say.

Why did Betty say this? What was the relationship between her and her family like? It would be important to consider what Betty was going through in life for more specific reasons (face-to-face interview, September 2014).

Betty: My father is the master of our family and all the family members should show him respect. As he is a very serious person, I have been afraid of him since childhood. No matter what my father asked me to do, I never dared to say no. When I was a pupil, most of the children my age could watch cartoons and TV series before they did their homework, but this was forbidden in my home. I was required to do homework first and then go to bed directly. I still remember that once I hit a problem with my mathematics homework and I asked my father to help me. But when he found the question was simple, he was very angry and he criticised me as an idiot. I felt very sad because I was deeply hurt by him. I never asked for his help when I had problems in my homework after that. Due to the deep influence of my father, I became a very introverted person with an inferiority complex and few friends, and it is difficult for me to change the status quo. I am now 22 years old, but every time my father and I have conflicts, I have no choice but to obey him.

Betty's family is another traditional Chinese family in that her father is the master of the household. Chinese society puts great emphasis on hierarchy and filial piety, which gives parents power over their children in family relations. The way Betty's father treated her is a kind of domestic violence. The root cause of this problem is the ideology of gender discrimination and the social power structure of patriarchy (Zhang and Hummert, 2001; Zhang, 2007). Parents who have similar approaches to family education to Betty's father generally demand too much of their children. Once their children fail to meet their requirements, they scold at the least, and beat them at worst. This kind of education mode, subscribing to the opinion 'spare the rod and spoil the child', will gradually distort the child's psychology and invisibly form a distorted character (Zhai and Hu, 2015).

Whether Betty's story involves domestic violence or not, I think traditional family culture provides a breeding ground for domestic violence. From the perspective of the concept of the traditional Chinese family, family ethics of 'respect for seniority' and 'subordination of female to male' tolerate the occurrence of this phenomenon. There is a great disparity in power between Betty and her father. This contrast, first of all, shows the gap in status in family life. Influenced by the traditional Chinese family culture of filial piety; fathers and elders are supreme and inviolable, always in a dominant position, while the younger generation is always in a submissive and less-dominant position. In Betty's family, this traditional culture has gone to extremes, over-emphasising the status and authority of the elders, extending the gap between father and daughter beyond its limits, leading to the situation that Betty's

human rights in the family cannot be effectively guaranteed. At the same time, under the strict restraint of the patriarchal family, children will show such behavioural tendencies as obedience and caution. This severe restraint and cold family relationship created Betty's low family status. When she began to develop herself, her wishes and feelings were often not respected and realised, resulting in frustration, which, to a large extent, would affect her personality characteristics in adulthood.

In addition, there are misunderstandings among Chinese parents in terms of education concepts regarding their children: from a personal perspective, the 'School Record Rush' and 'Score Rush' phenomenon leads most parents to believe that the focus of education is on academic achievements (Peng, 2012); some of them are keen on face-saving (Chen, 2013) and believe that only children with high scores can show how good and unique their education is; the success of a family education is also determined by the child's academic record. A child is judged by their academic record; test score determines everything. From the perspective of the whole family, some parents want to change the family's destiny and pin their hopes on their children. For them, the most important thing is to study hard, to be admitted to a prestigious university, and some children even hold the expectations of generations. These parents believe that a child's academic record indicates their future development and destiny to some extent (Bian, 2005). Especially for children from rural families like Betty, parents have infused their children with the idea that only

through great academic achievements can they have a good future, as well as find a good job and live a well-off life.

In traditional Chinese-style families, parents have absolute power to enforce everything about their children (Gove et al., 2012). For example, do parents ask for advice from their children when it comes to their children's rights? When there is a dispute in the family, parents are always accustomed to making the decisions for their children with the simple attitude 'I did it all for you', no matter what the reasons. The result of these behaviours is to stifle the child's democratic consciousness and make them admit to a false sense that power can overcome everything (Chen, 2006).

Parents are the closest to their children. But the fact is that more and more children don't trust their parents; they are not willing to share their innermost thoughts and feelings with them. Their independent consciousness and self-awareness begins to strengthen and they try to break away from their parents' restraint and discipline (Hao and Du, 2011). When I interviewed my participants about the development of modern technology, such as the internet and mobile phones, I was deeply interested in the discussion of smartphone use as a means of breaking away. As a smartphone is so important, more and more students count on it a great deal; how to appropriately use smartphones has been a hot issue in recent years.

Never-Give-Up: I am fond of fiddling with my iPhone, because it is an important channel for my friends for me. We always share something interesting on the WeChat network, such as beautiful pictures, funny videos and short passages with profound meaning and so on. I firmly believe that it can strengthen our friendship through the communication on the network. It feels that every day is colourful and significant. Meanwhile, I enjoy playing mobile games, because I

always forget the annoyances when I play. My mum is opposed to my phone-playing habits. At first, she tried to persuade me, then, she became more and more angry. Finally, she expropriated my iPhone. I became so depressed that I argued with her as she had cut off contact with my friends. More important, I was unable to understand why she didn't respect me (WeChat interview October, 2016).

The younger generation desire their parents' understanding, and want them to know their thoughts, interests and emotions, so as to understand and support their choices and pursuits. Unfortunately, many parents don't understand. They only care about their children's routine life and school records, but don't understand their rich inner world. Once upon a time, parents peeped into their children's diaries or letters, eavesdropped on their children's phone calls, checked out their smartphones, and spied on them in all respects (Zhai and Hu, 2015). From their childhood, parents are in charge of everything, taking full control of their children's lives. I wonder, is it possible that such a family life leaves no lasting damage on the children's minds? Why do Chinese parents distrust their children so much?

In this case, Never-Give-Up's mum expropriated her mobile since she believed her daughter wasted a lot of time on it every day. Then, a conflict erupted and Never-Give-Up argued with her mum. This is, however, an extreme solution, but the lesson is indeed thought-provoking. This is a kind of possession by parents. Given their rights, parents can effectively order their children about and dictate their actions.

Considering Never-Give-Up's current situation, she urgently needs to contact the outside world through her mobile phone to get information about LGBT groups. A survey (Lv et al., 2010) on the mental health of LGBT people showed that 67% of

them felt 'very lonely' and 63% felt quite depressed. More than half of LGBT people have felt painfully and seriously affected in their lives and work because they are not understood. Although people are more tolerant than before, the influence of traditional factors cannot be eradicated overnight. For LGBT groups, they also need social interaction and social identity. Before the advent of the internet and smartphones, despite the growing diversity of mass media reporting LGBT content, LGBT groups were only the subject of discussion (Sun, 2012). Traditional mass media in China seldom pays attention to the real lives of LGBT groups, and they seldom express their inner thoughts to society. The development of the internet and the emergence of smartphones has become an extremely important channel for LGBT groups to obtain and publish relevant information. A study on LGBT media voice rights (Yu, 2016) shows that 88.6% of participants use computers, mobile phones and other network media to obtain LGBT information. Through smartphones, LGBT groups can choose to disseminate personal or group information anonymously or using real names, and have the most direct and in-depth interpersonal communication with a vast number of netizens.

Never-Give-Up's mother is very resolute in her attitude, so to speak, and totally unconcerned. This also reflects the traditional thinking of Chinese families; parents always hope that their children will carry on the family line. Parents are often one of the biggest obstacles to LGBT groups. It is totally unacceptable for many parents that LGBTs fail to fulfil their expectations of continuity of the family line, and even form LGBT families. According to a survey (Lv et al.,2010), when parents know that their

children are LGBT, nearly 70% of them will feel disgraced, annoyed, or disappointed with their children, and even have the idea of breaking off the relationship. Never-Give-Up once told to me, 'My parents were very resolute in their opposition. She didn't understand me at all. She even thought I had a mental illness and took me to a psychiatrist.' LGBT groups face many difficulties in current society. Family acceptance can enable them to live freely; luckily, the attitudes of Never-Give-Up's mother have begun to change, and this will be discussed further in the LGBT chapter. Since the reform and opening up,⁵ China's economy, politics, culture, society and other fields have been developing rapidly. The living and development environment of the parents of the previous generation are different from those of the children of the next generation, which leads to great differences in knowledge, experience, values and lifestyle:

The new generation of young people is obviously more competitive and risk-conscious, adventurous and innovative than the previous generation. They are able to respond quickly to social changes, while the previous generation of parents is accustomed to living in the traditional environment and cannot adapt quickly to the changed society (Chen, 2010, p.24).

The emergence of divergences between parents and children has dramatic effects on children's development and socialisation.

2. Families and Marriage

In the Chinese family, married life is another one of the important embodiments of traditional culture and one of the most vital things during one's life in terms of

⁵ The Chinese economic reform (known as reform and opening-up) refers to the programme of economic reforms termed "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" and "socialist market economy" and started in December 1978 (Brandt, 2008).

traditional Chinese values (Liang et al., 2014). In Chinese society, marriage is not just a personal thing, but it is related to the couple's families, morality and reputation as well as responsibility (Chen, 2007). The couple aims to build a harmonious union, sometimes requiring them to abandon their own desires. In a Chinese family, members learn to tolerate, to forgive, to adapt to others, which can be seen as a huge burden, making modern young people frightened of marriage. Also, the cost of marriage is beyond many families' means (Tian, 2008; Zhao, 2010). Traditionally, marriage in China was basically established through parents, relatives or friends' introductions. Even in the late 1970s, people could not accept free love, so that the problem of love and marriage rarely attracted attention (He, 2018). As the social environment changed, people's attitudes towards love and marriage became more and more open. At different times, young people hold different values. In the present day, age, height, education degree, profession, appearance, health condition and love experience have become the standards (Chen, 2001).

Therefore, what are the parent's attitudes towards their children's love (marriage), how do family structure and parents' attitudes impact on young women's marriage attitudes?

Referring to marriage attitudes, when it comes to students in China, most of them use implicit words to talk with their parents about their romantic relationship. Just one participant mentioned that they believed in their parents unconditionally. 'Parents are experienced and won't hurt their child', **Emma** said: 'If parents think something is wrong, it must be inappropriate.' She added, 'I trust my mom. It is she

who has bought me up from a baby girl. She cares for me, loves me, and respects every choice I make.'

There are also some conflicts between parents and children in the selection of a suitable mate.

Betty: Stability is important for my parents. A house and car must be the first considerable condition for them. To be fair, a house is a necessity for living. But more Chinese relatives and neighbours care about whether others buy an apartment and how large it is, and whether others buy a car and how much money it costs. They are too superficial. For me, feelings are important.

At the same time, she mentioned that she would obey her parents if they arranged for her to meet someone, so that she could save face for her parents with the aim of securing a harmonious relationship with them. Harmony is the ultimate goal of Chinese communication. It is probably because building good relations and face saving. Each member of society endeavours to develop and maintain a harmonious relationship through establishing relationships and mutual dependence. What's more, mutual dependency requires people to save face for themselves and earn face for others (Goffman, 1955; Chen, 2013).

The ancient Chinese marriage system stressed how 'the marriage was decided by the command of parents and words of a go-between' and the marriage of the children was dominated by the parents. With people's unremitting efforts and the overthrow of feudal rule, freedom emerged in China, love and marriage began to become independence, and free love suddenly became mainstream for marriage (Dong and Yao, 2011). However, with the rapid development of information technology, people's freedom in marriage and love is gradually declining at present. Many young

people who have reached marriageable age have not found a life partner for various reasons, for example, stressful work and small social circles (Zhang, 2016). However, parents who have been influenced by traditional ideas are eager to hope that their children can find their other half and live a happy life. So, they begin to intervene in their children's marriage and love life, asking questions about when they are going to marry, who, how, etc., in order to get involved. In today's society, marriage is no longer about being deeply attracted and attached to each other, and many marriages are marriage for marriage's sake.

Never-Give-Up: My mother thinks that girls don't need to be hard to please and too excellent. If I don't marry before I'm 30 years old, there must be something wrong with me.

In recent years, 'leftover women' have aroused widespread concern in China. Although there is not a distinct definition of 'leftover women', generally speaking, pretty unmarried women with a high educational background, high income and high IQ, and aged over 30 years old, are called leftover women. The term 'leftover women' is derogatory implying that since no one is marrying them, they are in some sense abnormal. It seems that they are aliens out of the normal orbit of life. Since industrialisation, people's age at first marriage has increased generally in the early industrialised countries (Wang, 2010). With the development of urbanisation in China and the increase in years of education, people will inevitably delay marriage.

Never-Give-Up: I am a single girl. I am not alone and I am not wrong for my choices. One can be happy without a man, and we shouldn't be punished for our choices in life when we have not wronged others. I am opposed to the term 'leftover woman', the idea that 'leftover women' need to try harder.

The concept of 'leftover women' is the result of the definition in male discourse. The public still evaluates women according to male standards. Older unmarried women who do not conform to the aesthetic standards of male-dominated society are defined as 'leftover women'. The 'leftover' is a woman selected by the subject as the object (Fincher, 2014). Women who are independent, self-confident and unwilling to depend on marriage or men and choose to be single voluntarily are also put in an objectified position. The main point of postmodern feminism is to emphasise women's self-awareness and their subjectivity; reconstruct female subjectivity; stress the concept of equality between men and women based on gender differences; advocate full cooperation with men and establish a harmonious partnership in order to achieve the liberation of women (Nicholson, 1989; Aronson, 2003). The emergence of 'leftover women' reflects the contradictions and conflicts between self-consciousness that women are waking up to and the traditional concepts of love and marriage in postmodern society (Feng and Li, 2011).

Due to the influence of the traditional marriage concept (a man should get married on coming of age, and so should a girl), unmarried women above the average age for marriage suffer enormous pressure from family and relatives. Many parents expect them to compete with men; therefore, they have to face high academic and career expectations. But, when they get older and excel in their careers, they are still expected to fulfil family duties to get married, bear a child and oversee a household.

'My parents had very high expectations of me when I was little. They said I should compete with boys. Now they always say nobody is going to marry me because I'm

too competitive', says **Fiona**, who used to be a bank clerk and was recently promoted in a local trading company. 'That is very confusing and contradicts what they taught me.'

Her parents were not happy about her promotion. In fact, she felt denigrated. They suggested the biggest reason for promotion was the fact that she is unmarried, convincing her boss that she would spend more time on work than her peers, who are mostly switching their focus to family life.

'It was heartbreaking to hear this from my parents,' **Fiona** says. 'I understand their concerns, but they undervalue me and consider my work capability to be zero. That's not comforting when I face other work obstacles.'

In a culture like China's, where mainstream society continues to attach great importance to establishing a family, most people would expect women to marry early, and, more importantly, to give birth to a child to carry on the family name, Li Yinhe, a renowned sexologist, says:

The appearance of 'leftover women' in China undoubtedly breaks the traditional concept of marriage to a certain extent. Although the so-called "leftover woman" itself reflects the disregard of the subjectivity of women in patriarchal society, the emergence of high-quality unmarried urban women also illustrates the awakening of their subject consciousness. (Li, 2005, p.2-3)

Chinese parents have a strong desire to control their children, and they would do anything for them. Therefore, they hold high hopes for their children. However, it is paramount to learn to return the children's lives to themselves. In fact, children's needs are simple; namely, they do not want their parents to make any decisions for them, including marriage.

The concept of 'leftover women' has been constructed by male-dominated culture. However, with the change in the times and the progress of society, more and more members of society show tolerance and pluralism in the postmodern spirit (Yang, 2004). Postmodern feminism advocates that we should reconstruct the female subject based on the real experience of women themselves, and arouse the self-awareness and subjective consciousness of women as complete human beings (Hekman, 1991). The phenomenon of 'leftover women' occurs under the background of urbanisation and industrialisation, which reflects that women are ridding themselves of the dependency on men. 'Leftover women' generally have a higher education and are economically independent. Therefore, they have relatively independent personalities (Leung, 2003). They are reluctant to accept the traditional concept of marriage decided upon by their parents. They do not want to regard marriage as the sole goal of their lives. They hope to choose their preferred lifestyle based on their own will.

I think appearance is OK as long as it pleases the eye. My boyfriend is only a junior college student, but I do not care. His character is good, motivated, and his ability is also very strong. He is always working hard and, although he has no money, I firmly believe that our life will get better and better (**Candy**).

Modern women's social and economic status has been improved unprecedentedly; they are both economically and mentally more independent than traditional women, which means more and more women no longer need to rely on marriage to obtain security, thus reducing women's dependence on men and marriage, so that they have more and more freedom of choice (Liu, 2011). More and more women like

Fiona and Candy are paying more attention to maintaining a high quality of life and are unwilling to tie themselves down with marriage and children. This is also in line with the fact that postmodern feminism no longer pursues a fixed and unified standard, but begins with the basis of gender differences to seek equality in differences, highlights individuality and independence in equality, and enables women to find the most suitable of many different routes in the process of becoming women, which is in line with the current social development trend (Yang, 2004).

The concept of love and marriage stems from the ethical culture of traditional society, and the unspoken rules stemming from people's feelings that 'men enjoy higher status than women'. New women, with higher education, decent jobs, and high emotional demands, have their own good conditions that give them the chance of independence and access to better situations. They do not need to be dependent on others, or change their economic situation and escape from intense social competition through marriage.

3. Family and Leaving China

In recent years, with the improvement in people's living standards, the development of education and policy relaxation, more and more parents have been choosing to send their children abroad for education. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Education, the total number of Chinese students studying abroad in 2013 was 413,900, an increase of 3.58% compared to 2012 (Qiao, 2016). Why do so many parents choose to send their children abroad to study? What are the problems with

China's current education system? Is the current content of education not sufficient to meet the needs of students and parents? These are questions that deserve our deep consideration.

Studying in England was definitely one of the turning points of my life, and I am really grateful that my parents gave their support to me. My 'new life' began on the 4th of July, 2009. Everything seemed very difficult at first, especially with my language barriers. Language was a big barrier. I could not understand the lecturer well; I had to work ten times harder to understand the academic literature. To be honest that was when I realised how little my knowledge was. And yes, I did cry; in fact I have cried a lot. However, I understood that I had to overcome these difficulties and now I am proud to say that I have the ability to fit and settle in my current situation and have made an amazing group of friends.

-----Wenjun's diary

According to the Ministry of Education, China sent 540,000 students to study abroad in 2016, and the trend is increasing (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2017). Chinese students have been the biggest group of foreign nationals at UK universities for several years (Miao et al., 2018). With the development of China's economy and society, the more prosperous 'post-70s' and 'post-80s' have become the main drivers of Chinese parents, and more resources and energy have been devoted to children's education. When faced with a variety of educational resources, people appear to have many choices, they are mentioned in the list: Study, examination, scores, the upsurge of studying abroad, the upsurge of housing in school districts, and the upsurge of extra-curricular tutoring classes. Chinese parents who have the advantage of a good education and income want their children to have the freedom to learn and the freedom to choose (Yang and He, 2014), but how many schools can meet this need in reality? Chinese parents want their children to be rid of the educational

model that is based on their academic performance, but how can they get rid of the educational model based on the results of the gaokao? What are their motives for doing this? What facts would they take into consideration in sending their children abroad?

The Motivation for Studying Abroad

With the popularisation and internationalisation of higher education in China, studying abroad has been increasingly accepted by students and parents, and has become the pursuit and dream for many university students. Studying abroad has become one of the three main choices for graduates on a parallel basis with employment and postgraduate study. According to statistics, since 2011, China has ranked first in the world in terms of the number of students studying abroad, and is currently the world's largest source of foreign students (Shan and Zhou, 2015). However, to study abroad involves a lot of costs in terms of money and energy; so, what is the attraction of study abroad for students and parents?

I Hope My Children Will Receive a Better Education

Nowadays, many parents are also changing their attitudes. They do not want their children to bear so much pressure and put all their energies into traditional studying (Yang and He, 2014). Therefore, parents prefer to trust foreign educational methods and concepts (Wang and Liu, 2014).

The popularity of higher education has greatly expanded university education, giving more opportunities to those who want to learn, but blind expansion has led to a

severe reduction in the standard of university education (Li, 2016). Some National Key Universities aim at 'Building World-Class Universities', the admission criteria are set very high in advance and, no matter whether they have reached the international advanced education level, many students fail to enter key universities in China, but do successfully apply to famous universities abroad (Zhang, 2007). Therefore, parents tend to agree with foreign educational ideas and resources, hoping their children can learn in a better teaching environment. In China, gaokao is one of the important indicators to measure students' future development. More and more students who fail in the gaokao choose to study abroad (Liu et al., 2014), and parents are more willing to do their best to send their children abroad for education. Parents also believe that, instead of spending four years on a regular undergraduate course and facing difficulties in getting a job after graduation, they might as well spend more money on studying abroad and at least learn a foreign language (Liu, 2016).

Chinese Parents' Conformity

Many students and their parents lack a correct and objective understanding of studying abroad, and are influenced, encouraged and compared by the people around them. Chinese parents, in particular, have always had the mentality of 'expecting their children to become *dragons* (be successful)' (Zhai and Hu, 2015; Peng, 2012). Parents hope that their children's academic level and future life can be at a higher level. They hope that their children can change their life course through knowledge, and then glorify their whole family. At the same time, the success of children can become the object of parents' comparison. This kind of comparison

mentality, though inappropriate, is deeply rooted in human nature, so parents always want their children to be the best. Because Chinese society attaches great importance to 'returned students', parents hope to make their children stand out and achieve their expectations this way (Miao et al., 2018, p.20).

What are the benefits of studying abroad? (Group interview in September 2014 and WeChat interview in August 2017)

Wenjun: I think the reason why I decided to study abroad without hesitation was not that I knew what I wanted, but that I knew what I didn't want. Perhaps foreign countries are not as good as many people think. But at least I'm going to see a bigger world, a bigger territory, instead of 'sit idle as the frog in a well'. So, what do you think of studying abroad?

Anna: I have a relative who told me that she is going to send her daughter to a high school in the UK for British education. The relative said that most of the students in her daughter's private school had good financial resources, and many parents began to prepare for studying abroad when their children were in primary school. Since almost all the children's classmates go abroad to study, she would be very sorry for her daughter if she didn't send her to a foreign school.

Emma: That's right. My mother's colleague's daughter was sent to England to study in her second year of primary school.

Candy: A colleague of my father encouraged his daughter to study in Australia in order to escape the severe gaokao. I heard that he had a good business friend who settled there and could act as guardian to his daughter. He felt that he did not have the opportunity to study abroad when he was young. Now that the conditions are good, he must send his daughter to study abroad. He thought it would be a good idea to send his daughter abroad to study to broaden her horizons in that environment, even if she didn't learn anything, and she was taken care of by someone. However, his daughter felt that her father had no confidence in her, that he was not sure whether his daughter would be able to enter a famous university, so he decided to let her go abroad. This is an escape from the gaokao.

In China, studying abroad is the children's dream, but also the parents' expectation.

Whether in primary school, middle school or university, parents send their children abroad to study by various means. A few decades ago, it was not easy for Chinese

students to study abroad. But now, studying abroad has become more and more common. In fact, to study abroad is to study in another place. The only difference is that the place of study is abroad, even further away from home.

As far as I know, many parents send their children abroad to study, mainly considering the advantages of local education, healthcare and pension, to prepare for future immigration. Some families adopt the strategy of letting their children go abroad to study, waiting for the right time for the student to emigrate at first, and then for the other family members to emigrate. Workers with higher education qualifications are more likely to successfully apply for permanent residence. In this process, students move from school to society and gradually integrate into the local society. However, with the change of immigration policies in various countries, this approach is full of many unknowns.

-----Wenjun's diary

Wenjun: Have you heard that Emma will study abroad after graduation next year? (Group interview, September 2014 and WeChat interview, August 2017)

Daisy: Yeah.

Wenjun: What do you think of her choice?

Daisy: I kind of support her.

Wenjun: Why?

Daisy: For me, the most important reason is that, after graduation, she will have a good chance to migrate to the country for a better living environment, better freedom, democracy and human rights. She doesn't need to worry about the food quality, environmental pollution and the management of the authorities.

Wenjun: What's the biggest obstacle to studying abroad do you think?

Emma: It can be a frustrating and sometimes painful experience going to study in a foreign country, with its different language and culture.

At the beginning of my study, many participants were reluctant to talk about the topic of politics and democracy in the interviews. However, they then began to discuss democracy and freedom, which greatly surprised me. What was the reason for them to make such a change?

From primary school to university, it is all about the glorious deeds of the Communist Party of China in the textbooks on ideological and ethical education, history and

Chinese. We are forced to accept and recite some of the principles and state policies formulated by the Party. Teachers never let us have a lively debate, and no one has ever questioned its correctness. The words in those books are like a carefully embellished great truth that are full of official opinion, which really makes it impossible for the students to refute and think about it.

Even if some students have different views on it, they will not express them at first, but will think about what kind of rhetoric they can use so as to enable their words to be consistent with the great truth in all the related textbooks, because they are afraid of being laughed at, and they may think their ideas are totally unreasonable as a result. This leads to an interesting result, and we have gradually developed such a psychology that state affairs are solemn and sacred, and the principles formulated by the Party are irrefutable.

All these state affairs are not something that ordinary young people have the right to talk about and refute. Only those people in power who have a high position in society and are old enough are qualified to talk about it can do this. Young people are only entitled to be fully aware of the spirit of these state affairs. From the moment we enter school and start our learning, from primary school to university, we are rarely actively involved in political discussions, and young people are reluctant to talk openly about their ideas, especially their dissent in politics. Although most young people are dissatisfied with the system, they are helpless. Although they are not willing to be institutionalised, the benefits of institutionalisation are often quite tempting, so what they can do is to adapt to the system.

However, when these young people start to express their concerns about food safety, environmental pollution and government functions today, it is really heartening. These young people, who were born in the post-80s and post-90s, are beginning to have a comprehensive understanding of society and have the courage to express their views. They have begun to pay attention to issues about democracy and livelihood, which are closely related to themselves, because they want to improve their living conditions and quality of life, and it also indicates that these young people are constantly improving their subjective consciousness.

Emma is a very optimistic person, she told me she likes to meet with many new friends so that she can get to know different places and cultures. I still remember that, when I interviewed her for the first time in 2014, she said: 'I want to go abroad to study after university graduation.'

Wenjun: What's your aim to study abroad?

Emma: For young people, we have lots of dreams. My dream is to broaden my mind, to see different cultures. Also, I hope to learn more experiences to bring some excitement to my life.

Wenjun: Do your parents support you to study abroad?

Emma: My parents support me to study abroad very much, especially, my mother. She doesn't think I'm suited for the Chinese education system; she hopes I can do the things I like. Although I am the only child in my family, I would like myself to be independent.

Even now, I can't forget a message which Emma sent to me on the first day she came to the UK (sent on 25 September, 2015).

Emma: When I told my parents how delicious English milk was, they thought it was absolutely right to send me out.

Send the children away, not necessarily because of the acceptance of the native country, but because of dissatisfaction with the motherland. As an international student, I have been in England for more than nine years, and I realised the true meaning of these words. When a generation can't change themselves and the world around them, they want their children to go to a better place (Li, 2016). On the other hand, Chinese parents use all available resources for their children's training and education (Liu, 2016; Miao et al., 2018). The reason is simple: only in this way, can their offspring continue to make progress towards a better life. In fact, the purpose is simple: let children grow up without relying on relationships, acting according to authority's ideas, and living with various constraints and helplessness. When parents find that their children's future development track is still likely to be examination, study, graduation, work and unemployment, they begin to seek a better living environment for them.

Since the Chinese economy and people's living standards have been constantly improved, Chinese families have gained sufficient energy and resources to be invested in the education of their children, and Chinese parents have begun to have a consensus on increasing their investment in education.

In China, parents are willing to invest more in out-of-school tutoring expenses since, from the time their children start to study in primary school until they go to university, no parents are willing to let their children be left behind at the starting line. However, there is a series of problems, e.g. children have to do homework every day until midnight, take part in all kinds of interesting hobbies, attend the tutoring

classes and social activities; therefore, children are tired, and the adults' energy is drained as well. Many well-educated parents who are fully aware of the domestic educational environment have gradually come to consider that it is not a wise choice to adhere to the educational concept of pursuing the single goal of high scores. However, they are still anxious about how to choose the right path for their children. The younger generation of parents are also very worried when they are facing such a situation, so that they begin to accept the diversification of educational concepts, but they have no alternative choices in reality. They are always thinking about whether they should respect the free nature of their children, or help their children to adapt to the tough competition in society. Therefore, Chinese parents began to consider changing their concept of education, because they did not want their children to bear so much pressure and put all their energy into acquiring knowledge from textbooks. Therefore, parents began to slowly accept and choose foreign education methods and ideas. They thought studying abroad could improve their children's English language ability, and enable them to have an international educational background and expand their horizons, and enhance their independence and adaptability. So, studying abroad, and then standing out in terms of language and experience, became the first choice for middle-class families with financial resources.

Better Employment Opportunities for Children in the Future

Graduation from well-known universities is an important condition for graduates to have better careers and job opportunities. Nowadays, with the increasing number of university graduates in China, the pressure for employment is also increasing. The

difficulties of work and employment have become a real problem that troubles parents and children. In recent years, the state has adopted some special preferential and encouraging policies for returnees, while continuously opening up the market and introducing various preferential policies. This has led to a growing enthusiasm among some parents to encourage their children to study abroad, and for young people to do so. People have gradually come to realise that degrees abroad are more valuable; to start a career, you must study abroad first. Therefore, more parents will choose to send their children abroad for further study, hoping to make them more competitive in employment after returning home, and with an increased hope for their children's future living standards and quality of life.

Emma comes from a civil servant family. Her parents are well-educated, have stable jobs and a strong economic foundation. Some scholars believe that the educational level of parents is positively correlated with family income and professional status (Wang and Liu, 2014). According to Pearlin and Kohn (1966), people's class and their work experience not only affect their personality orientation and values, but the personality orientations and values shaped by these work experiences will also be brought into the family and passed on to the children, thereby affecting their values and behaviours. Parents in the civil service have often received good education, have a higher educational background and are influenced by their professional status and living environment. They have the ability and wish to send their children abroad to study.

Now, five years later, Emma has returned from abroad and become an English trainer in an overseas education agency. We keep in touch with each other through WeChat, and I still remember when we talked about her experience studying at Leeds University. She mentioned that, on the university campus, the foreign students were not alone in having come from far away. She encountered many others from overseas and made friends from all around the world.

We talked about her experiences in the UK on WeChat when she returned to China in 2017. She summarised her life experience of studying abroad:

Every foreign student is like a book. Every woman student is becoming strong: from incompetence to competent; from depending on family for everything to dealing with everything by herself; from simplicity to sophistication without going beyond the principles; whether you are walking on this road or have already passed through it, you have varying degrees of metamorphosis. I think studying abroad is to study hard practically. No one will care more about you because of who you are.

In the postmodern context, it is an inevitable trend to refer to and integrate Chinese feminism into postmodernism. Postmodernism breaks the restrictions of traditional thought and enables people, especially young women, to have a wider horizon. At present, Chinese women have shifted from the goal of striving for independent status, gender liberation and equal rights to not only achieving formal equality between men and women, but also achieving substantive equality between men and women, thus very actively promoting the participation of women in social life. At the same time, because women are increasingly highly skilled and educated, and they also constantly improve their ability to think independently, they will have higher requirements for themselves and their future lives. They think that studying abroad

can broaden their horizons and allow them to obtain advanced cultural ideas. Therefore, they start looking for an independent state of existence; they have practical life plans and ideals and pursuits other than those attached to the family. Studying abroad also lays the foundation for them to pursue independence and freedom.

It must be noted that most families in China are salaried. Although they have the will to send their children abroad to study, not every family has the financial resources. Of the many participants, only Emma chose to study abroad, which means that the financial circumstances of the family is still an important factor affecting study abroad.

In short, it is understandable that parents expect their children to be successful, but I think parents should realise that studying abroad only represents an increasing chance for everyone to receive education. For every student and family planning to study abroad, the experience of studying abroad has become more and more common. It is no longer the key to job hunting and future success. Parents should adopt a more rational attitude and make a full assessment of their expectations of their children and their own conditions, so as to choose the most appropriate route for education.

4. Family and Employment

In the process of children's growth, parents impose on them more and more challenging expectations and make greater investment. Students' choice of major,

motivation to study and direction of employment are influenced by many family factors, such as parents' expectations, family environment and so on (Kuang, 2007). My study shows that parents' recognition of their children's employment, going to school and going abroad and their expectations of future employment competition have an important impact on their children's attitude towards choosing jobs. With the transformation of Chinese higher education from 'elite education' to 'mass education', the difficulty of employment has become an increasingly prominent social problem (Xian and Guan, 2010). The employment problem of university graduates has become a hot social issue, which has attracted widespread social attention. In China, graduate employment is not only a choice of career, but also a matter of family choice (Feng and Ye, 2008). Among the many factors that cause the phenomenon of 'employment difficulty', is the increasingly prominent influence of family factors. In particular, family values, parents' occupation and education level, family economic level and family social relations have more and more influence on graduates' career choice (He, 2008).

With the development of the social economy and the emergence of new occupations, the concept of employment among young people is changing. When job hunting, some people are pursuing challenges, do not like stability and traditional occupations, and the differences in the concept of employment between parents and young people is also growing. So, what exactly is the employment gap between young people and their parents? Why do such differences exist? (WeChat interview, August 2017)

Betty: I asked my parents what a good job is. They told me that high income is an important consideration. However, if there is a gap between high income and stability, they would choose stability. In the minds of parents, the child has to find a job with stability. A job, even if it pays more than 10,000 yuan a month (so-called high salary), if the job is unstable and may end in a few months, parents would feel that the job is unreliable. If it's another job, and the salary is only 3,000 yuan (so-called low salary), as long as they have a stable income, they prefer to choose it.

Betty adds: My parents always think that, after graduation, I should find a job as soon as possible. After I find a job, I should make money for a down payment on an apartment, then date somebody, get married, carry on the family line and give birth to their grandchildren as soon as possible.

Betty from Jiangxi was a student majoring in computer application technology at Tianjin Normal University. She admitted that her parents did not support her choice of profession, and that she and her parents had a big disagreement over it. Her parents think that a good marriage is better than a good job. Even if she wants to work, their greatest hope is that she can find a stable and undemanding job. Betty became a middle school teacher in her hometown after graduation. Recently, she rejected the idea of a blind date arranged by her parents and she told me she would prefer to find love herself instead of listening to her parents with regard to the arrangement.

For parents, the most fundamental measure of stability is not to be unemployed. The expectation of many Chinese parents for their children is that everything will go ahead steadily, step by step, and they will lead a stable life.

With the improvement of education and the emergence of various new occupations, young people are more commonly pursuing challenges in job-hunting; they do not like stable and traditional occupations, and the difference between parents'

employment view and that of the next generation is also growing (face-to-face interview, October 2014 and WeChat interview, August 2017).

Fiona: My parents always wanted me to be a bank clerk. They don't think there will be any payback in this job. And I won't be laid off. As long as I abide by the law and discipline, I can usually stay in the company for a lifetime and get a high salary after retirement. After graduation, I became a bank clerk at my parents' request, but then I found out that I spent my whole day doing the same boring work for a poor salary. I am tired of doing that boring work. I hope to find a job that is pleasant, fast-paced and has room for improvement.

After two years of work, Fiona moved to a trading company as a sales manager. She was satisfied with her choice, and felt that she had been rewarded for showing her value to the maximum extent. However, her parents think that she should find a suitable boyfriend and marry as soon as possible. This sales job is not suitable for a girl; they consider it unstable. Her parents are worried and anxious about Fiona's future.

A large proportion of graduates do not want to stay at home all their lives. Many of them are eager to go to other places or even to big cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou or Shenzhen to find opportunities. But almost all parents all over the world want their children to be around when they are looking for a job; they think it's better to work near home. For this reason, parents can even use family connections to arrange work for their children. In some cases, efforts have been made to disrupt their children's job opportunities in remote places and even to cause conflicts with their children.

Daisy: My hometown is Lanxi, a beautiful town in Zhejiang Province. Although my hometown is beautiful, I would prefer to work in big cities after graduation, but my parents think that I should find a stable job in my hometown and stay

with them. I'm actually quite contradictory and don't know how to choose.
(October 2014)

At the first interview session with Daisy, she revealed that she wanted to work in Shanghai after graduation. Despite the obstacles from her family, her parents' opinions did not change her mind. In the following interview, I learned that, after graduating from university, she found a job in a financial institution in Shanghai. Although she was busy with her work and was under great pressure, she was very happy. After two years of work, she moved to a foreign bank, and her salary and position improved significantly. But her parents always ask her to go back to work in her hometown and get a boyfriend and marry as soon as possible.

Daisy: My father is an ordinary worker. My mother takes care of everything at home and also needs to work in the fields. My family does not have any good social relations and resources to help me find a satisfactory job in my hometown. If I go back, I have to start from scratch. Is it still unknown whether I can reach the present living standard. Why should I go back? (August, 2017)

As children, do we feel indescribable pressure about everything that our parents bring to us? So, do parents really understand why their children leave their hometown?

If children really get into a good university, the ideal school, as their parents expect, their parents are happy and the children are happy also. They feel that they have finally met everyone's expectations; they can finally take a break and relax. But time passes quickly. As soon as they have graduated, the familiar and intense pressure immediately increases again. Why? This is because of employment. Because it's really not easy to find a good job. Why do so many graduates leave their hometown to find work? Part of the reason, of course, is that they've found a professional work

situation in another place or they really like a particular job. Many people still choose to move around the world without finding a suitable job. They are unwilling to come back to their home to find a job. Why?

Daisy: Because, in other places, at least I can relax. Although there is pressure in other places, at least it won't make me breathless. In my hometown, I will find many of my classmates. Even those who abandoned school in junior high have a stable job or a considerable income already. Because they started work early, many people are also good at social relationships. In this context, of course, I would rather work somewhere else than go back and compare [myself] with them. I'm even worse than them. It's a disgrace to me and my family. (August, 2017)

When I was conducting an interview on the theme of employment, I once asked my interviewees what was the best job for them, and the vast majority of people answered: 'My dream job is one with a high income, good promotion prospects, and not far away from home.' But, for them, the 'home' here does not refer to their hometown, or the place where they grew up in the company of their parents. It refers to the place where they live now, perhaps the house they rent, or the house where they spend all their savings before they make a down payment on a house.

Few graduates from rural or small cities choose to go back to work in their hometown. Why is this, Are they unfilial? Of course not, otherwise, they would not travel back to their hometown from a great distance every year to celebrate Chinese New Year together with their parents. So, what causes this phenomenon? First of all, they are hoping to get better work opportunities and development a platform. Young people have dreams and ambitions relating to the prosperity of the city, so they generally choose to stay in big cities after they graduate from university. They don't

want to go back to their hometown, take an exam to become a civil servant or for an institution, or ask their parents to help them find a job and accept such a life when they see what how things would look when they grow old. Of course, there is another reason for this, it also means they can escape from the complex network of relationships in their hometown. Many graduates receive a lot of attention and praise from their neighbours, relatives and friends when they are admitted to a famous university. It becomes the idle gossip of their neighbours and relatives, such as 'There is a famous college student in the family of... 'and 'Oh, that child is really good.' This concern does not disappear because they leave their hometown for university; it continues to ferment to a climax before and after they graduate. There is usually no harm in these comments and concerns, and parents may feel rather proud when they hear such praise from their neighbours, but it makes the students feel a lot of pressure.

Talking about the topic of whether they should stay in a big city or go back to work in their hometown after they graduate, when we conduct a rational analysis, we find that the latter actually has more advantages. If the young graduates go back to the small cities of their hometowns, they might have greater happiness, because the prices in small cities are low; house prices are also lower, and living pressure and competition are obviously much less. However, even if many people have this idea, they dare not really act on it based on their ideas. The ideas and concepts of people in small places are always very backward and realistic. If the young graduates do not become a high-ranking official, or do not make a lot of money, their neighbours and

fellow villagers will consider them not to be successful, even though they have a high degree. Imagine if the young graduate goes back to the small city where she was born, and the praise turns to comments like, 'The university students haven't even earned much more than the youths who have just graduated from high school. It is useless to be a university student.' So, can a student who has just graduated bear this kind of talk from their neighbours and fellow villagers?

In contrast, Chinese parents often do not like their children to look for jobs in other places, especially girls living too far away from home. The reason is that the absence of children can cause parents to worry. Some parents don't think a job that's too far from home is a good one. Many graduates prefer to venture far away when they are young, in search of better job opportunities. But, parents feel more comfortable if their children work near home. However, children feel that if they can be financially independent and find a suitable job, it will be easier to establish a sense of security and have a foothold in society.

When a woman considers her career, she should start from her 'human' role more than from the gender-added identity of 'woman' (Weir, 2013). After all, being born into this relatively free society, we have the opportunity to choose, to have a more diversified choice, which represents great progress (Wang, 2001). If we were born one hundred years ago, we would encounter arranged marriages, foot-binding and lack of education. Even if we are talented, we would have no chance to develop, and our life path would be determined before we are born (Wu, 2010). A pluralistic society needs housewives as well as working women. If it is out of genuine love,

housewives can do perfectly well, and professional women also face a great risk of failure. When facing various possibilities, a girl may choose to be a housewife, be willing to be a good wife and mother, which is justifiable, but it needs to be based on self-analysis and independent thinking.

Because of the obstruction of deep-rooted traditional ideas, it is very difficult to promote complete gender equality in China. In reality, women's recruitment is highly discriminatory (Li, 2015). But this should not be used as an excuse to hide in a small home. If women give up fighting for their rights, discrimination will only get worse and worse, driving society to extremes along the road of patriarchy, and the power gained by various movements for women in modern times will probably be taken away again.

The cultural tradition of China and the realistic development stage of feminism are different from those in the West. In the Chinese context, women's rights may exist, and there may also be a respect for women's rights, but it will not rise to the theory of feminism (Zhou and Qin, 2017). Feminist rights have never been the key guiding ideology of feminism in China. Masculinity is wrong, and feminism is also wrong. Women are fighting for a position to be equal to men, instead of replacing patriarchal power. Moreover, causing a tit-for-tat situation between men and women is not good for the actual development of women. The true and harmonious relationship between men and women involves realising differentiated equality. We should focus on men's rights more in respect to certain aspects, and focus on women's rights more

in respect to other aspects, as there is actually no absolute equality at all because we cannot deny that there is really a difference between men and women.

The reference and integration of Chinese feminism within postmodernism is an inevitable trend. Its basic objective is to achieve the ultimate equality between men and women; however, we have to solve the specific problems currently existing in reality first. For example, people have a traditional stereotyped thought that men enjoy higher status than women, of the inequality between men and women before and after marriage, the low employment rate of women and so on. In the long term, we should strive to achieve goals whereby there are not obvious gender boundaries and rules in society and the family, so that everyone can develop their personality on the basis of gender equality and people will not feel suppressed by gender.

From the perspective of postmodern feminism (Hekman, 1990), equality is based on gender differences, which pays attention to the differences in individuals. Postmodern feminism believes that there is not only a difference in physiology and psychology between men and women, but there are also social and cultural differences (Leung, 2003). Therefore, both men and women can obtain a development environment suitable for their gender characteristics on the premise of the pursuit of differences.

5. Conclusion

Parents and children grow up in different ages, their living environments are different, and the education they received respectively is also different. Parents and children contact different people and encounter different things in their own life circle; therefore, there is also a difference in their minds and behaviour.

This chapter has analysed the relationship between parents and children from the perspective of interviewees, based on the interviewees' descriptions of reality in interviews. This thesis carries out an analysis of the following four aspects: family and education, family and marriage, family and leaving China, as well as family and employment, and then summarises the communication methods, principal contradictions and conflicts, and the new characteristics of parent-child relationship. The study shows that there is a series of generation gaps and contradictions existing based on traditional culture and stereotyping in the process of interviewees getting along with their parents. At the same time, the analysis also brings some new enlightenment through the interviews, and this is worthy of further discussion in this study.

Firstly, the young generation whose ideas are in a transition period from the traditional to modern have begun to have a greater sense of individual rights, and they pursue equal family relations and a free life; as a result, there is a generation gap and conflict between parents who hold traditional family concepts. Traditional Chinese parents always tend to arrange everything for their children; they intervene in their children's lives in all respects, in terms of what their children should to eat,

what their children should wear, what kind of friends their children make, who their children's idols are, how long their children can watch TV for, which kind of a tutorial class their children should attend, and even what's in their children's diaries. In the interviews, many of the interviewees said that parents often ask them to study hard so as to have a future, or their parents had often said something like: 'You must work hard, and if you don't have a good job in the future, others will look down on you.' In fact, the interviewees indicated that they wanted to realise their dreams more than just for others to see them as successful. They wanted to be able to make their own decisions without relying on others, and hoped they could handle all kinds of relationships between them and the external environment independently.

Secondly, there is a big difference between parents' concerns for their children and the expectations of the interviewees. They hoped their parents would care about them in many ways, such as giving close concern to their interpersonal communication, life skills, as well as giving guidance and feeling concern about their emotions and mental health, instead of being concerned only with all such trivial details as their score in an exam, when they get married, and whether their company is far away from home, etc. In fact, the interviewees all indicated that they were not in conflict with the discipline of their parents. They just didn't want to be passively managed by others like a slave because they have to face society independently as individuals, no matter whether they are going to university or society, or into the workplace. Society will no longer treat them as children, and this will require each individual to have the ability to deal with all kinds of tensions independently.

Thirdly, although there are many divergences between parents and their children, the traditional pattern of relationship between parents and children is changing in the families of most of the interviewees, and this kind of change gradually weakens the absolute authority of parents in the family. Most parents are beginning to respect their children's wishes and seeking to communicate with their children on an equal basis, especially in terms of dealing with the issues of education and studying abroad, which is rather different from the traditional family model.

Chapter 5 Women's Experiences of Higher Education (HE) in China

This chapter analyses the current situation of Chinese HE from a linear perspective: the Chinese HE system, access to HE in China, space and facilities in HE, students' loneliness, pain and conflict, as well as gender and self-actualisation. Part 1 looks back at the development of Chinese HE, and expounds on and analyses the main achievements and the special features of each development period. Part 2 rethinks the fairness of the National University Entrance Examination (gaokao) by examining the examinational form, content and students and their parents' attitudes and behaviours, which have constituted a social problem that should not be ignored. Part 3 examines the university infrastructure, including the school environment, school infrastructure in terms of teaching facilities and logistical equipment. Part 4 analyses the campus interpersonal relationships and self-cognition among university students, and discusses the relationship between minority status (social class) and schooling in order to provide a reference to improving interpersonal relationships. The final part analyses gender-education relationships, examining gender differences in both formal and informal educational praxis, highlighting a breakthrough in the traditions in order to fulfil self-actualisation, which involves a process of growing and developing as a person.

1. Chinese HE System

I was told when I was a child that university life is the most worthwhile period in a person's life. When students are in high school, they must have imagined what their university life would be like. They think that they will have more free time, and will have more time to make friends, read more books and so on. At the same time, their teachers and parents will give them more freedom, and, in fact, they are right to some degree. This is a time when a student begins to form his or her ideas about life in general. Attending classes and studying in the library keeps a student busy and provides him or her with access to valuable information, adding to his or her knowledge base.

-----Wenjun's Diary

Overview of the Educational System in China

The Chinese education system is considered traditional. It is made up of several parts

- basic education, primary school education, higher education and adult education.

Basic education in China includes pre-school education, primary education and regular secondary education. Preschool or kindergarten can last for up to three years, with children entering as early as three years old until six, when they typically enter primary school. When children are six or seven years old, they must attend school for at least nine years, known as the nine-year compulsory education, which the government funds. It includes six years of primary education and three years of junior middle education. After junior middle school, students need to spend three years on their senior middle course. Then, they need to spend four years in higher education. If they want to get further education, they will spend another three or six years getting a master's degree or doctorate. In the Chinese education system, students can spend nearly twenty years completing all their study.

In China, education is always an important part of people's lives. When they were three years old, they were sent to the kindergarten. From then on, their learning career began. They were taught to obey what teachers said to them. Breaking the school rules was forbidden. No matter who they are, once they sat in the classroom, they had to listen to the teachers' words carefully, write down the important points and review them after class; otherwise they may fail their exams.

2. Access to HE: The Gaokao

The Tragedy of an Unsuccessful Gaokao Result

A 20-year-old woman committed suicide after failing the gaokao (the National University Entrance Exam of China) for the second time as reported on July, 3, 2013 (Figure 2).

Figure 2



A photo of Yang Yuan on her table. Yang Yuan's will (source: Chinadaily.com.cn)

She cut her left wrist with a fruit knife at her home in Chongzhou, southwest China's Sichuan province, on the day after learning her exam result. She left a note (Figure 2)

that apologised to her parents. Her father, a migrant worker in Lhasa, was waiting for his daughter to call him that day to tell him the exam result, but instead he received a call from his wife, who told him that their daughter was dead. In her suicide note, his daughter wrote:

*I'm sorry my dearest father and mother.
I hope I still can be your daughter in the afterlife.
There is no way I can repay the kindness that you have shown me.
Only if I die, can you feel relaxed.
Promise me, you must live carefully. Take care.
Your daughter
22/6/2013*

It's important to note that the number of student suicides in China has increased in recent years (Davey and Higgins, 2005; Liu et al., 2016). Surprisingly, even eight primary and secondary school students committed suicide in 2010; two of them ended their lives under academic pressure, according to the Shanghai Education Commission. Frequent occurrence of student suicide leads to huge social shock and reflection. Although pressure, to some extent, can provide motivation, excessive pressure has a serious negative effect. Pressure can destroy a student's confidence. Pressure from employment, depression, poor living conditions, lovesickness and mental illness can also make some students lose control of their emotions and behaviour. The education authorities and the whole society should work to release the heavy academic burden on students.

Nowadays, depression caused by negative life events has become a common mental disorder all over the world (WHO, 2012). Negative feelings increase the risk of suicide, and can dramatically impact on an individual's interpersonal relationships, as

well as their quality of life (Ibrahim et al., 2013). Younger Chinese students are at higher risk of depression and the negative effects of pressure, since they are now experiencing a greater transition period from being a teenager to adulthood, while they are also facing up to make major life decisions (Bayram and Bilgel, 2008; Chen et al., 2013).

Chinese Students' Gaokao Life

The gaokao is China's gruelling, ultra-competitive university entrance exam. Somewhat similar to the UK A-levels, the nine-hour test is offered just once a year and is the sole determinant for admission to virtually all Chinese colleges and universities.

You cannot imagine how important the gaokao is unless you are a Chinese high school student and are going to take it. In China, most students start their study in primary school with the purpose of taking the gaokao (Wei, 2008). In other words, they spend almost 12 years preparing for this 'silent war'. And because of our remarkably huge population, millions of students take the annual exam and compete for admission for the limited number of places available (Yu, 2008; Jin and Long, 2013). The competition is really fierce. For me, as someone who experienced the pressure for as long as I could remember, we have all been infused with the idea that only through the gaokao can we get an ideal job, earn a bright future and good life.

I remembered when I was 18 years old, I only focused on one thing, that is the only one thing, the gaokao... 14 to 16 hours a day, I studied for the university entrance examination. I took one day off every three weeks... I was still carrying my textbook from room to room the Sunday morning before leaving for the

exam venue, still reviewing materials during the lunch break, still working hard Sunday night, preparing for Part 2 of the exam that Monday. I wanted to study until the last minute. I really hoped to be successful.

(Betty, October 2014)

Going through the gaokao is an experience shared by the majority of people in China, and that's why it is such a popular topic; everybody talks about it (Mullins, 2005; Yu, 2008). The result of the gaokao test, which covers Maths, Chinese, English, and the natural and social sciences (MoE⁶), will decide whether a student goes to university, or back to school for another year, or tries to find a job.

The only big news in China in June is gaokao. In Tianjin my home town, all exam venues and areas within a radius of 500 metres are guarded by police and are off-limits to pedestrians and vehicles. Many examinees are welcomed with a pat on the shoulder or a hug from their teachers and parents before the exam starts. Anxious parents prefer to stay close, and sit on the ground fanning themselves or wait under parasols to avoid the sun. -----Wenjun Diary

Figure 4



Figure 5



Examinees enter the examination room on 7th June 2014, the first day of the two-day exam. (source for Figures 4&5: news.xinhuanet.com)

⁶Ministry of Education (<http://moe.edu.cn/>)

Figure 6



Figure7



Parents of examinees wait anxiously outside the examination room during the exam.
(source for figures 6&7: research participants)

Figure 8



After the test, a group of examinees leave the examination room. (source: one of my research participants' fathers)

All across China, the whole of society seems mobilised to make sure every student can give it their best shot.

Figure 9



Figure 10



A notice warns against 'beeping horns' around gaokao examination rooms. (source: www.022net.com)

Figure 11



An ambulance waits outside a gaokao examination room (source: Women of China/Zhang Ping)

Figure 12



Many policemen are on duty outside examination rooms to ensure the security of gaokao examinees. (source: Women of China/Zhang Ping)

Figure 13



After one of the gaokao tests; parents of an examinee comfort their child who was not feeling all that satisfied with her performance in the exam. (source: Women of China/Zhang Ping)

Construction sites are told to stop working and be quiet and retirees who enjoy dancing outdoors with loud music are banned due to the activities creating chaos which disrupts study and rest (Ottery and Zhu, 2014). Some parents have even been known to put their daughters on birth control pills so they won't be distracted with periods during the test (Fong, 2012). Sometimes parents spend a large portion of their salary on brain tonics and air-conditioned hotel rooms for the last few days before the test so their children can focus on studying in a distraction-free environment. News photos show parents of examinees kneeling on the ground and burning incense or joss paper for their children as offerings to whatever gods they worship.

Figure 14



Figure 15



Some of the more affluent parents rent houses close to the exam venues across the country, while so-called 'high-flyer rooms' are offered in Tianjin, according to the China Daily newspaper (Yi, 2012). The special hotel rooms- which cost up to 800 yuan (£ 75) more than an ordinary room - are billed as having previously been rented out to someone who scored high points in the exams. Rooms with lucky numbers such as six - which symbolises success in Chinese culture, or eight - which represents wealth - are also favourites.

The morning before the exam started, I walked through a crowd of students' parents. They were anxious and gazing expectantly at their children, praying that they would ace the test. My dad was there too. He brought me a can of Red Bull. 'Daughter, don't be nervous.' My dad passed me the can. How can I not be nervous?! I was thinking, drinking the Red Bull. 'Your teacher said you are good. He said you have no problem.' My teacher? Which subject teacher? My teacher doesn't care about me at all. All teachers care about are statistics. 'We can try again next year if you fail.' (How many next years I am going to have?) But I just said bye to my dad, walked into the exam room, ready to face my destiny (sighs).

(Emma, October 2014)

As a result, pressure on the families and society is increasing and students are pushed to work hard when they are young. The gaokao is such a severe competition that many students can't handle the big pressure. It is unfair to judge students only by the results of exams because nobody can perform well, especially under such great pressure (Yu, 2008).

When the exam was over I walked out of the room feeling like a deflated balloon. All I wanted to do was to catch up on all the sleep that I had missed over the past three years. It was not only because I was so sleepy; I wanted to sleep away the horrible three years, to forget them like a bad dream. When I wake up again, I hoped that I would find myself a fresh person with a new life.

(Anna, October 2014)

Just a month after taking the gaokao, I got the admission letter from a university; my family was excited. But I was only relieved to have my burden removed, if

only temporarily. I knew university would by no means be as wonderful as the teacher depicted to me.

(Betty, October 2014)

Candy considered that testing through the gaokao was not the best or most scientific method. Passing the gaokao successfully doesn't mean that someone is better than anyone else. In recent years, there have been a lot of cases where students committed suicide after the gaokao because of failure. These cases are silent protests about the gaokao. Is it possible to judge a person's quality by just one test paper? Even if the candidate has enough ability to cope with the examination, the exam is just a random event. Who can ensure that he/she is able to show his/her true ability when taking an exam? In particular, the gaokao, which is an examination which has a life-long impact on all the examinees, puts great psychological pressure on the examinees. Whether they can go to university, all depends on this examination after decades of study. Under such huge pressure, how can candidates take it easy in the examination?

The gaokao is the key to social mobility in China and a fateful moment in the lives of those who take it. Success and failure in the test can mean the difference between prosperity and endless toil. In addition, success or failure may not only shape the lives of those who take it, but also the lives of their families, who depend on their future earnings.

What Destroys the Health and Happiness of Millions of Chinese Young People?

For more than thirty years since the Reform and Opening-up, the material conditions of Chinese society have been greatly improved, but children in China have not

become happier (Yu, 2008; Yuan, 2018). On the contrary, the 'post - 90s' and 'post-00s', seems to be less happy than the older generations. Since the book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (Chua, 2012) was published, people began to learn about Chinese traditional extreme parenting and how they 'tortured' (Kohler et al., 2012. p.69) their children with the goal of them excelling in all endeavours and performing perfectly. According to Amy Chua's book, there are some family rules which need to be obeyed in the context of this kind of parenting: children are not allowed to attend sleepovers; they are not allowed to have play dates; they are not allowed to watch TV or play computer games; they must achieve an A for every course they take; they should not have any excuses whatsoever, but just get the job done. The 'Tiger Mother' employs a traditional Chinese way of supporting and pushing the child to realise his/her full potential. Tiger moms demand perfect grades because they believe that their children can get them. They also believe that they know what is best for their children and, therefore, override all of their children's own desires and preferences. For them, the best way to protect their children is by preparing them for the future, letting them see what they're capable of and arming them with skills.

When I asked the interviewees whether their lives were happy or not, I heard amazingly consistent responses of 'No'. In Chinese cities with a long-term single-child family policy, children are the centre of every family. Nowadays, children's growth environment is not just rich in food and clothes, those material supplies, but also in cultural life (Yuan, 2018). Why are children still unhappy? It is because children have too much pressure to learn (Lu, 2008). High school students have a lot of pressure

from their gaokao; so do the students in junior school and primary school in terms of their entrance examinations. Therefore, students always carry a heavy burden of expectation. The test pressure not only affects Chinese children's happiness, but also seriously distorts China's educational outcomes, creating generations of malformed teenagers who lack imagination and creativity, independent thinking and social responsibility (Wang, 2008).

To be honest, Chinese educators do pay attention to quality-oriented education, but 'quality-oriented education' is only an unattainable dream in the current institutional environment (Zhang and Lin, 2017). It is often asked what the principles in China should do to improve the exam-oriented education. Such discussions are necessary, but are all empty talk under the current educational system (Yang, 2016). Principals can really do nothing, because exam-oriented education is hard to change (Xu, 2010). The gaokao is not only the 'baton' of millions of examinees every year, but also the 'great pressure mountain' on millions of children all over the country. As a matter of fact, the majority of students can't even maintain their basic sleep levels, let alone 'quality-oriented education'! Even for students in junior middle school with relatively low pressure, it is common for them to do their homework until midnight and to get up early for school at six o'clock the next morning.

3. Space and Facilities in HE

The Realistic Depiction of University Life

On my first day in the university, I still felt a bit lonely, though I kept the smile on my face. When as my parents went back home, I fought back my tears and remained in silence the whole day.

(Emma, October 2014)

I was right: university life was but another cycle. We were going through another round of anxiety, boredom, bewilderment and fear for the future. The goals of life were changing from passing the exams and going to university to finding a boyfriend, getting a job, taking postgraduate study or studying abroad.

(Fiona, October 2014)

Having passed through the examination for entrance to university, students become freshmen. For a university freshman, university life is a brand-new journey. They are full of expectations and confusion about their university life.

For me, campus life enables us to exercise autonomy and independence in studying. There is a clear sense of relative freedom; nobody urges you to study, to finish your homework, nor worries about your performance. You are the only one responsible for it. A lot of students may have been having the same ideas at the same time, but, as far as I experienced it, university life in China was not as simple as you might imagine.

Wenjun: Can you tell me your opinions about university? How did you manage your time?

Emma: I think I will always remember that, when I received the university admission notice, it was totally different from the indulgence of throwing my schoolbag after the gaokao. Probably because of the emphasis on paper qualifications, that notice made me feel at ease. I had mixed feelings when reading it. There is a yearning for the new environment, the curiosity towards new students I would meet, the joy of the new life, the fear of the new curriculum, and the fear of new pressure. I looked for a lot of information on the school website, about the campus environment, dormitory environment and so

on. This excitement continued until the start of the university semester; after my parents helped me settle down, several girls come over to chat with me. I realised that the prelude to university life had really begun (face-to-face interview, September 2014).

With the rapid development of China's market economy and the need for rapid changes in society, expanding HE moves China from the first stage of elite HE to the second stage of mass HE (Mu, 2008). Researchers such as Heyneman and Jamison (1980) and Heyneman and Loxley (1983) have found that the basic facilities, such as libraries and amenities, strongly determine educational achievement. In China, the expansion happened too fast in too short a period of time, and accompanied with the limitations of space and amenities, it generated many short-term problems, including a shortage of campus facilities, a decline in the quality of education and rising living costs (Quan and Liao, 2007). Universities which had substantial overheads could not keep pace with the pace of increased enrolment. Not only was there a shortage in campus facilities, but also poor management and social norms limited educational equality and achievement in universities. For these reasons, I asked my participants the following questions (face-to-face interview, September 2014).

Wenjun: Are you satisfied with your school?

Anna: It's okay. The campus landscaping is very good, various instruments and equipment are also quite comprehensive, but it still falls short of my ideal university.

Wenjun: How does it fall short?

Anna: I think the ideal university is a place for academic research; the atmosphere would be conducive for studying, and the campus environment would be very beautiful. But the reality is very far from this ideal; the campus is very small; all kinds of equipment are in varying degrees of wear and tear. It is full of impetuous students. It feels like a holy place for looking for a boyfriend. There is no study atmosphere.

Wenjun: How do you spend your time?

Anna: Like most students, my freshman life is very orderly, but also interesting. I joined societies (we have different student clubs and societies), served as a member of the class committee; prepared for my study, revised at night even in rainy weather, what a routine life! I tried to write various activity plans, participate in various activities, and enjoy the excitement of all kinds of activities every Tuesday night after revision.

Wenjun: How about your sophomore/junior year?

Anna: It can be said to be a transition period during sophomore and junior. I gradually become accustomed to the term 'senior', accustomed to the freshmen seeking exam advice, and I gradually clarified my goals. There were many professional courses. I had my direction and set about preparing all kinds of postgraduate materials; it was tiring but fulfilling.

Wenjun: So, what are your feelings about senior life?

Anna: It is a stage that can improve students' social skills. It is said that university is a small society; indeed, in four years of university study, you can get to know a lot of people from different provinces, with different lifestyles, different characters with areas of expertise.

An individual's value orientation about their view of life radically affects their behaviour (Daniel et al., 2015). Chinese university students are the selected elites of each era. While living in a society of material prosperity, they are now confronted with a series of urgent problems in terms of their view of life, negative life attitude, etc.

When students enter university, it is natural for them to relax, because they have passed an important stage and started to open up a new life chapter. Most students believe that university life should be full of fun and they don't need to study hard, so they sleep in class (*Guangming Daily*, 2013). Most students are addicted to playing computer games and stay up all night. They always sleep for a few hours and then just go to class for the lecture. They don't care about what the teacher says, or if they understood what was taught.

It is a terrible situation for university students to expend their energy on these activities instead of studying. Sleeping in the class has become some students' choice. They need to balance activities and study.

Figure 16



source: <http://edu.youth.cn/2013/1113/133732.shtml?mobile>

University life lasts four years in China and most of the cost is covered by their parents (Cao, 2014). After graduation, they can go and hunt for jobs. But now, it has become more and more difficult for them to find a good job. Although great changes have taken place in the education system in China, it still cannot meet the needs of society and still requires further reform. At present, the country has invested a lot in universities, so the physical facilities are quite complete, but the maintenance work is not in place, causing valuable equipment to be damaged (Wang, 2011). The campus environment is good and suitable for study. Most contemporary students are maturing in their outlook (Yang, 2008). It is also a key period for values clarification. But many students cannot resist the temptation to go astray. All day long, they are addicted to the internet, procrastinating.

Unlike middle school, there are only a few courses in university, which means we have much more spare time than before. Also, university study is student-oriented rather than teacher-orientated as in high school. Teachers only offer instruction at university. Setting out a well-organised study plan by ourselves is essential at university.

In addition, university is different from high school due to the opportunity of other activities besides study. There are many societies and activities in universities, which provide us with a platform to fully reach our potential and, in these activities, our social abilities are increased intangibly.

For a freshman who has just entered the campus of the University, whether in study, life, communication or in the dormitory environment, university life is a new beginning; entering the university means students have entered a small society and, in this environment, which can accommodate tens of thousands of people, learning to get along with people is very important (Shi and Zhang, 2010). Of course, if we want to make a good job of interpersonal relationships, the first requirement is to get on well with roommates (Zhang, 2018).

Generally speaking, six or eight undergraduates share one room, and two postgraduates share one room. Caretakers (dormitory supervisors) take care of the buildings around the clock. Each room has bunk beds, desks and cupboards. The living facilities include toilets and washrooms on each floor. No cooking is allowed in the dorms due to fire hazards. Students have to have their dinner in the university

canteen. However, because of the long queues in the school canteen, some students decide to eat at nearby restaurants.

Figure 17



Figure 18



The overcrowded university canteen (from research participants)



The surroundings of the university canteen (from Wenjun)

The university canteen is a place where students eat three meals a day, important for the study, daily life and the health of the students. The canteen is one of the school's major facilities, but also an important part of school management. In order to investigate the present situation of the university canteen and understand the canteen dining environment and quality of meals of the students, the author carried out a group discussion about this issue (group interview, October, 2014).

Wenjun: What do you think of your university canteen?

Anne: I have been wasting 20 minutes a day standing in cafeteria lines, which would be better spent tackling the great research practices of our day.

Emma: You do not want to put your health into the hands of school cafeterias. I can't forget when I just arrived in university in the first year; I had food poisoning after taking the canteen's food. I went to the school clinic and found there were many students having the same syndrome, such as diarrhoea, fever and abdominal cramps. There are many elements university authorities need to scrutinise, such as catering licensing, hygiene, food processing, materials storage, sterilisation and water use. I think all these elements are important in food security.

Daisy: You can't understand how stingy kitchen staff can be when they serve students. They will always shake the ladle before they put the food into your tray. Amazingly, it's always the meat that is shaken off while the vegetables lie safely in the ladle. So, the secret to getting as much meat as possible is to be the last person in the queue. The kitchen staff will then spoon all the meat left into your tray.

At the same time, some students complained that, although the government has placed strict controls on the price of dishes in university canteens, students are worried that portion sizes would decrease if canteens are not allowed to raise prices to deal with increasing costs.

Grace: The kitchen staff serve smaller portions, though the prices are unchanged. But it's no different from raising prices.

It can be seen that all participants complained about the universities' facilities, not only focusing on a variety of topics closely related to their lives, such as the student dormitory, canteens and washrooms, but also focused on learning-related facilities, especially the university library.

On a Chinese university campus, it is a common phenomenon for students to reserve seats. In the classrooms, libraries, and even in the canteens, you can see bags, books and pens 'sleeping there', claiming temporary vacant ownership of the desks, tables and seats.

Figure 19



Source:<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/n/2014/1011/c20691-8793417-4.html>

These photos (Figure 19) show students at a university in Jinan, in east China's Shandong province, studying in the school canteen to prepare for the postgraduate entrance examination. According to one student, there are not enough classrooms for students to study in, because most of the classrooms are already occupied by other students.

Additionally, students reserve seats even when they are not present. This has become a public concern.

Wenjun: Where is the best place you want to go on campus? Why?

Daisy: It is the library, of course. The library of the school is rich in books. Basically, you can find all the information you want, and it is very quiet, very suitable for study, and the sanitation conditions are good here. But too many people reserve seats; it is really disgusting.

Grace: I think that students who occupy seats in advance should not be to blamed since the university does not have enough facilities and cannot provide enough seating.

Others have different opinions about this phenomenon, such as:

Anna: I believe it is impolite and inconsiderate to occupy seats and it should be stopped. I used to occupy seats for my friends so that we could talk, laugh and discuss together. However, I changed my mind last winter. I still remember that winter morning, I got up at 6 o'clock and prepared for everything as soon as possible, simply for the sake of occupying a warm comfortable seat at the library. Discouraging disappointment and sorrow flooded my heart when I couldn't find even one vacant seat. Clearly, lying on each desk were books, bags and pens showing that the seats had already been taken. What is worse, half of the temporary owners were not there, they were vacant! From then on, I have opposed reserving seats. Taking up seats does harm to the harmonious campus and class atmosphere, leading to fierce competition in the university. In addition, occupying seats inevitably wastes the temporarily vacant seats. To some degree, it worsens the problem of resource shortage. I strongly oppose the act of occupying seats!

(Group interview, October 2014)

Figure 20





The occupied library seats and the queue to enter the library (from research participants): in order to get a seat, students came early to the library entrance, in this case, the queue of backpacks replaced by the students themselves, who can do something else, such as have breakfast at the canteen, fetch hot water from the public hot water station, etc. When the library opens to the public, students will join the bag queue immediately and get their preferred seats in the library.

An online survey by *China Youth Daily* (Wang, 2012) showed that nearly 80% of participants believe that the mission of universities is not to make money, and suggest that Chinese universities should put more resources into improving their educational infrastructure. According to the survey, 80% of over 1,700 participants said that it is hard to find an empty seat in self-study rooms in the library during the exam season. Nearly 87% had unpleasant experiences of failing to find an empty seat to prepare for exams during their university years. Twenty-five per cent of participants believed that Chinese universities have sufficient educational infrastructure resources, including self-study rooms and libraries. Nearly 36% found the infrastructure resources 'acceptable,' while over 25% considered them 'insufficient.'

Many universities attach great importance to library construction, because it is one of the basic criteria to reflect the quality of a school (Zeng, 2013). If the library design is reasonable and the service is adequate, it will naturally be appreciated by the

majority of students. And, while the university should handle the seat-occupation phenomenon, students also need to improve their attitude and not occupy unnecessary resources.

Regarding these complaints, I asked two additional questions about university management.

Wenjun: What particular management task have you found most effective to balance educational resources? Having looked around the university and spoken to senior staff, what defects or limitations do you see?

However, unfortunately, almost all participants did not answer these questions. It would be surprising for there not to be any objections. In fact, these silent students are simply the inevitable product of an educational style that has changed little since Confucian scholars sat mutely at their masters' feet (Berling, 1982; Gove, 2012; Yan and Jiang, 2012). China has always had the tradition of showing great respect to teachers and schools. Although students should be the centre of a university, in China the authorities are always the centre and the students are only the participants.

The Chinese are deeply influenced by Confucianism, which emphasises the didactic and teacher-centred way of learning (Zhou et al., 2005). Chinese people believe that, as a member of a community, they should try to subordinate themselves to the group or society to maintain harmony. Silence is a salient feature of Asian students' communication style, not only in classrooms, but also in other aspects of life. Chinese people also value face, called 'mianzi' in Mandarin (Chen, 2013). When asked about whether they had the experience of keeping silent in university when problems arose, all the students answered 'Yes'. And most of them said the reasons for this

were that they were not sure about the result, and they did not want to lose face in front of teachers and the school by giving personal opinions.

Wenjun: Why do you think Chinese students usually keep silent in class?

Betty: I think Chinese students are afraid to give the wrong answers, so they just keep silent and wait for the correct answers. I remember one day, when the teacher mentioned 'Liberation Bridge' in the centre of Tianjin city. I was wondering about the name 'Liberation' since I had not heard of it before, but decided not to ask since I thought all the others knew it.

When asked if, when they felt confused about an issue or when they identified some mistakes in the university management, whether they would point it out, most said they might not to do so. One example is provided here.

Wenjun: Have you ever kept silent in the university? Why?

Candy: Yes. Because I lack confidence. When I am not sure about the result, I'd prefer to keep silent. I do not want to be laughed at.

Wenjun: If mistakes made by staff are found, will you tell him/her?

Candy: No, as I do not want to make him/her lose face.

From the interview, I found that students keep silent at the university in order to save face for themselves and others, as they were deeply influenced by Confucianism. The finding helps me to better understand why Chinese students always have a conservative attitude towards school issues.

4. Loneliness, Pain and Conflict

Betty's Life Story - Gave Me a Reason to Be Unhappy

Increasing diversity and rapid changes in our society make interacting with others more and more complex and difficult. According to Alasheev and Tsvetkova (2000), 'Interpersonal relations in school exert a substantial influence on the shaping of

young people's personality' (p.7). Positive interpersonal relationships are vital for optimal human growth and development. However, in recent years, educators (An, 2009; Chen, 2010) have expressed their concern about the quality of interpersonal relationship among students in HE institutions. A survey conducted by Hubei University (Cai, 2013), showed many university-age students regard interpersonal relationship as the biggest headache.

With limited life experiences and social skills, university students face lots of challenges in dealing with interpersonal relationships. This is especially true for students coming from rural areas. Because of the lack of social skills, they are often rejected by others and rejection gives them even fewer chances to learn how to interact with others. The life story below is about participant **Betty** (face-to-face interview, September 2014), who was shy and withdrawn while settling into university life in Tianjin:

In 2012, I came to Tianjin from my hometown, Jiangxi. My university is located in this beautiful and prosperous city, and my four years of university life also began and ended in this beautiful and prosperous city.

As soon as I got off the train, I felt the air of modernisation. Towering tall buildings, flashing neon lights. For a moment, I almost lost my way. After two turns, I finally got to my university. The university is a new campus, the dormitory is just completed, and six students share a dormitory. Although the facilities are being gradually improved, all this is not as basic as the high school I went to in my hometown, so I am satisfied. I remember I was the first to arrive in the dormitory, so I unpacked my things. everything was ready and I lay in bed reading. Over the next few days, roommates reported in succession. I feel really depressed about the demographics of our dormitory. There are six people in the dormitory, and only I come from the west, or the countryside, while the others' high schools are in coastal cities.

We all didn't know each other at first, but the common passion of youth made us get to know each other quickly. A few days later, someone in the dorm brought a laptop. I said naively: 'Where did you borrow it?' She looked at me and said with a smile: 'My dad bought it for me.' I remember I was suddenly embarrassed, and I

don't know why. The next few days, the rest of the dormitory also brought a computer back and only I did not have a computer in our dormitory. I obviously felt uncomfortable, and I knew why.

After about three weeks of classes, the counsellor said the student loan had been settled. One time during the class, the counsellor suddenly walked into the classroom and announced that the list of student loans had been drawn up. When I heard that my name was on the list, I really had an indescribable feeling, including happiness, because I didn't have to worry about tuition. But it was also a humiliation, and I really wanted to run out of the classroom.

After that, I had a strong sense of low self-esteem. When people played a joke on me, I thought they're making fun of me. As a result, my relationships were so bad that I had few friends to talk to, and I couldn't integrate with the social circle of my classmates because I didn't understand or was uninterested in what they were passionate about. Gradually, I felt a little depressed and anguished. I think going to the library for self-study was the only thing I could do other than attending class, eating and sleeping. This was good for me because I could go out with the sunrise and go back with the sunset, so there would be no time to communicate with them, and there would be no conflict at all. Besides that, I never had any conflicts with them, and everyone seemed to get along well. My grades were very good; they would come to ask me if they had any questions, and I also did my best to help them. If the teacher assigned any homework and needed a computer to complete it, they would be happy to lend it to me. Dormitory activities would not leave me out, but I refused most of them, because I had limited financial resources, and there was no extra money for interpersonal activities. It looked like we were in a good relationship, but in my heart, loneliness was as plentiful as the grass after the rain, and I could not find an outlet for my emotions.

I have more than once recalled my past. I was not like this before. My childhood memories are always related to the beautiful natural scenery of my hometown, and my carefree laughter. It was the same during high school because the students came from almost the same family background. The friendship at that time was pure, and there were no materialism of ulterior motives in our friendships. I had a lot of friends in high school, and I was more talkative, and my friends talked to me because our life experiences were similar. But when I came to university, everything changed! Sometimes I couldn't help thinking: Why am I different from them? If only I was born into a wealthy coastal family. How wonderful it would be!

But it was only fantasy. At that time, I became a little depressed, because I could not integrate into the mainstream of university life. Every time I rang home, my mother asked me how about living and studying there, and I would be happy to tell her that it was good. Because mum and dad have done a lot for me, I didn't want them to worry about me anymore; I would regret worrying them. However, all the sourness and bitterness in life, I could only bear it alone. I had no one to confide in, and buried everything in the heart. I think in the long run, I will

definitely have psychological problems. Sometimes I cried silently at night, soaking the pillow case, but I seemed very strong outwardly.

I finally went to a party when I was about to graduate in my senior year, because I made a little money from a part-time job. On that day, everyone had some beer, and, at last I couldn't help crying. They were all surprised and asked me what happened. I poured out my helplessness and grievances from my heart through the influence of the alcohol. They listened quietly, and, when I had finished, they were all sitting in silence. After a long time, one could not help but cry, and said: 'In fact, you are very kind, we always regard you as our friend, and especially want to help you. But we know you have lots of pride, and we are afraid you will misunderstand us. Actually, I've always wanted to communicate with you. All university students are the same -- the same desire to make friends. Geographical and family economic situations should not be the only criteria for us to choose friends, and none of us will care about that. Why do you want to lock yourself up? You have to trust us.'

I was shocked: 'Yes, why did I lock myself up?'

I looked at everyone, and there were tears in their eyes. But all of a sudden, we laughed together.

Through Betty's story, the author finds that the students have significant urban-rural differences in the levels of satisfaction with the teaching they receive and campus life satisfaction; satisfaction for rural students is significantly lower than that of urban students in this area. As Diane Reay (2010) points out, social class dictates a person's role in education. There are still high levels of inequality in education praxis.

Relations differ widely in terms of how different groupings within the same class position themselves and are positioned by others, and in terms of how their relationships to education have evolved. (Reay, 2010, p.419)

The satisfaction level of rural students with teaching is significantly lower than that of urban students (Zong and Ding, 2013). Here the issue of the adaptability of rural students to the teaching methods of universities is relevant. Due to the low level of teachers in rural middle schools and the traditional and simple teaching methods (Wang, 2007; Xiao, 2013), most of the students from rural areas have become accustomed to the teaching method of 'teachers talk - students listen'. Nowadays,

the teaching methods of teachers in universities are very diverse, such as the use of multimedia teaching and so on. These teaching methods have long been commonplace for urban students, but they are relatively strange to students from rural areas. Therefore, the flexible teaching modes make it difficult for rural students to adapt initially, which can lead to their dissatisfaction with teaching. In addition, the satisfaction level of rural students to campus life is significantly lower than that of urban students. The reasons may be that the economic status of rural students' families is often not good, which means that they are unable to try all kinds of popular entertainment inside and outside the school; therefore, their extracurricular life is usually limited to school and study. Their social life in campus may be relatively narrow and the form may be relatively simple. In contrast, as urban students have better economic conditions than rural students, they have more options for entertainment and aren't limited to the extracurricular living space and facilities provided by the school. Therefore, the satisfaction level of rural students with extracurricular life is inevitably lower than that of urban students.

Reay (2010) came to similar conclusions in her study about social class. At the same time, Read et al. (2018) highlighted that, social class is one of the important factors that largely determines friendship on university campuses. Since the economic reforms in China began, income inequality has increased significantly. The adverse effects of having a widening inequality between the rich and the poor include social and political instability, discrimination in access to areas such as education, pensions and unequal opportunities for Chinese people.

Betty found it difficult to integrate with her classmates, and she assigned herself and other classmates to a different 'social class', and the distance between them was so hard to cross that loneliness grew like a weed in her heart. She was lonely for such an unhappy and helpless reason. People with an inferiority complex tend to build an invisible wall between the people around them, separate themselves from the environment and only pay attention to their own feelings; they do not allow themselves to believe that there is any reason why others would make friends with them.

Inequality in the Chinese Education System Between Rural and Urban Areas

Penny-Jane Burke (2012) state that HE should be available to all who have the potential and/or capability to benefit from university study, regardless of social background. However, in China, there is still a huge gap in development between urban and rural areas, even though the rapid development of the country has lasted thirty years (Hannum, 1999). Since the beginning of Chinese HE expansion in 1999, higher education in terms of scale, speed and structure has seen a rapid development beyond its optimum capacity. The current popularisation of HE in China is facing a series of serious problems, such as educational outcomes, funding, regional development and fairness, educational structure and employment of graduates.

A type of city-orientated value has been formulated by China's urban-rural dual social structure over a long period of time, resulting in a serious imbalance of the

distribution of funding and of other educational resources between urban and rural areas. According to the China National Institute for Educational Research (2002), a typical gap between urban and rural education is the difference in educational supportive funding from the government. In recent years, only one-third of the national budget has been invested into rural basic education. Take government investment in basic education in 2001 as an example; according to Yuan (2005), all items of educational funding received by rural areas are much lower than those for urban areas. Such gaps are remarkable, and the differences are in the range of 68-225%. In addition, the uneven state of urban and rural teachers reveals the education gap between urban and rural areas. Most rural teachers get their qualifications through a variety of irregular educational routes, which makes it difficult for them to compete with urban teachers. Another serious gap between urban and rural education is related to school conditions. According to the official website of the Ministry of Education of China (2007), there is a big gap in school conditions between urban and rural areas. Sixty per cent of students at primary school are studying in rural schools, while the number of rural primary schools accounts for more than 80% of the total number of primary schools. Less than half (40%) the computers are owned by rural schools and fixed assets of rural education sectors only account for half. As Taylor (2013) expressed, in terms of the importance of mattering, which is deeply tied in to processes of subjective construction, those matters produce interaction effects in educational practices. Taylor (2017) stresses

the inseparability of knowing and being, the materiality of educative relations, and the need to install an ecology of ethical relations at the centre of educational practice in higher education (p.422).

The huge differences between urban and rural education reveal the sorrow of Betty's story that rural society and its educational facilities are very like an abandoned child in the modernisation process in China. Whether in terms of facilities or faculty, schools in urban and rural areas are significantly different. In fiscal expenditure on education, the east-west differences are also bigger, and it is concluded that regional distribution of educational resources is highly uneven; urban areas have better educational outcomes. At present, the urban population has a fixed number of years of education, 13 years on average, compared to the rural population with average of less than seven years, almost half as much (Rong and Shi, 2001). In terms of the quality of teachers and educational funds, the urban and rural difference is also big and there is unbalanced economic development; the national economy is growing at an average of 8%, but some provinces are growing at 15% (Liu et al., 2013). Many parts of the middle and primary schools are badly run. As regards outstanding performance, the National Centre for Education Investment is mainly concentrated in developed areas and cities, far less so in the mid-west and rural areas (Yang, 2015). Rural areas are lagging behind the rest of the country in economic and educational progress, holding back the nation's attempts at even greater modernisation. The causes of the educational imbalance between urban and rural areas can be listed as follows. Firstly, different attitudes are a leading reason; because the parents of people in a city always assert that knowledge is important and education is necessary

and can promote individual quality of life, they, therefore, always place a high value on their children's education. However, most people in rural areas are indifferent to education; by contrast, they attach more importance to physical labour. What's more, some of them believe that education just wastes their money. Rather than seeing schooling as 'useless', people in rural society see it as hopeless (Xie, 2017). Also, regional difference raise another significant issue. City people always have more opportunities to learn from each other and engage in exchanges with other outstanding figures and the competition in education always promotes educational development. But, in the countryside, the atmosphere around receiving good education is not positive enough and some parents even do not consider it to be the most important factor in children's growing up processes. In addition, imbalance in resources is also a reason for the educational imbalance between urban and rural areas. On the one hand, schools in the city always employ excellent teachers who have a wide range of knowledge and excellent teaching methods, and students in the city can take advantage of the internet or other resources to help them study. However, all of these are inaccessible to most students in the countryside. What's more, time utilisation is also a reason. Children in the countryside often need to help with farm work and other things, so they may have not enough time to study, while children in the city have lots of time to study. For these reasons, there is an imbalance in educational level and the opportunities for better education and better jobs. In addition, a person who comes from a village may be discriminated against because of it.

Moreover, due to the existence of different structures in urban and rural areas, the gap between rural areas and cities have become more and more obvious. The country doesn't have its own libraries, or complete scientific equipment for educational use. In addition, the gap between the social strata is also an important aspect in causing unfairness in HE. Because of the economy and environmental constraints, people at the lower stratum cannot realise their full educational potential, leading to a lack of necessary life skills and cultural knowledge. As Reay et al. (2009) concluded, there are significant differences in participation according to social class. Studies have shown that students' activeness and enthusiasm in learning depends very much on their backgrounds, differentiated by geography, family, social class, gender and ethnicity (Wilkins and Burke, 2015). The rural-urban conflicts caused by the inequitable socioeconomic order in the context of Chinese development have the attributes of both ethnic and class conflicts. The past few years have witnessed a large expansion in universities. Many schools, however, have just focused on scale expansion, but neglected quality improvement. Being highly educated and having more chances to receive various types of advanced ideas, people raised in urban areas are usually more open-minded, and play a decisive role in receiving an education. Meanwhile, the situation is quite the opposite in rural areas, where students have little access to social activities, and there is no doubt that their learning power is seriously restricted.

Taylor (2013) illustrates how objects, bodies and spaces as importantly lived materials are overlooked in educational practice. She highlights 'all bodies, things and

matter-not just human bodies - are active material-discursive agents' (Taylor, 2013. p.690). Whether in terms of the competition relating to occupying seats in the library or complex interpersonal relationships in the dormitory, HE exists as a system; it has the integrity, the connection, and dynamic. It is a complex process from conflict to communication. The co-existence of students and students, students and teachers, even students and campus facilities constitute the indispensable links in educational activity. The interviews show that university students are not pleased with their campus life. A distinct differentiation was found in terms of urban or rural origin, economic condition, and family background, which is highly related to students' contentment with material space. As important locations for studying and living for students, the dormitory, classroom, library and canteen are the crucial component parts of a university campus.

Research on University Campus Satisfaction

Under traditional cognition, the university student should take on activities in line with social responsibility (An, 2016; Sun, 2016). However, with the Reform and Opening-up as the background, and the student strike on June 4th 1989 (known as the 'Tiananmen event') as the prelude (Ogden et al., 2016), contemporary university students have shown a clear break with traditions. The 'Ma Jiajue incident',⁷ shocked the whole country, and caused great uproar in society. However, at the centre of the storm, the university students showed an unusual apathy. On BBS, an online forum for

⁷ Ma Jiajue was a biochemistry major at Yunnan University who was convicted and executed for murdering his roommates. 'University quadruple killer executed' Xinhua at the *China Daily*, June 17, 2004.

universities and colleges, a significant number of university students took a cautious attitude to these negative reports with a neutral response or no comment; some even considered Mr. Ma's behaviour to be rational (<http://bbs.zxip.com/read.php?tid=2442371>).

This difference between the reactions of university students and mainstream society towards this issue, which was originally regarded as a significant example of a clearly unethical and illegal act, has led me to rethink and examine the group of university students today. Is there a kind of identity between them? Does this kind of identity constitute a kind of subculture of university students, which departs from the mainstream ideology and social expectation.

University Students' Satisfaction with Campus Life

According to my research interviews, some students are dissatisfied with their campus life. Taking 'University students' satisfaction with campus life' as the keywords, I realised there are no documents containing these words in the China Knowledge Resources Integrated Database. Although there are 51,400 responses in Baidu (Chinese version of Google), none of the topics contain these words. This shows that the campus life of university students has not attracted much attention. There are about 20 million university students in our country, which is a huge group (Sun and Wei, 2010). They are very valuable human resources, and their experiences of campus life, and their studies and growth are extremely important for China's development (Huang et al., 2016).

In February 2004, four people were killed in a Yunnan University student dormitory; the 'Ma Jiajue event' caused a sensation across the whole country (Liu and Wang, 2005). In April 2007, in one university dormitory, murder was triggered because of an argument over switching off lights which caused a fight (Lin, 2009). In April 2011, two college students in the dormitory of Beijing Normal University in Zhuhai branch quarrelled over toothpaste, leading one to stab the other five times (Du, 2016). In October 2011, a murder happened in the male dormitory of Guangdong Electromechanical Vocational and Technical College; a senior boy killed his roommate with a kitchen knife (Nie, 2017). The incidents listed above all have one thing in common; that is, the assailant and the injured are roommates. So why do those who are closely associated with each other fight against each other?

All this points to the issue of university relationships, especially dorm relationships. In the case of university dormitory relationship problems, the above example of wounding is extreme, but the occurrence of spats, 'cold violence', tension and so on is also common. Therefore, the university dormitory relationship problem cannot be underestimated anymore.

Compared with boys, women university students are faced with a more complicated environment and circumstances. They bear the burden of male dominance, male intelligence and female gossip (Wang, 2010). Their inner conflicts, contradictions and imbalances may be more complex, intense and hidden than those of boys (Lu, 2010). The women students' dormitory relationships are particularly sensitive. Improperly handled, interpersonal relationships will easily produce a series of psychological

problems (Diao, 2008). As a social group, they face many problems in their lives and study in university, such as adaptation to the new learning environment, adaptation to their major and study, handling of interpersonal relationships, the problems of love affairs, and the choice of future career, and so on; these all need a good environment, a good mindset and a healthy mentality.

Through the conversation with the interviewees, I learned that some of the dormitories did have larger conflicts or disputes due to various reasons. Some women students gradually even exclude themselves from other dormitory members in order to avoid interpersonal conflicts in their dormitories; they often go out to study and avoid returning to the dormitory environment. Some students even apply to change their dormitories or even rent rooms outside campus. A university dormitory is a 'scenic spot full of stories' which is a mix of various campus interpersonal relationships, although the area is small. The 'scenic spots' are complex, with various shapes and colours (Lin, 2009). Among them, there are always some lonely, solitary individuals, and they account for most university campus interpersonal anxiety and panic (Diao, 2008; Lu, 2010). Perhaps they like to go alone, and do not want to 'follow the herd'; perhaps in their hearts there is a strong desire for good interpersonal communication. Maybe they are just running away from their powerlessness in the face of interpersonal interaction.

The following research enters the university dormitory and through this window, examines the lonely individuals on campus, their hearts, their personalities and the course of their lives.

Attitudes towards Campus Relationships

At the beginning of entry to university, dormitory allocation was generally carried out according to a random combination, so there was no in-depth understanding between the members of the dormitory. In the early days of coexistence, most girls usually hid themselves, but such concealment did not stand the test of time, and their personality would gradually become apparent (Lei, 2006). Nowadays, most university students are the only children at home; they are spoiled and self-centred in their homes (Hao and Wang, 2009). So, it's easy for conflicts to be generated. Most of these conflicts are caused by trivial things, for example: disagreements about dormitory, switching off lights, using someone's things without first asking for permission, dormitory night talk, and so on (Du, 2016). These little things could become intolerable because of niggling dissatisfactions in dormitory gradually hidden in the heart. Such long-term tension and suppression of interpersonal relations is not conducive to the physical and mental health of each member of the dormitory (Nie, 2017), and is not conducive to the development of each member's personality (Han, 2009).

Anna: Whether a dormitory relationship is harmonious or not, I think there is no direct relationship with age or education. It point depends on the personality of the people. Some students not only never clean the dormitory, but also do not care for the dormitory's hygiene and cleanliness, even littering the dormitory. Even their personal hygiene is very bad. Their bed is dirty and messy. They go to sleep without washing, and do not usually take a bath; these bad habits are what roommates cannot stand.

Daisy: Some roommates do not have the same daily schedule as everyone else. Those who sleep late influence the others. When they get up the next day, these students may also deliberately make more noise in the dormitory. Thus, forming a vicious circle, the dormitory schoolmates' friendship also disappears in the gradual torment. Having a laptop in the dorm is already a common phenomenon. However, some students watch videos or voice chat at night and refuse to turn off

their computers at one or two o'clock in the morning, which will wake other students from their sleep and affect their rest. This will also make the student relationship more tense.

(Group interview, October 2014)

Because universities have a wide range of students, there are many students from different provinces, cities and regions in a dormitory, and their family backgrounds are different (Lin, 2009). When some of the relatively wealthy girls intentionally or unintentionally show off their high-end study resources, daily necessities, and even luxury goods, the dormitory also silently divides into rich and poor factions (Lei, 2016). Some women students, because of the influence of family or bad social ethos, have developed arrogance and selfishness (Zhao and Shi, 2010). In their social life, they do not know how to care for others' feelings. If the students with family financial difficulties do not have a firm belief in self-improvement and self-reliance, it is easy for them to develop an inferiority complex. They do not want to let others guide them; they cannot be calm about facing their own family situation. Over a long period, the gap between the rich and the poor causes these two types of students to not understand each other's actions and values, which can easily lead to interpersonal tensions in the dormitory (Diao, 2008).

Fiona: There are a few students around me who moved out of the dorm because of their relationships. Many students at home used to live alone; however, in the communal life in school, they cannot tolerate other students' minor problems, and cannot tolerate others threatening their own interests. Many students will not understand, and forgive others.

Grace: The relationship in our dorm is notoriously bad. Everyone cares only about themselves. Even if someone in the dormitory is sick, everyone just says a few nice words; seemingly, no one is willing to waste their precious time to take care of them. Of course, even if you do it, it will only offend others, because no one else has done so. If you have a unique problem, it seems others have no sympathy, and make people feel like you want to please to someone.

(Group interview, October 2014)

Interpersonal relationships are an important part of university life and the dormitory is the place where university students directly participate in interpersonal communication; the atmosphere is dependent on interpersonal communication skills, and mental health development of the university students (Du, 2016; Zhao, 2010). University students who live in disharmonious dormitories tend to show the characteristics of depression, irritability, sensitivity, self-isolation, etc. (Han, 2009). In contrast, university students living in a dormitory where interpersonal relationships are harmonious are often characterised by happiness, learning-centredness, enjoying making friends and being willing to help others, etc. (Lin, 2009). Therefore, the in-depth study and analysis of the interpersonal relationships in university students' dormitories have great significance for the personality and mental health of university students. According to a survey of university students' mental health, the incidence of psychological problems among university students in our country is 29.03% (Han, 2009). Thus, if we cannot eliminate and solve the psychological problems of university students in time, it will do harm to schools and families.

Main Factors Affecting Interpersonal Relationships in University Dormitories

Individual Causes

First of all, from the subjective factors, most post-90s university students are the only children in the family, self-centred, lacking team consciousness, with strong dependence and poor resistance to frustration (Hao and Wang, 2009). Being the

centre of the family from childhood, they have experienced love from all their family members. But, once they get to the university, into the dormitory, they are no longer the centre of everything; so, figuring out how to balance this huge gap has become our primary problem. University life is a prelude to society, and everyone is just a member of society (Li, 2016). It is a common occurrence that one's own ideas are ignored and opinions are not accepted (Lei, 2016). Therefore, we feel uncomfortable and do not manage to find the right time and place to communicate with others in a timely and effective manner, reflecting that we are still immature in dealing with specific problems. Students who are not deeply involved in the world are lacking in social communicative ability (Qin, 2017). Due to the lack of knowledge and skills in interpersonal communication, we do not know how to solve specific problems when we encounter them. As a result, there will be more and more opinions and more and more tensions.

Secondly, everyone has their own different personality, influenced by different factors, such as family background, education level, difference between rich and poor, narrow knowledge and so on, and consequently they form different habits. The psychological obstacle formed by diversity of individual's cognition leads to disharmonious interpersonal relationships. For example, students with good family backgrounds are apt to have a sense of superiority, while, in contrast, it is easy for jealousy to arise in those from poorer family backgrounds (Jia et al., 2012). The former is more likely to have a sense of conceit, while the latter is more likely to be jealous. The appearance of these psychological changes easily produces the

phenomenon of interpersonal antagonism, which has a great negative effect on the development of interpersonal relationship.

Family Causes

Upbringing is a significant contributing factor in shaping a person's personality. The educational concepts and daily behaviour of parents play an important role in the development of children (Ling and Shu, 2003). With the increase in the number of only children in China, the majority of university students are only children (Zhang, 2012). Therefore, the only child in the family has usually experienced protection, expectation and spoiling, which means that such university students have poor psychological coping mechanisms, and lack independence (Zhaoqiong, 2005). If these psychological characteristics are not properly guided and allowed to develop, they will cause people, after they have left the shelter of the family, to become problematical in the small social environment of their university life, resulting in obstacles in their relationships with others and affecting group living (Anderman, 2002). After entering university, many only children show considerable inability to adapt, being unable to deal with problems independently, unable to withstand the pressure in their study and life, and being self-centred, as can be imagined (Xu and Zhuang, 2003). If, in the study, in the dormitory, students are acting in line with this, it would inevitably lead to dormitory interpersonal tension and frequent conflicts.

Educational Causes

Le and Johansen (2011) believe that:

youth who felt that their schools and teachers supported and provided opportunities for positive social interactions across different groups and cultures would be less likely to engage in interpersonal violence. (Le and Johansen, 2011, p.689)

As an important place to promote the socialisation of students, university still pays attention to the way it imparts knowledge to students (Kuai, 2015), but to a certain extent, does not emphasise teaching interpersonal skills (Dai et al., 2007), and the imperfect system of the gaokao and the evaluation mechanism for teaching quality make many schools still adhere to the model of examination-oriented education (Wang and Gao, 2017). As far as the university dormitory problem is concerned, although schools have taken many measures to solve some problems, there are still shortcomings. First of all, the schools have neglected some factors in dormitory management: No psychological guidance (Bao and Hao, 2009). At present, dormitories in most universities contain four to six people; in addition to extracurricular activities, almost all the time a student spent in university is spent with the same few people. Once there is a problem inside the dormitory, very few others get involved. Although the students in the dormitory face each other every day, without a smiling face and warm greetings, everyone feels uncomfortable when looking at each other. No one has taken the initiative to reconcile the individuals; the dormitory has become more desolate, the problem cannot be resolved, the atmosphere is difficult, and the process of improving the relationship has also been lengthened. Although there are counsellors, the ratio is one counsellor to every 150 people, and very few counsellors visit the dormitory (Yang, 2016). When we have problems, there is a lack of professional knowledge of teachers to counsel us (Tao et

al., 2015). Although hostel aunts can help with domestic issues, such as cleaning, cleaning hallways and so on, when it comes to psychological problems, this is obviously more than they can do.

There is no emotional education for students, and guidance on interpersonal relationships is lacking. In addition, the lack of communication between teachers and students has led teachers to cope with the full schedule of educational courses (Zhou et al., 2014), which naturally leads them to ignore guidance and education for students' emotional lives, and there is little communication between teachers and students, so that education on how to handle interpersonal relationships is inadequate.

Social Causes

In today's knowledge-based economy, it seems that every day we are being instilled with the idea of 'survival of the fittest, survival of the strong' (*Taiyuan Evening*, 2009). The fact that employment is difficult constantly tells us that only when we become strong can we ensure our future. As Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) point out, educational failure becomes more prevalent as societies become more unequal. From the social excessive utilitarian guidance (Xian and Guan, 2010), some students blindly pursue high scores in the process of receiving education, ignore the social and emotional aspects of life and ignore ideological and moral sensitivity and the promotion of their own personal charm (Wang and Gao, 2017). In addition, in the various school evaluations, they intentionally or unintentionally highlight scores and rankings (Kuai, 2015). Given this social situation, some students are eager to get a

good score at the end of the term (Peng, 2001), so, they will not share review materials with others or take time to solve difficult problems for other students, which also affects their enthusiasm for participating in collective activities and various beneficial social practices.

At the same time, with the continuous development of social media, communication between human beings is decreasing day-by-day, and interpersonal relationships seem more perfunctory (Huang, 2016). University students often return to the dormitory without communicating with their roommates. The indifferent interpersonal relationships have formed invisible barriers between people.

From the interviews about university students' satisfaction with campus life, we know that they are not satisfied with the campus life they have experienced. Since there is no significant difference in university students' satisfaction with campus life in terms of urban and rural origin, and economic conditions, university students' dissatisfaction with their campus life is not a minority problem but is much more pervasive. We should attach great importance to it. Students are not satisfied with their campus life, which can be understood as: the disjunction between the campus life experienced and expectations of the university has reached a level that cannot be tolerated. So, where do students' expectations of campus life come from? It should be said, that it comes mainly from students' feelings of belonging. University students are adults; the more they fit in with wider society, the more they can accept the reality, and vice versa (Xin and Jin, 2006). In contrast, people who feel marginalised and lacking a sense of belonging to the community tend to interpret school as a

utopia that exists independently of society, and, in addition to the secondary and primary schools they have experienced, teachers and parents protect them from the storms of life (Xi, 2011). It is a matter of course that what is 'good' about university should be much better. In fact, the 'goodness' they experience on university campuses is not as great as they expect.

Looking for Normal Campus Life

How should university students live on campus? Some students like to sign up for various foreign language courses, some hope to accumulate work experience from part-time jobs, and others are keen to participate in training for various professional qualifications, or play an active part in the student union. All kinds of activities have played a positive role in cultivating students' holistic development.

Wenjun: Will too many activities take up your study time and play a negative role? How should university students live on campus?

Betty: The more qualifications you attain, the more competitive you will be. Many students have taken the popular intermediate and advanced translation courses, computer courses. Although we are more willing to spend more time on our studies, we have to devote some energy acquiring additional qualifications to ensure a smoother career path for ourselves.

Daisy: Maybe it's because of my personality that I prefer to do some 'errands'. I don't think university students have to put studies first. In the university, it is more important to learn how to live and how to behave combining the study and work together. Mastering solid professional knowledge and rich practical experience will give you an advantage when you seek to enter the workplace in the future.

Fiona: Learn as much as you can. I see a lot of people who are already working but have also signed up for courses to improve themselves. They are incredibly busy and tired juggling work with professional courses. If you see them, you will be glad that you have enough time to study before you get a full-time job.

Emma: For the sake of my major, I will study abroad after graduation, so I try my best to study English. As for working, I believe I will learn to have effective time; in the case of ensuring the quality of learning, having practical experience would be more advantageous than book-learning.

(Group interview, October 2014)

University students are in a golden age of learning, and it is right to put learning first and take advantage of the great time at university to enrich yourself. In addition, many students wish to go on to postgraduate studies; therefore, good professional qualifications for future learning are very important. Nowadays, many firms value student paper qualifications (Zhang, 2011), as proof of ability. When it comes to working, I think it is very meaningful to be engaged in work related to one's major.

The author thinks that it is meaningful to discuss how university students should live on campus, because this is a problem that all university students must think about and face. Campus life is not only related to the success of university students during their four years of study, but will also have a significant impact on their life as a whole.

I agree with most of my interviewees that studies is the primary task of our campus life and the subject of university life. Students should most of their time and energy on studying. A solid professional foundation and comprehensive accomplishment are the foundation for everybody for their functioning in society in the future. University is the golden stage of learning, because students of this age have the strongest desire for knowledge, the strongest memory, the strongest understanding, and what is more important, universities offer unique opportunities and are most conducive for learning. They have the advice of eminent professors, rich libraries and modern laboratories with complete facilities. If they fail to grasp these opportunities for study, they will regret it for a lifetime.

In addition to learning, on the campus, university students have a lot of things to do, such as participating in community activities and other campus arts and sports activities as well as cultural activities; participating in training for all kinds of certificates; taking a part-time job in and out of school and so on. The above activities are supplementary to the classroom, but beneficial for university students to broaden their knowledge, cultivate their abilities and develop themselves holistically. But it's not the case that more is better. Each person can choose to participate in a number of activities, but too many activities are not advised.

5. Gender and Self-actualisation

A question that is worth studying is what are the distinct factors that affect the development of women university students? The experiences of success and failure when growing up, individuals' views and experiences, and their behavioural responses are some of the main factors that influence the development of female university students.

Success always makes people happy and confident, and failure always makes people depressed with an inferiority complex; this is everyone's experience. In a competitive society, many people have low self-confidence, because not everyone can succeed every day, and failure often makes them feel incompetent. In a university that places great emphasis on academic studies and holistic development, if a student's grades put them in the last few places in the class, they can neither run nor dance, neither sing nor dance. They may not be good at dealing with people, and their interpersonal

relationships are in a mess. It is difficult for them to have confidence in themselves.

Sometimes there are one or two specific events that can hurt a student's confidence and make them suddenly unable to accept themselves.

Candy told me her story:

I remember when I went to a teacher training school for an interview after junior high school, I was wearing a suit of shorts. The interview included running, long jump, sit-ups, singing and dancing. Perhaps because of being overweight, the examiners looked at me curiously; one parent even smiled and said: 'So fat, it's strange to be able to pass the exam! I didn't realise at that time and I didn't say anything back, and since then I have found that I have been slow to respond. I have no confidence in myself, afraid that others will look at me. I joined the folk dancing club during the first year of university; I felt clumsy and uncoordinated during the learning process and I was always afraid of acting like a fool. I feel like I have no strengths as I'm short and fat. I'm not responsive; I'm not flexible; I'm not good at all, and when people mention my strengths and weaknesses, I'm nervous and blushing.

(WeChat interview, August 2017)

No one has an easy time throughout their life. People grow up facing adversity, failure and other people's judgements. With more life experiences as we grow up life experiences, the experience of success or failure will inevitably increase. Experience of success or failure is essential to human growth. We cannot predict adversity, and it is difficult to change the environment. The only thing that can be done is for us to adjust our views, enhance our psychological resilience, use our positive and constructive behaviour to change our present situation, accept ourselves, and make ourselves confident.

On my (**Betty**) first formal oral English class in the university, I felt a lot of stress. I never had systematic oral and listening training. I was 'terrified' when I saw other people reading fluently and talking to teachers. I was born more introverted, and also quite sensitive. The teacher was not very satisfied with my pronunciation, I could feel that. Other students seemed very active, which made me even more ashamed. Slowly, during my oral English class, I became very

nervous and strangely silent, and I began to reject my English teacher because she was probably the first teacher that expressed dissatisfaction with me for the first time in my life. I think she only saw the fact that I was lagging behind the others, but she didn't notice that I was working hard too. Once, a classmate came to the dormitory to chat and said: 'You're completely different from when you were at school. You were much more active then.' I realised that I had become a silent person in the eyes of others. I blamed myself. Since then, I have consciously increased my contacts with my classmates. I soon found it very pleasant to get along with my classmates. Many things can help and promote each other. Gradually I felt that the environment was not as terrible as I thought, and I was much more active in class.

(Face-to-face interview, September 2014)

From my research, we can see that the self-knowledge of female university students is directly related to the love, respect, trust, acceptance and spiritual support obtained from teachers, parents and friends.

I have interviewed several students and they had a common experience, in their growing up process; parents, teachers, friends always blindly criticised them too harshly. Especially in childhood, they were often criticised, ridiculed, scolded, and they had to take responsibility for their errors. The experience had a terrible effect on their thoughts, emotions and behaviours.

In China, many people have suffered from some degree of 'mental abuse' at an early age (Chen, 2007; Jia et al., 2012), because adults often use 'mental abuse' as a way to educate their children. When a child does something wrong, they blame them harshly like a tiger mother. When they do the right thing, they seldom praise them. The aim is to make the children learn to be modest, and ensure that they do not come across as proud. Instead of cultivating modest people, the result will be a lack of self-confidence, frustration, timidity, insecurity, and a lack of knowledge of how to cope with the stresses of life. When you grow up, you just remember your

shortcomings; you know nothing about your strengths, and it's easy to think that nothing you do is right.

Daisy recalled that:

My mother was a very strict person, and I still can't forget that when I won the first prize for children's painting at the age of 10, she took the certificate and put it aside and said to me: 'How did you get 91 points in maths? If you can't learn maths well at such a young age, you will fail in all subjects when you're thirteen or fourteen.' It hurt me a lot, and I often doubt my ability.

(WeChat interview, April 2017)

Anna added:

When I was young, my parents were tough. They could pick out every mistake I had made, but they thought reward was superfluous, and I had no idea what I had done right. I don't think I have anything to show off. I'm really afraid of doing something wrong, so I try not to do what others don't ask me to do, because doing that makes me nervous and anxious. Although I won the first place in my class when I graduated from high school, I was stooped and listless when I received the award on stage. I was afraid to stand proudly in front of people, and it became the most painful thing to accept the prize on stage.

(WeChat interview, April 2017)

In the process of human growth, appropriate criticism can play a certain educational role, but being excessively critical will destroy a person's personality in many ways. Will make the person lose their confidence, their creativity and their sense of humour, and they will begin to doubt their own strengths, and become alarmed and confused.

Contemporary Female University Students Need Spiritual Independence and Initiative

From the in-depth interviews, I found that spiritual independence and subjective views have an important original impact on the development of female university students themselves. The only thing a person can ultimately rely on is being herself. If

one is too dependent on others, over time, one will lose her independence, the opportunity for independent thinking and self-expression, and lack skills in facing adversity and dealing with setbacks. Once the dependence is lost, it can easily lead to insecurity, anxiety and even mental breakdown.

I am a person who insists on my own opinion. When I applied for the gaokao, my parents asked me to apply for some popular majors, but I wanted to choose the one I was interested in. I argued with my parents for ages, and I wept and continued trying to convince them, and eventually achieved my wishes. I am very satisfied with this; I am now studying the major that I am interested in with no regrets. I found that I have become more and more confident.

(**Betty**, WeChat interview, August 2017)

The greatest joy in life is achieving what others think you can't do, and you manage to achieve it, and you make up your mind to overcome the difficulties, and this will be a positive thing in your life. The days before the gaokao, I had a very difficult time, in the city mock exam and province mock exam; it was a complete mess. The teacher lost confidence in me, and my parents shook their heads and sighed at me. They often criticised me for my low ability. In my heart, I felt grievance and pain, because I usually worked very hard, and, in the end, not only did I not get the ideal results, but I had to be scolded. At that time, I thought that there were only two roads before me: surrender to the gaokao, or 'die bitterly' at the hands of this fierce enemy. These two paths were both hopeless. But I was still not resigned to it. I transferred the pain from my heart to the gaokao, seeing it as an enemy, and determined to fight it to the end, until the last breath. Finally, I realised my dream to be admitted to a university.

(**Never**, WeChat interview, October, 2016)

A Never-ending Life Cycle

A survey by *China Youth Daily* showed that 76.5% of those polled believe Chinese parents interfere too much in their children's affairs and 90.2% said this would cause children to feel great pressure (Wu, 2012). When I was a child, I always wished to be a grown-up. Little curiosity can be found in our childhood; furthermore, our parents usually focus their worries on the wrong aspects. I had a strict upbringing. I often felt

unhappy when I was told 'You cannot do this' and 'You're still too young'" It's as clear as daylight that children suffer a lot, which is not supposed happen at their age. The sense of competition is encouraged by our parents from the day we enter nursery. Remember what a nursery used to be in the old days? It was a place where children played games with each other, free to run and laugh, and learned. But in the current society in China, according to Grace, 'children are "imposed" [upon] to learn too much before they enter primary school.' In primary school, then in secondary school, they are crammed with impractical academic knowledge, perpetual exams and endless homework. It's possible that they spend most of their spare time studying instead of playing with friends and developing their own interests. Undoubtedly, playing comes naturally to children. They should have more chances to observe and be curious about what's all round them, which inspires their thinking ability and creativity. But, nowadays, Chinese children are deprived of such chances. Instead, they are provided with more chances to bury their heads in textbooks. What's worse, parents and teachers put so much emphasis on children's academic levels that they give them peer pressure when comparing their children with others. To improve their performance in their studies or to make them more competitive in other aspects, on weekends, parents send children to study groups like Olympic Maths, different types of English classes, or lessons in the arts such as piano, violin or painting that they may not be really interested in. Those children don't even have a little time to sit back and relax for a while.

A video clip about estrangement caused by inappropriate parenting between a teenage boy and his father has spread on China's social media (Cheng, 2016), attracting an audience of over three million within days. In the film, a depressed 15-year-old describes himself as a 'learning machine', made to study for over 12 hours a day. He said 'the idea of running away from home give me much comfort', while his father seems to suffer as much distress and pressure. 'I've been trying my best to be a good dad. Why does he still want to run away? All we have done is for him and his future,' he said. Such a conflict between strengthening self-awareness of adolescents and traditional Chinese method of parenting has given rise to the 'greatest estrangement in the closest relationship', the film summarised at the end.

Chinese parents do not communicate well with their children and some do not set good examples (Tong, 2013). For instance, they always tell their children not to spend too much time online, but they themselves sit in front of the smartphone for hours after coming home from work.

As far as I know, many parents do so not only because of the outdated education system, it's also because that they are enthusiastic about comparing their children with other parents, treating their children as their proud products. While Chinese parents are proud of their children and arrogantly receive expressions of envy from other parents, they should contemplate deeply again whether children tutored by themselves are truly talents or successful creatures. In fact, this so-called pride is totally passive and mechanical, because they completely accept the tutoring, training and persuasion of their parents, and they are accustomed to being driven to achieve

by tedious repetition and tenacious practice, to be forced to continue what 'they were told to do'. They get used to waiting for a commander, without whom they would stop their mechanical programme, like dull machines waiting for a clear order. So, so-called successful kids in China are only skilled craftsmen, rather than creators, let alone intellectuals.

However, although Chinese children feel frustrated with their parents, they still rely on them. Take the example of the 'little emperor' and 'little princess' and you will have some idea of that. Although Chinese parents remember to wash the clothes, make the beds and do the cleaning of bedrooms for their golden children, seldom do they realise that children should learn and master living skills, or they will have trouble when they grow up.

To summarise, there are three problems when it comes to Chinese families: the idea that children are the possession of parents, the habit of over-indulging children, and parents forcing their unrealised dreams on their children.

Time flies, and now I am an adult and already have a child, as many Chinese born in the 1980s are now stepping into parenthood themselves. For our generation, a whole family's monthly income can be spent on the child; our moods are hugely affected by our children; friends, career and fun all belong to our life before parenthood. More and more young couples struggle to have children because we want to be the best parents possible. Obviously, to ease our worries, the Chinese government should provide quality education and better public services.

Growing up is painful in some ways with the troubles that come with it; we suffer much stress and have more responsibilities to take on. When I was a child, I hoped that I could grow up quickly. At that time, I thought that, if I were an adult, I would no longer be under the control of my parents. There was always so much homework given by teachers and so many arguments between my parents and me. Nothing can change unless we change ourselves. We are and will be parents sooner or later. Therefore, can we educate and raise our children in a different way? For example, can we let them share the happiness and innocence of childhood with their playmates; let them be free to think about the meaning of life and discover the colourful world.

How to know yourself, change yourself, and then accept yourself are achieved by a person's efforts, confirming their objective existence and positive value. By recognising reality, and not blindly being proud and insecure, you would not be destroyed and shaken by the opinion of others. Everyone has the need for and possibility of self-realisation, that is, how to forge a satisfied and perfect self from an imperfect, contradictory and conflicted self.

Chapter 6 LGBT Lives in China

In China, where tradition reigns, homosexuality is no longer taboo. What is the view of those living in the country? During as much as three years of follow-up interviews after we first met via an online LGBT social network, Never-Give-Up (her online nickname) and I have built up a good relationship. When we chatted together, she could always safely open her heart, speak her mind, pour out her troubles and share her joy with me, even introduce me to her LGBT friends for my further study. I was offered a rare and precious opportunity, a feeling that I could be family to her. The following life story is what she told me. It was based mainly on two interviews (WeChat, October 2016; face-to-face interview, October, 2017), WeChat and e-mail communication.

1. A WeChat Interview Report on an LGBT Chinese Lesbian

Name: Never-Give-Up

Age: 26

Occupation: Clinical doctor
(WeChat interview, October 2016)

Traditional Chinese native Never-Give-Up (henceforth Never in this chapter) knew she was different. For this 26-year-old to tell her parents that she was a lesbian was the most difficult thing in her life.

She felt that no parent would be willing to accept this fact. And she said that, since she was a child, she had always dressed like a boy. She loved casual clothes, and she was always playing with boys, even if she knew there was no special attraction

towards male friends. As a 14-year-old, she began to wonder if she was gay because of her attraction to girls. But with no depictions of gay people in the media at that time, no discussion of gays and no internet, she wasn't quite sure what she was. She only knew she was different.

When she was 18, Never travelled outside mainland China for the first time. In Hong Kong, she witnessed lesbians holding hands on the street, something she had never seen before. Having been exposed to a different world, she immersed herself in a new life while she was at university. When studying medicine at a university in Liaoning province, she actively started seeking a female partner.

She was soon living with her girlfriend and had come to terms with being gay. Yet she had still to confront one major obstacle; she hadn't come out to her family, worried how her traditional Chinese family would react.

In line with tradition, her parents were busy arranging men for her to date.

'The pressure to get married increased dramatically after I graduated from university. In the beginning, I complied to my parents' arrangement to date the young men they choose for me,' she says. 'But I chose to find an excuse to end the relationships.'

This didn't discourage her parents and they worked even harder to find the 'right son-in-law'.

'I didn't want to hurt anyone anymore,' she says. So, she decided to open up to her family.

'My parents believed that I definitely had certain physiological problems', she says.

'They told me it is a natural law for a woman to get married and give birth to a baby.

Why should I be abnormal?'

They even took her to a top physiological clinic in Beijing to seek medical help. But her parents were disappointed when the doctor said their daughter was totally normal.

'Understanding from my family is more important than the outside world, because I have to face my family every day,' she says. 'If they can accept me, I will feel less depressed, but they can't.'

The young woman and her partner hope to buy a house, but they do not have enough money. She envies men because their incomes are normally higher and there are more jobs available to men. What's more, she says, it is a tradition for a Chinese family to save up and pay for their son's wedding and house.

However, money is only one stumbling block for the couple. 'Even if we are rich enough to buy a house, do you think our parents will allow us to live together?' she asks. Yet despite the gap between her and her parents, the young woman says she doesn't regret being honest with her parents.

'It is my life, and it is my right to choose the lifestyle which I want,' she says.

However, there has been a warming of relations between her and her parents. She decided to make some radical changes in her life. After two years of living with her partner, she asked if she could bring her roommate to dinner with her family. Her mum said 'Yes'.

'Let's be honest, she's my partner,' she told her mum.

'Of course, I know; I'm your mother,' her mum replied.

Though her families struggled with the idea of her being gay at first, she said they have come to accept it.

My mum said to me, "As long as you're happy, I'm fine." Never told me.

Never's story is an example of China's changing attitudes towards LGBT. In a country where LGBT was once a taboo subject, increasing numbers of Chinese are becoming more tolerant of LGBT.

LGBT hasn't been accepted by the mainstream culture of China, though it has quite a long history (Tian and Zhang, 2013). Dating back to hundreds of years ago, Chinese society was feudal, and all people had to conform to the social institutions. It was almost impossible for LGBT to admit their sexual orientation (Zong and Li, 2014). Nowadays, LGBT seems to be accepted by a small number of people. However, when a celebrity is reported as gay/lesbian, the public seem shocked and social media will use the news as headlines. And, usually, journalists will report the news with a large layout. The public will talk about the news. All these show people still regard LGBT as something odd - they just can't look upon it as a normal topic. Under traditional Chinese culture, all the young people of marriageable age would be urged to marry as soon as possible by their parents (Li, 2002). Chinese parents usually hope that their children can marry someone and then have a child. The hope seems easy to realise, but not every marriageable man/woman would like to marry a person of the opposite sex. Among those people, most dare not tell their parents they are LGBTs.

They clearly know that their parents can't accept the fact, and their relatives and people around them would consider them as odd people. Most LGBTs can't bear the pressure from their parents and relatives, so they choose to conceal their true sexual orientation by marrying a person of the opposite sex whom they don't love.

2. The Attitudes to LGBT in China

The Official Attitudes to LGBT

Before 1997, homosexuality was a crime in China and, until 2001, it was classified as a mental illness (Wang, 2011). Recently, China's Ministry of Health amended a 14-year ban on LGBT blood donors to allow lesbians to donate blood, while the ban is still in effect for male LGBTs.

The authority does not actively promote gay issues in China. Although there is no law against homosexuality or same-sex acts between LGBTs, and there is also no law to require people to accept individuals who engage in LGBT acts, it is believed that the Chinese policy towards gay issues typify the 'Three NOs': no approval, no disapproval, and no promotion (Homosexuality relationships in China, 2010). However, many cases show (Li and Wang, 1992; Li, 2002; Sun, 2012) that some of those participating in LGBT activity are still punished by the official justice system and pursued by the police, and may even be arrested.

Figure 20

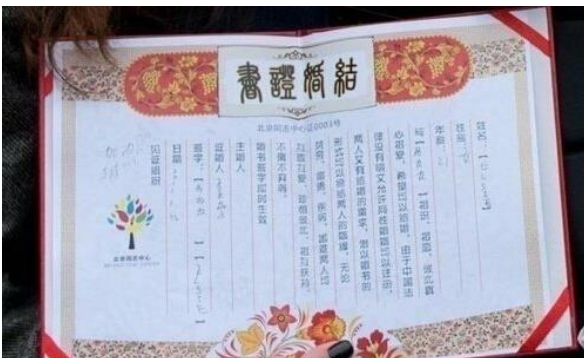
Beijing rejects lesbian couple's marriage registration



Source:<http://www.womenofchina.cn/womenofchina/html1/news/newsmakers/15/941-1.htm>

Ma Youyou and Elsie applied to register their marriage in Dongcheng District in Beijing on 25th February, 2013, but they were refused by the department of civil affairs. News of this event attracted the attention of many Chinese netizens. LGBT marriage is not legal in China and it was reported that Ma and Elsie created their own marriage certificate after being denied an official one.

Figure 21



Ma Youyou and Elsie's unofficial marriage certificate [sohu]

Social Attitudes to LGBT

As Chinese society became more and more progressive, LGBT began to gain more acceptance in Chinese society especially in Chinese universities. Over the past thirty years, with the development of higher education and the influence of Western perceptions, the attitudes of the public in China towards LGBT have changed (Wang, 2011). An increasing number of LGBTs are not just coming out of the closet, but are

also organising LGBT (Zhu, 2012; Tian and Zhang, 2013) communities and activities. With their efforts, some universities have even begun offering homosexuality-related courses. According to Ah Qiang (2013), executive director of PFLAG China - The Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, China, another Guangzhou-based LGBT community, the organisation has committed to helping LGBT people get along well with their friends and relatives since it was established in 2008. Chinese society now has more open attitudes towards LGBT, and an increasing number of LGBTs and their parents are willing to share their stories.

The tolerance of LGBT is increasing in the major cities in China. The statistics (Homosexual relationships in China, 2010) showed that more than half of the people expressed their understanding of LGBT in modern cities like Shanghai and Beijing. Only 15% of people supposed that homosexuality and heterosexuality were not equal while people who totally objected to LGBT numbered around 10%, which is lower than America, which might be because religious belief is not very common in China. Furthermore, LGBT relationships between adults were legalised in 1997 and, in 2001, (Black, 2009), the Ministry of Health of China stopped regarding LGBT as a mental illness, which could be a representation of the change in Chinese attitude towards homosexuality.

China had its first gay pride event in Shanghai in June 2009 (*On Top Magazine*, 2009), consisting of plays, film screenings, discussions and parties in one week. The event, called Shanghai Pride, attracted thousands from all over China.

While police did monitor the events, and plans for a parade were called off, the fact they were able to hold the event is a testament to the progress China has made. In 2004, a different group tried to hold a similar event in Beijing, but it was shut down (Chen, 2013). This might be because Shanghai is further away from the political centre of Beijing, which enabled them to hold the event.

Although the attitudes of the general public in China towards LGBT have changed in the past thirty years, traditional values still play a significant role in terms of LGBT.

According to Shanghai Jiao Tong University (Pink News, 2013), on the whole, there is still a widespread view in China that LGBT is unacceptable. They did a survey of 3,500 residents in 34 cities at the end of 2013, and two-thirds of Chinese adults considered LGBT to be anomalous, having a higher proportion in the less developed cities. What's more, there are no existing laws and regulations to protect LGBT people from discrimination in China, let alone for LGBT couples to get married or adopt children.

Phoebe Zhang (2018), in her article, 'Scared Straight' revealed in the after math of a shocking kidnapping case, a united LGBT community fighting "conversion therapy"-- shock treatment used to convince 'patients' (LGBTs) their sexuality could be changed. There is a section in her article about a 'patient' who received treatment from a non-traditional therapist:

no white coat, just a middle-aged man in jeans and jacket...he (therapist) asked the patient to remove his shoes and lie on a sofa with his eyes closed...and asked the patient to think about men having sex - then, without warning, electrocuted him with a small metal baton. (Zhang, 2018, p.61)

There were lots of potential negative impacts of the treatment; many 'patients' even lost the ability to work. The reason for this is there is no specific Chinese law to protect gay rights. The sociologist Li Yinhe believes that, in modern society, homosexual people are still a vulnerable group, and there should be laws protecting gay rights(Liu, 2013). At this point, Chinese legislation should learn from Taiwan: the establishment of the Enforcement Rules for the Gender Equity Education Act (Hsieh, 2012, p.75) defines 'substantive equality of gender status' as 'no one shall be discriminated based on his or her sex, sexual orientation, gender temperament or gender identity' (Rule 1, ERGEEA, 2005). The importance of legislation is that it aims to champion the ideology of gender and sexual equality, while protecting more and more vulnerable people.

Parental Attitudes to LGBT

Yet while the increased activity in China's gay community is proof of its growth, much of Chinese society remains stuck in the past, ignorant of LGBT. Large generational, educational and societal gaps still persist. Nowadays, many young people depend on their original family to buy houses, get married and raise children, while the present university campus is mainly composed of only children, who receive particular attention from their families.

'Many of my friends don't come out to their parents because they are afraid of rejection', said Never. Though her parents know she is lesbian now, Never has not given up avoiding discussing her partner with them. She explained to me, 'If you don't

address it, although they know the truth, you are given some level of freedom to live the lifestyle you want to live. If you don't talk about it, you can pretend nothing happened. Although some people think that this system gives more freedom, it's unfortunate because it means children feel estranged. There's no open communication in the family.'

'Some parents know their children are gay, but they still ask them to get married and lead a heterosexual life. Of course, some people are afraid of losing their family, so they get married', said Never. In traditional Chinese thinking, every Chinese has to get married. It is such a dominating lifestyle. In China, the pattern of family is not diversified. It's basically heterosexual marriage that everyone needs to go into, whether gay or straight.

In the past, many gay and lesbian Chinese stayed closeted their whole lives, marrying heterosexuals and having children. There is a true story of a woman who found her husband was a gay and eventually took her own life.

Luo Hongling, a teacher, used to teach Korean at a foreign language school in Chengdu. On 16th June, 2012, she jumped from the 13th floor of an apartment and died on the spot (Levesque, 2013; Luo, 2013). Only one day before her suicide, her husband admitted that he was gay.

After her death, Luo's friends and families found her account on an Online Forum, a website for online writers to share their works. Luo was a member of an online community for wives of gay men (<http://www.weibo.com/u/2803036010>). From that moment, she suspected her husband was gay, up to two days before her suicide, Luo posted her life stories on the online forum.

On June 13, 2012, her last post said: 'Sisters, you are right, my husband is a gay, and he has been using me from the beginning!'

Renowned sexologist and sociologist Li Yinhe (2002) commented that the homo-wife phenomenon is unique to China, but seldom occurs in other countries. In other countries, LGBT people can always remain single or live together or marry each other. Very few enter into a heterosexual marriage. This phenomenon happens in China because Chinese culture places such a great emphasis on marriage and reproduction, that it compels gay people to enter into a straight marriage (Chinese Cultural Studies, 2010).

According to a national television programme broadcast (Ngan, 2008) in 2005, approximately 90% of LGBT men chose to get married due to social pressure. Their wives knew nothing about their sexual orientation. An expert on LGBT, Zhang Beichuan (Shan, 2012) estimates the number of women married to LGBT men is around 16 million. The main reason that LGBT people have to get married is the huge social pressure on them (Ah, 2013). In Chinese society, it is very much easier for them to get married than to reveal their sexual orientation to their families and friends. Statistics (Ngan, 2008) from the *Home for Wives Married to LGBT Men* website report that more than 1,000 people aged between 20 and 60 have registered as members and regularly share their stories on the website.

More surprisingly, in recent years, there has been a growing phenomenon of lesbians and gays marrying each other and having children. This arrangement is considered to be mutually beneficial, allowing each to please their parents while leading their own lives. Never even told me there is a new gay bar in Shanghai named The Box which serves to match gays and lesbians.

Seeking public acceptance, lesbian partners are tying the knot with gay men to satisfy their parents, but they find the deception exhausting.

3. Break the Conventional Thinking

In a traditional male-dominated society, there are various restrictions on women, and women must assume multiple roles in their daily lives. Although traditional feminist theories recognise such inequality to some extent, there is a lack of analysis of the underlying causes. Postmodern feminism has explained discrimination and injustice from various aspects of social construction, cultural awareness, physiology, etc. It advocates jumping out of the limitations of gender, emphasising the awakening of female consciousness, and seeking the comprehensive progress of women beyond gender (Butler, 2007).

The postmodern way of thinking in postmodern feminism and the opposition to the normalisation of heterosexual culture enables women to question the rules of modern society and the scientific standards that standardise gender (Dollimore, 1995). In the concept of 'postmodernism', gender has become uncertain and non-absolute. From this interpretation of gender, the absolute man and woman disappeared. It is very possible to train a girl to have fortitude and courage from an early age, and endow them with traditional 'male characteristics'; one can also train a boy to be sensitive, and 'feminine'.

In a country where most newspapers are government-owned and gays aren't portrayed in the mass media, the internet has provided LGBTs with a way to find

current information about the gay community and understand their sexuality (Taylor et al., 2014).

Never thinks 'the internet has been a catalyst for the gay community, especially the younger generation'. Because of the internet, younger people know what's going on in the world; they are much more open-minded and willing to stand up and fight for rights. For some gays who remain closeted to everyone, the internet has served as their only outlet. She added, 'for many Chinese, the internet is the only way to contact and find gay friends. We don't need to hide ourselves on the internet. I can't imagine how bad my life would be if I could not use the internet. It has changed my life.'

Increasing migration to cities from rural areas may play a role in the improving attitudes towards LGBT. Many gays like Never who originate from small rural towns have only confirmed their sexuality after migrating to cities for university studies. In China's rural areas, LGBT is mostly not discussed while gay populations are invisible, leaving many gays isolated. Those who come to the city find more resources and can connect with more LGBT people. Never, who works in Tianjin, said many gays choose to work in cities far away from their parents for more freedom. And she also believes education is a factor. 'The higher the education, the easier it is to accept gays', she added. 'They know LGBT is not a sickness. From what I know, it's the truth. I've been to different schools, for bachelor's degree, and master's. Each time, more and more classmates are open-minded toward gays.' University life has been acknowledged as a significant period for shaping young people's identities (Falconer and Taylor, 2017).

Students in university can negotiate their identities more freely, while this kind of university experience is said to be 'a progressive signifier'. Emphasising 'diversity' in HE, refers to protecting equality by eliminating discrimination, while ensuring equal outcomes for different groups (Allen et al., 2012). Diversity is the core of HE for it encourages and embraces all sorts of lifestyles and it allows different thoughts to coexist and merge. Therefore, the HE stage is an important turning point where university students are socialised. It is also the period when they question life and come to know themselves. For example, Dugan and Yurman (2011) stressed that university transitions are an incredible journey of self-discovery for young LGBTs, believing that personal recognition through university is a formative process for the clarification of identity and the disclosure of sexuality.

The Development of LGBT Rights in Asian Countries

Confucian culture is the core ideology for most east Asian countries; therefore, the process of legalisation of homosexuality and same-sex marriage is different from that of Western countries; it embodies the unique culture characteristic (Sullivan and Jackson, 2001). Only some parts of cities and regions in Japan recognise same-sex relationships, and accept same-sex civil unions, but it does not have legal effect (Liu and Chen, 2017). On 24 May 2017, Taiwan became the first legitimate LGBT marriage area in Asia. The trend for legalisation of same-sex marriage in the Western world has affected the concept of marriage in traditional China, and especially influenced university campuses. Thanks to the popularisation of the internet and various forms

of social media, the more enlightened perspective of the West in films and television programmes about the LGBT theme is available to numerous university students through various channels, which seem to be without political influence, and this has played a significant role in shaping university students' values.

The Development of LGBT on University Campus

In China, homosexuality has long been regarded as a mental illness. In the Chinese Classification and Diagnosis of Mental Diseases - 3rd edition, published in April 2001 (Lv et al., 2010), homosexuality was not classified as an illness, which demonstrated that China has begun to tolerate LGBT groups, but LGBT has still been a taboo issue for a long time. In the face of social stigma, discrimination and violence, LGBTs have different degrees of emotional disorder and suicide (Li, 2010). In America, 1.6 million students in public schools were bullied because they were LGBT (Rivers et al., 2007). In China, with a huge population base, there are also a lot of LGBTs who are bullied. As a result, their physical and mental health should not be ignored. Domestic studies mainly focus on the mental health of LGBT groups (Gao and Jia, 2008), high risk sexual behaviour of LGBTs (Liu, et al., 2014) and the social attitude to LGBT (Wang, 2007; Yu et al., 2010a; 2010b), but seldom pay attention to the discrimination suffered by LGBTs on campus and at work and the influence on their mental health.

The Development of LGBT Organisations on Campus

On October 12, 2006, the former 'Queer Research Group' of Sun Yat-Sen University was formally registered as 'Happy Together' which is a student organisation of Zhuhai Campus, Sun Yat-Sen University (Zhang, 2006). Happy Together, as an academic and public academic community, develops activities on campus and is committed to creating a campus environment with diversified sexual orientations, the equality of diversified cultures, mutual tolerance and respect. Happy Together has established five departments, including a public relations department, propaganda department, secretary department, resource department and LGBT. LGBT is responsible for organising member communication, gatherings and establishing consultation stations. As an organisation, its establishment enables students to develop a more enlightened perspective and understanding, so as to eliminate discrimination and prejudice, and carry out activities advocating equality, friendly communication, healthy education, safe sex education, and a discussion of universities' policies. The establishment of Happy Together was a sign of an open campus environment. After that, many universities registered similar student organisations successively (Liu and Chen, 2017). But then, the university stated that it did not recognise 'Happy Together' as it is private organisation. This indicates why some registered student organisations concerning LGBT issues have generally applied for registration relating to gender research, AIDS care and multicultural studies and tried to avoid giving others the impression of being a 'homosexual organisation' in their activities.

Underground Community on Campus

Because it is difficult to formally register a special LGBT student community on campus, some students have been willing to establish the organisation as an underground community (Hu, 2012). There is not a great difference between these organisations with the ordinary ones in terms of establishment, management and operation mode. Several sponsors are responsible for making plans, recruiting members and developing activities. Because underground communities face some risks in terms of establishment and organisation of activities and cannot grow and apply for a place on campus through a normal channel, they usually organise activities outside the campus or in a public space.

The College Gay Student Alliance (CGSA) was established in the winter of 2004 (Hu, 2012), and applied for registration in Peking University but was not approved, and thus operated underground. This is an independent non-registered student LGBT community composed of the LGBTs of Peking University. In its heyday, the community developed various kinds of activities, such as reading parties, garden parties, fitness and discussion. Because participants go Dutch in terms of necessary expenses, they organise affordable activities with as little expense as possible. There are dozens of registered members, covering more than ten universities in Beijing. However, in 2006, the key founder of CGSA left Beijing. Although other participants tried to continue to operate it, they failed. At present, the organisation has ceased activities completely.

The Academic and Teaching Activities Related Social Gender in Universities

Some universities are now offering studies courses and seminars including LGBT issues, and these courses and academic meetings are concerned with and participated in by the LGBTs in the universities or surrounding universities (Wu, 2014).

In November 2003, Professor Gao Yanning in Fudan School of Public Health established the Sociology of LGBT Health course, which is an elective for graduate students, and students can obtain credits upon completion of the course (Chen, 2006). This is the first case in Chinese universities offering LGBT studies. Although there are only several graduate students choosing the course, 1,745 students attended these lectures in the last two years, and the lecture theatres are often bursting at the seams, barely satisfying demand. In September 2005, Dr. Sun Zhongxin established a public elective course, namely LGBT studies for undergraduates. Its lectures attracted students who had not signed up for it, but whose the numbers outstripped those who had (Cheng et al., 2015).

The Internet and BBS⁸ for LGBT Students

There are many LGBT networks on the internet, and some of them are particularly aimed at LGBT students. Moreover, the programmes of some forums even focus on specific universities. The emergence of LGBT student websites can be traced back to 2000 when China's LGBT websites began to rapidly develop (Feng and Zhao, 2016). In the early stage, the founders of LGBT websites were the students who had majored in computer studies who were interested in making a webpage. LGBT student

⁸ BBS (Bulletin Board System) has become a new kind of media, through which people can share information and exchange emotions.

websites became a rare space for LGBTs to communicate and were widely welcomed at that time. However, these websites are now facing the dilemma of being closed due to sensitive issues.

On September 20, 2000, www.boyair.com was established on the China Education and Research Network by a university student of Beihang University (Chen, 2008). In January 2001, the server was moved to Tsinghua University and a graduate student is now responsible for its management and maintenance. At the end of 2002, the large BBS forums of some universities had special keywords in LGBT topics were very popular.

水木清华 (BBS of Tsinghua University) opened for members of the same sex (motss) on February 3, 1999; the Chinese name was 同性社区, and it was the first large BBS website established by a domestic university with an LGBT symbol (Chen, 2008). A webmaster assumed the role of BBS moderator, but the website survived for just over 20 days and had to be closed because of endless disputes. The webmaster applied for motss in February 2003 without outcome.

At the end of 2002, the website on the BBS of Peking University had a rule requiring that the discussions relating to LGBT must be illustrated in the titles, which aimed to avoid conflicts between LGBT and heterosexual member, but many LGBTs were not satisfied with it.

At the same time, many LGBT websites opened a lot of chat rooms attracting many visitors, but the chat rooms especially established for LGBT students attracted very few.

Student Groups-based WeChat

WeChat is a chat tool widely used in China and it has 290 million active accounts at present (Zhang and Lu, 2015). All LGBTs that I interviewed for my study had a WeChat account and some students even have several accounts. Some LGBTs use special WeChat accounts to contact others in the circle and avoid using the same account to contact classmates, families and friends.

When LGBTs contact each other, even though they can choose other contact methods, sharing WeChat accounts is quite helpful. In other cases, sharing a WeChat account to unfamiliar people is an effective way of self-protection.

Because WeChat can facilitate communication with multiple persons by establishing a group and the operation is simple and convenient, founders can rapidly establish a group and there is no need to set up a special website. As a result, it is widely used. According to research participants, there are various kinds of topics on WeChat, including a lot of LGBT groups. The establishment of these groups is usually based on topics, interests, specific activities, regions and universities. In many cases, LGBTs have special WeChat groups, and information on activities is published and virtual meetings are carried out through these groups. Moreover, there are many activities spontaneously organised by the WeChat members. Before entering a university, freshmen have joined in related WeChat groups which have become an important channel for them to make contact with other LGBTs.

Safe Spaces

Some universities have gay safe spaces mainly located in remote forests, green areas and public toilets (Zhang, 2006). There are many different reviews about these places. Some students have not dared to go there alone, and others have found there are many unsafe factors in these places. As for the existence of these places, students have different opinions, ranging from a neutral attitude to disgust (Yu et al., 2010b). Most gay students find information on same-sex dating displayed in public toilets of universities, but few people make contact in this way (Wang, 2007). Some universities have a 'safe place' for chat and meetings, and these places appear automatically after self-study at night every day with up to thirty persons who meet until lights out (Yu et al., 2010b). The primary goal of most participants is to chat.

Dilemma Relating to LGBT Community Activities

The activity mode of LGBT students on campus is different due to different spaces and patterns. Loose student groups, underground communities, websites and WeChat groups usually spontaneously organise activities ranging from leisure, travel, sports, and dinners to informal discussions. Primary expenses are assumed by organisers and participants (Zhang, 2006; Hu, 2012).

Under the influence of a loose overall environment, university LGBT activities are carried out smoothly. However, it is difficult to organise these activities because there are many serious obstacles to be overcome.

On the one hand, if students want to organise formal activities on campus, they must have formal registration, otherwise, they will face difficulties in terms of activity publicity and applying for a venue. It is more difficult to apply for activities in the

name of LGBT. The common method is to register a society focusing on preventing HIV and propagating HIV positive attitudes and involving the LGBT topic by organising relevant activities. On the other hand, small-scale activities organised by students do not cost a lot of money, which is mainly spent on publicity and necessities. However, if they want to apply for a larger or better place, it is necessary to pay rent to universities. Some activities can obtain funds from universities, but the expenses of other activities have to be contributed by group members.

Sexual Orientation - Another Life Choice

LGBTs can be found in universities and account for a certain proportion of students. Meanwhile, it is clear that, at present, although society as a whole has changed its attitude to LGBT, the variation on campus is not obvious. Above all, the living situation for LGBTs is not optimistic and their mental health is worrying. They are also related to some risk factors and they are not happy.

Most of them live in the background and tolerate various pressures from the demands of their own lives and social environment. On the surface, their lives are very calm. However, they are very depressed. In fact, they are typical in terms of 'double man' phenomenon; on the one hand, they have to hide so they can live 'safely', while, on the other hand, they try to take risks and live an unknown life outside the common setting. They are full of conflict and anxieties and they live in pain.

As for university students, both homosexual and those who are not sure if they are homosexual or not but are suspected to be by others, are still growing and faced with a common problem, that is 'choosing' and 'confirming' their own sexual orientation and identification, and choosing their life direction.

Although I cannot say that university is the last period to confirm sexual orientation, it is the most critical. At this time, experiences demand determine people and they must make a decision about their sexual orientation.

If one confirms one is of the 'minority' through various paths, and ensures a willingness to accept that sexual orientation, then the problem one faces is how to continue to live a life in line with that 'preference', how to tolerate the social reality that cannot be accepted by most people at present, how to survive in a hidden and unsafe environment, how to deal with relationships with others, how to choose one's own sex partner, how to avoid being damaged and how to avoid experiencing other pains. This will be a life with both pain and happiness.

If a person is unable to confirm their own sexual orientation, but is curious or forced by external pressure, or caused by others' vicious jokes to try LGBT life, they are still in a 'muddled' state and living blindly. However, if, after experiencing the life, they find it is not what they thought, they need to be courageous and face their own weaknesses, and learn how to face others and survive in a complex environment.

In addition, there is another kind of person who is special but cannot be excluded. At present, the media reports that female university students regard being 'lesbian' as a fashion, and some southern college students are 'money boys' (Li, 2012; Hu, 2017).

This might be misleading in the media. However, if these persons do indeed exist, I think they are irrelevant to LGBT, but they are 'playing with' their lives and themselves as well as 'fire'. They do not have the pains and distress of LGBT, but they will bear the adverse consequences caused by their childish and thoughtless behaviour.

The various situations above might exist in universities and the number of the sexually-ambivalent might be greater. Because undergraduates are undergoing change and uncertainty during this period of their life, and are in the process of clarifying their sexuality, they can easily get into trouble while experimenting with identities.

In addition, it is necessary to point out that we should eliminate the bad habit of being curious about and sneering at homosexuality or people with that tendency. A simple sentence such as 'she is a homosexual' or 'she is a real hidden gay' can cause unimaginable pain and pressure for some people. At present, although the diagnostic criteria state that homosexuality is not a mental illness, we should note that the new definition requires society to change its attitude to homosexuality and it cannot randomly censure homosexual conduct and marginalise homosexuality--which does not mean that they do not have psychological problems. In fact, for various reasons (social pressure, unique growth experience, fragility of character), the group is prone to have psychological blocks and needs psychological aid, and sneering and curiosity merely aggravate their psychological problems and make their lives miserable.

As an important part of the LGBT community, LGBT students and the opportunity to have their own space for LGBT meeting and activities are of special significance in China at present. During this period, LGBT university students leave their families and begin to make contact with wider society and live a communal life. Meanwhile, the pressure around marriage and family has not yet appeared. In addition, they do not completely enter society and society's negative opinions and value judgements do not directly impact on individual LGBT students. At this time, students have a certain freedom.

Empowering LGBT students during their years at university is key to ensuring the success of the advancement of LGBTs in society. Only when these people are emotionally and psychologically healthy, can they effectively resist the pressure from various of society. Only LGBT students are equipped with self-confidence and empowered with knowledge as they enter wider society, can the attitude and views of the LGBT community and the overall social environment fundamentally change.

4. A Longitudinal Research Study - Never-Give-Up's Life Story

In China, the story of lesbians has been going on for ages, but these experiences and memories have long been annihilated and buried in the lesbians' personal memories. Most of us cannot hear lesbians' personal stories, and we cannot even find historical statements about their stories. In the past, most of the studies on lesbians in China tell people that lesbians exist objectively, both in history and in real life. However,

further discussion of this is rare, either because of the lack of necessary samples or interest in the research. As a result, the lives lesbians is almost unknown to the public. Three years ago, Never showed up and cooperated with my research. Through constantly communicating with each other, we have a good trusting relationship, which allows us to have the opportunity to explore issues related to lesbianism. When Never talked about her stress and annoyance to me, I found that these series of troubles were caused by her sexual identity. Therefore, I began to discuss the issues related to LGBT in my research.

The first impression Never gave me is that she resents being called 'gay', and she would prefer to use the English abbreviation 'LES' to define herself. I think the reason is that the name comes from an exotic language and forms a psychological sense of safety for her. For those who have been under pressure for a long time, taking the English abbreviations as their names may protect them to some extent. Unlike the stereotypical image of a typical homosexual, Never is emotionally stable, humorous and funny, and has a strong personality. Never is in a stable job as a clinical doctor, maintained a stable relationship with her girlfriend, and they now live together.

I conducted the in-depth interview with Never mainly in two ways, one by communicating regularly through e-mail and WeChat, and the other by conducting face-to-face interviews in October 2017. In addition, introduced through Never, I randomly and informally interviewed another six lesbians, and it had a great auxiliary effect on understanding their social circle and their lifestyle.

Never-Give-Up's Cross-gender Psychology - The Impact of Family Factors

When Never was a child, her family was poor, and her parents had to work in various places for a living, and they had no time to take care of the young Never. From an early age, Never naturally wore the used clothes that came from her cousins, neighbours, or relatives, regardless of sex. Among these used clothes, many were not girl's clothes; however, she didn't have a choice at the time, so she has been wearing boys' clothes since she was a kid. This situation did not attract particular attention from her parents as they felt that it was very normal, because it was common in Chinese families to wear used clothes at that time. Since Never's mother was very busy with her work and had no time to wash Never's hair, she cut it short, making Never look just like a boy.

Never once told a story about herself when she was still in kindergarten.

When I was in kindergarten, there was once a sports meeting attended by in the whole city. Our kindergarten also prepared a programme; all of the performers were the young kids of the kindergarten, and we were performing group dancing. Maybe because there was a difference in the number of girls and boys, the teacher put me on the boys' team, and I also had to wear boys' clothes when we were performing. In fact, I think I have had many opportunities to be a boy or a member of a boys' group since I was a child.

Never was regarded as a boy or one of the boys at an early age, and it had something to do with her childhood image in line with the boy stereotype. Short hair and not wearing bright clothes are in line with the image of boys in people's mind. Never was often treated as a boy and it obviously this created a great confusion and conflict with her self-identity. In addition, Never said her father was smart when he was

young, and when he encountered the Cultural Revolution he had many opportunities, but his prospects were thwarted for various reasons and he had to work in the countryside all his life. Such life experience made her father very disagreeable, but helpless. Her father got married at the age of 35; he wanted to have and bring up a son and hoped a son would make a difference, in that his son could fulfil his own dream of getting out of the countryside. Unfortunately, Never was born a girl.

I was born a year after they got married, and my dad wanted to have a boy. According to my mom, when I was born, my dad was unwilling to even hold me; maybe it was a little awkward for him to be a father for the first time; maybe he just wanted to have a son.

Never studied very hard, and she was admitted to a key provincial junior high school and later a key provincial high school. However, none of this enabled her to prove to her dad that she was more excellent than a boy. Her father's patriarchal mentality and behaviour made Never deeply believe that men were superior to women. The estrangement of the relationship between Never and her parents enabled her to have fewer scruples in choosing which way to live. During an informal interview with another LES in 'Aixin Home', she also talked about her experience of living alone in a strange land. That her parents were not staying with her was also an important reason why she was able to live more openly as a LES.

When I was about five, six years old, I was always following a group of big boys around, climbing trees, and climbing walls, and I was always playing some games that were only suitable for boys. I have not had a girl playmate since I was a child. I still find it strange now. How did this happen? But it was true at the time, and I never played with a girl when I was a child. I never played dolls and the game of role play in my childhood. It was not because I liked to play with boys, but I didn't seem to know any little girls at the time, which was rather strange.

Never played with boys from an early age and identified herself as a member of her male peers. Due to the poor economic status of her family and the family's liberal attitude towards gender, coupled with the influence of family factors, such as her father's gender preference for a boy, all of this had a great impact on Never's sexual choice.

The Formation of Never-Give-Up's Identification

Never's identification as a lesbian is deeply influenced by the internet. She stumbled upon an online LES community, and read some reports and articles on LGBT on the website. In addition, she found that she had an unusual love for her female classmates, and then she realised that she was an LGBT. She found that there were a group of people who could like women and live with women. Never pasted LGBT identity tags through online media and from then there was a transition from the initial constant questioning of herself to a clear and conscious gay identity. It is clear that Never accepted herself as having a gay identity based on the new self-understanding that had been obtained through reflection.

Lesbian websites serve as a very important media in the process of forming the sexual identity of lesbians. Lesbians' understanding of their sexual identity takes place entirely through this space. The LGBT websites are an important place for them to communicate.

In this virtual world, they do not have to hide their identities. They can also find a group of people who are of the same inclination as them. They can express

themselves at will and can 'appear' in any desired manner. They can publish the information through the internet forum and the community discussion boards and receive replies, so as to conduct information dissemination and exchange, thus obtaining all kinds of information. Meanwhile, the popularity of WeChat made dissemination and receiving of information quick and easy.

The virtual nature of the network has opened a free space different from that in real life. Via the website and network, they can publish or express their views without having to be face to face; people can 'become' another person who is completely different from themselves in real life, or show a part of their hidden personality, or be the ideal or truest part of themselves. For the minority in particular, they are more likely to find a sense of belonging and to show their self-suppressed identity here.

Apart from obtaining messages about lesbians through the internet, another important way to communicate is the gay community and volunteer service centre - 'Aixin Home'. In October 2009, a volunteer, Yong, who was HIV positive, established this community on the internet and provided psychological support and intervention to people who were HIV positive through chat rooms. The office of 'Aixin Home' evolved from these network chat rooms. At present, the 'Aixin Home' studio, located in the Nankai district of my hometown, Tianjin, has become the home of people who are members of the LGBT group or are uncertain of their identities. Because being gay is regarded as disreputable in society, the majority of gay groups are not willing to disclose their identity, and they choose to hide their true identity instead. The 'Aixin Home' allows many people with the same experience as Never to find people

who can communicate with each other without worrying about incomprehension from others and heterosexual stares. When we talked about 'Aixin Home', Never was strongly in favour of it:

I think it's important to find the right person to talk to. Because it means she agrees with you and supports you.

Never says she made some friends in the circle at 'Aixin Home'. The group of friends had decent work, and they were talkative and funny. Through the description of Never, I had a very keen interest in 'Aixin Home'. As a researcher, I hope to help people to speak out and express themselves fearlessly or at least, let them know we are still with them and will do everything possible to towards changing society for the better. Never offered me an opportunity to know this group of people.

Since I am now more familiar with Never, I'm beginning to realise that people's general view of LES is very different from that which I actually got to know about. In their emotional lives, they are the same as normal people. They work hard and live serious lives. They also yearn for the understanding and support of their families, and are eager for social recognition. In the interview, Never shared her feelings about her identity.

After knowing my sexual orientation, I feel it's very normal. Everything seems to have a reasonable explanation; no wonder that I like women. Of course, I received much pressure from my family. At first, I didn't dare tell them the truth, and when I was repeatedly asked to go on blind dates by them, I had to accept silently.

Most LGBTs are living in and facing an insecure, discordant, dangerous world, because they are heterogeneous and do not abide by the rules. They have to bear the

pressure coming from the traditional culture, the mainstream culture and their family. They are afraid of losing social identity and being marginalised and they are also suffering in a difficult personal struggle.

I went on a blind date after being threatened by my parents several times, and after dating the man for a few times, he tried to kiss me, and I felt it was sick.

Some of the requirements of traditional social norms directly affect the life of lesbians, such as pressures to form a relationship and get married and have children, etc. These seemingly natural expectations of women upset lesbians very much.

I long for a real relationship; I am satisfied with my current life status; and I have a stable girlfriend. My family will no longer interfere with my life, and they don't push me to get married and have kids. For me, life as it is now is what I couldn't imagine possible for me of a few years ago.

Social identity, tolerance and family understanding are really needed in the process of the formation of lesbian identity. Although gay marriage is allowed and recognised by law in many Western countries, there's still a long way to go towards legalising gay marriage in Chinese society. The majority of people still regard traditional marriage as the most basic ethical order. In fact, there is a certain difference between same-sex marriage and same-sex relationships. In China, the relationship can have an 'underground' status, but marriage is difficult to maintain in an 'underground' way. For such reasons, few LGBTs dare to take this step and get married. Even if same-sex marriage is legalised, even if they are married, few of them will dare to make the news public, and they will still prefer to live a secret life. So, whether same-sex marriage is legalised or not has little to do with the world in which they live. Unless

one day all of society no longer excludes and discriminates against LGBTs, then very few LGBTs will dare to marry the same sex. Unless the whole environment changes, just fighting for same-sex marriage cannot solve the fundamental of prejudice against homosexuals.

Families are often considered to be one of the most difficult aspects for the actualisation of LGBT identity. LGBTs find the path of coming to terms with their sexual identity a lot easier if they can be understood and accepted by their families.

Because my family always knew I was dressed like this, they won't show any unreasonable objections. But we're not officially talking about these topics. Mom knows, because she knows I will always tell my Mom about my little secrets. She did not object, but she was not in favour of it.

Never's mother's attitude is actually a receptive attitude for her.

It takes a long time for family to accept it, and it's also a long process. What they have to do is to do the things they ought to do well. The most important thing is to let my parents know that, even if I am lesbian, I am still their child, and it's just that my feelings and sexual orientations are different. To be frank, the Chinese are all afraid of making irresponsible remarks. So, all because of this, so the family dare not to make it public. In some cases, it is possible for a nuclear family to accept it. I mean my nuclear family can accept LGBTs. But when all the relatives talk about it and make it public, it will put a lot of pressure on the family and make them feel uneasy. This is actually a rather serious problem.

The parents show an attitude of neither accepting it nor denying it, largely because they do not know how to deal with it. Most Chinese parents do not want their children to be gay, although they know that the child may be. For the generation of parents whose children are now adults, most of them are more deeply influenced by traditional culture, so it is even more difficult for them to understand and accept the deviation of LGBT from mainstream society. Due to the social pressure, they feel that this is a family scandal, a disgrace.

When a son is grown, he takes a wife, and when a girl is old enough, she goes to her husband. As we get older, we have to bear increasing pressure to get married from our parents and the society, because the LGBTs in China are not accepted by most people, which is currently unlike the situation in foreign countries. In particular, there is still some discrimination and bias against LGBTs in China. Most of our parents think that homosexuality is a disease; that we are not normal and need to go to the doctor. A lot of people in our circle are urged by their parents and asked to get married as soon as possible. They're only able to delay and avoid it for various reasons. But, in fact, most people will eventually succumb to pressure and get married, because many of them are really unwilling to hurt their parents.

Influenced by deep-rooted traditional cultural ideas and dominated by mainstream heterosexual culture, LGBTs are considered devastating for most families. Generally speaking, the status of Chinese women is mainly recognised by the public in their roles as daughters, wives and mothers. In addition, women belong to their husbands. The most important responsibility for them is to start a family and maintain continuity of a clan. Many parents find it difficult to accept the LGBT identities of their daughters. On the one hand, it is difficult for their parents to accept that their daughters have sexual feelings towards members of same sex, are unwilling to get married, and have children for the rest of their lives. On the other hand, they are determined that this so-called 'family scandal' should not be publicised. They also have to protect their dignity and fear the comments and derision of their relatives and friends around them. In addition, in traditional culture, the concept of bringing up sons to support parents in their old age, still plays a role. In particular, in Chinese society, where only children are common and social security in old age is not perfect, parents are not only worried about their own pension issues, but also worried about their children's pension issues. They think that only heterosexual families can guarantee a pension and allow them peace of mind. Accepting their

daughter's sexual orientation means accepting that they are having a sexual relationship with a member of their own sex, not getting married or having no guarantee of a comfortable life in old age or not even having a child, which is a rather difficult thing for them. However, not all parents find it difficult to accept the sexual orientation of their children; some parents also try to understand and gradually come to an acceptance of their children. Of course, it will still take a rather long time for parents to accept their LGBT children, and it is a process from knowledge and understanding to recognition, acceptance and integration.

They can't totally accept it. Sometimes, they just say you're already an adult. Since you've made the choice, it's your business. We can't fully accept you, but we respect your choice.

Never felt a sense of relief after knowing the attitude of her parents. She thinks getting understanding from her parents has been the most important and difficult part of her journey. At the same time, she also expects to be able to live as a 'normal' person whose legitimate rights and interests can be protected by relevant laws.

Homosexuality does not break the law, and has not done anything to destroy society. We also do the same work and pay the same tax as other people. Why can't we get equal treatment?

Under the influence of the dualistic antagonism between the sexes and the influence of heterosexual mainstream culture, lesbians are a group of 'non-mainstream' people and are excluded by the mainstream. The situation for their survival is not a concern for the society and country; they even have to fight for their legitimate claim as citizens.

Of course, I hope that gay people can get legally married. At the very least, I really hope there will be less discrimination for us from society. I hope there will be more people who may pay attention to our group, and respect us, instead of looking at us as animals in a zoo. Regarding my own life, I hope to go step-by-step in the direction according to my own plan. Then, I hope everyone, whether my family or friends, can get better and better, and everything will be all right for them; that's enough. If I could, I would like to go on with my current girlfriend and to realise our dreams together; namely, if same-sex marriage can be legalised in China, we will get married!

Confined Existence

Under the restrictions of traditional culture in Chinese society, society has shaped the dualistic antagonistic gender in accordance with the so-called 'norms', namely, 'male' and 'female'. Through socialising with everyone living in this society, people usually measure themselves and individuals by this set of norms. Women who dress up or behave 'masculine', as well as 'sissy' men, often do not conform to this set of norms and are subject to odd looks or exclusion from the people around them. What's more, influenced by Chinese traditional culture including filial piety, lesbians will feel sorry for their parents and make them lose face because they are not married and don't have children and do not live a normal life. At the same time, they will find some methods to 'make up' for such 'mistakes', such as hiding their sexual orientation, not telling the truth to their parents, and following their parents' arrangements and going on blind dates. In fact, this will not only put them at risk, but also deepen the prejudice and discrimination against them, making them more marginalised. In such a culture, lesbians are ignored and are not respected and accepted. But they do not give up fighting for more rights for themselves; they try to make their voices heard on both the internet and through various groups and

organisations. Their existence challenges the dualistic of the sexes and heterosexual hegemony of gender and also reminds people of the existence of a multicultural society.

Never-Give-Up and Me

From the moment I decided to understand and come into contact with lesbian life experiences, there was a constant questioning in my mind. 'How do I get in touch with this group? Will they accept me? What do I want to know when I do this research? It's too hard. How about trying it from a different point of view.' Such questions often make me reflect. This did not shake my determination to do this research, but I was a complete amateur concerning the lesbian community and its culture. At the same time, there is little academic research in this field in China. I was worried and anxious about all these problems and difficulties.

At the beginning of my study, in order to conduct my research, I was acting like a lesbian and entered into an online lesbian community, hoping to build a relationship of trust with lesbians quickly in this way. However, I found it was a long process, and it was not easy for them to let down their guard and accept me. That period was the most painful time for me during my research; I was basically at a standstill. I told my experience to my supervisors, and they thought that it was very wrong for me to have impersonated a lesbian. They said I could not pretend to be one of them and I needed to tell the lesbians my real motivation and purpose. Later, I realised the errors of my ways and, in time, disclosed my true identity in the online community

and told everyone the truth. In such a mixed process of both bitterness and joy, I gained friendship and established a relationship with Never, and she became my principal consultant, opening the door to my research. She not only told her story, patiently answered my questions, but also helped me get to know her friends in the same community and helped me get more research materials. The research finally made progress, although difficulty still exists and even though I repeatedly explained the interviews were anonymous and confidential and that I would not use the sound recording of the interview for other purposes, I was still rejected by most of the lesbians, so I had to give up. Some lesbians agreed that I could make sound recordings of the whole process of the interviews; however, they later refused to allow me to use the content of the interviews. For the purpose of respecting the interviewees, I had to delete the sound recordings of the interviews and not use them. Although I encountered a lot of difficulties during the process of my research, the most gratifying thing for me is that Never says that what I'm doing actually helps them, and they need more attention and research, and it has also strengthened my determination to study the topic.

5. An Informal Group Discussion with Six LGBTs in 'Aixin Home'

The life of LGBT people is different from what might be called mainstream life, and they form a subculture to some extent. When you are different and few in number, you are more likely to be marginalised and discriminated against by those who hold

standards and values dictated by the dominant culture in society. For many LGBTs, it takes a willingness to face their own issues, to learn what they are thinking and what they really need, and to truly share their experiences with others. As a researcher, I hope to help people to speak out and express themselves fearlessly, or at least, let them know we are on their side and will do everything possible to effect positive change in society. With Never's help, I was given a chance to know a group of people in Tianjin. We had an informal group discussion about identity, peer and family relationships, and the LGBT organisation.

Some Interesting Findings

Firstly, it was not surprising to me that all six people showed the value of 'filial piety' in terms of family relationships. Because they love and respect their families, they do not want to hurt them and reveal to them that they are lesbians. Only one person (Chen) had told her mother she is a lesbian, and her mother showed an attitude of 'neither oppose nor advocate'. Chen said:

My mother's attitude was very strange, contradictory and complex. She was firmly against me at first, and she said I must have a mental disorder... Her attitude changed when she realised she could not change my mind. She said, 'You are my child. If I do not support you, and others discriminate against you, you will be very miserable.' She often talks to me like this nowadays.

However, except Chen, all the lesbians said they would not tell their parents. Guo said she would not ever tell her mother, because 'I live in a single-parent family and my mother raised me by herself. I would not tell her this thing...I don't know whether she could accept it, but I don't want her to be unhappy.' Wu and Guo mentioned that

they have to carefully live with a mask. Wu said: 'I can only tell a few persons, but I cannot tell my parents and other families.'

In contemporary China, traditional Confucian family culture is still the basis of family theory and norms (Ma, 2010; Pei, 2010); the concept of 'filial piety' stresses 'no violation', that is 'parents are always right' and children cannot disobey parents. Under this idea, children's freedom is usually subject to parents' authority.

Compared with their conservative attitudes to their parents, they preferred to tell their friends they are lesbian. However, before they told their peers, they always observed or explored their peers' attitude to LGBT. All six lesbians stated that they had told some friends their identity. They observed the attitude of their friends to the LGBT topic and when they were sure that their friends accepted the idea, they decided to tell them their identity. For example, Wu said:

In general, I first made sure that they could accept (lesbians), then I told them...If, through everyday chat, I find they do not resist and can accept, I will tell them. When we talk about LGBT, if she thinks it's OK and normal, I will speak.

In terms of the influence of peer communication on their sexual orientation, they thought that if peers can accept them, they will be 'more comfortable' and 'insist on their orientation'; if peers cannot accept them, they will pretend to have the same sexual orientation in their presence and be depressed. For example, Bing said, 'sometimes, they might just make a joke, but I am still not happy. When I mentioned homosexuality...they said they did not like it, so I was not happy.'

Secondly, in terms of the influence of participating in 'Aixin Home', which allows them to find a sense of belonging and helps them obtain a measure of freedom, Chen said:

I can obtain information here, because many discuss various LGBT issues here. When others talk about themselves, I realise that what I am going through is normal.

Guo agreed with her:

When I saw some lesbians... I realised that they do not torture themselves and I think their lives are wonderful and real...it is a completely positive influence.

For these people, peer understanding and support can relieve the mental tension and sense of shame caused by lesbian identity. In addition, participating in LGBT groups affirms their identity and their right to be individuals and enables them to know that they are a member of a vulnerable group, while 'Aixin Home' can also make them feel they are no longer alone and can even protect them.

Thirdly, they do not agree with the views of traditional Confucian culture. Some people believe modern women do not have to depend on men, that they can live life independently. They disagree with the traditional view that women should get married before they are 30 years old, otherwise they will become 'leftover'. Deng said in the discussion: 'My aunt... told me and my cousin that we have to get married before 30. But I think it is a traditional feudal thought...my response is that if I cannot find the right person, should I marry someone at random?'

Although they did not explicitly point it out, most of their views include the opinions of postmodern feminism. They believe women and men are equal, and women have

the same rights and their lives should be in their own hands; they also require a respect in their relationships with men.

LGBT has greatly impacted the patriarchal society and the structure of the patriarchy, improved women's subjective consciousness and made individual freedom possible. Taking the culture of postmodern feminism, women's development is inseparable from men's. They are looking to construct a new social attitude which is based on a spirit of mutual respect.

6. Conclusions

For a long time, feminists have focused on the inequality between men and women. Many feminist researchers regard women as an oppressed unified group resisting the political systems and cultural customs of patriarchy (Foucault, 1988; Sands, 1996; Morley, 2013). However, women are not a homogeneous. There is a diversity of women: heterosexual women and LGBT women, women in developed countries and the third world, healthy women and women with disabilities. In the past, women belonging to different strata of society could unite to resist the patriarchy. However, after the feminist movement achieved great progress, the difference in the female groups was manifested. Under the influence of postmodern feminism, lesbian groups attract the attention of society, especially scholars and people who focus on the problem of equality between women and men (Bilodeau and Renn, 2005; Franklin-Jeune, 2013).

Some participants think the oppression is caused by the heterosexual marriage system. They think that the heterosexual relationship between men and women leads to women's dependency and obedience to men. Obviously, they share the theoretical resources of anti-dualism of postmodernism, and think that the model can deconstruct the dualism of gender and sexual identity. Therefore, lesbians are not a kind of abnormal identity, but women identifying themselves as such. A gender relationship without oppression can be found to replace patriarchy by emphasising the features of lesbians. Under the influence of postmodern feminism, lesbian groups are not sure whether lesbians are born that way or become lesbians due to society and their experiences with men. Meanwhile, it is hard to persuade non-lesbians to accept LGBT relationships or marriage. The key to the problem is whether the rights demanded by lesbians can be equal to those for all women. Perhaps, it is necessary to emphasise the objective of the group, but not regard it as a general rule for all people. If the right to marriage is an option for human freedom, the marriage model and whether marriage is necessary should be gradually accepted by the society. In some Western countries, homosexuality is legalised, which can be regarded as the outcome of lesbians and feminism opposing traditional marriage. The world is full of diversity. Feminism and postmodern feminism which focus on society, including the rights of lesbians, have different considerations of the subject and pattern of life, and jointly promote the rationalisation of human rights. However, it is not a harmonious and unified world, but a world full of differences. We may find a more reasonable lifestyle more suitable for people's choices in the future.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

1. Key Findings

This thesis points the way to a detailed understanding and provides key information on young Chinese women's life experiences. Young people in modern times grow up in the context of the transformation of Chinese society and the integration of Chinese and Western cultures. In particular, the voice of young women expressing the wish for freedom is getting louder and louder. Their behaviour, mode of thinking and values have a common prominent feature, namely, pursuing equality and freedom. This study tries to analyse the influencing factors on the pursuit of freedom based on studying the life experiences of young women in order to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What is the level of satisfaction of young Chinese women with their life experience (family, education and LGBT)?
- (2) How are these experiences shaped by traditional Chinese social patterns, cultural backgrounds, a unique political landscape and an inherent attachment to family values in their culture?

The thesis can be divided into several parts to explore the following specific sub-questions.

- (1) What are the experiences of Chinese women in the family?
- (2) What are Chinese women's experiences of university life?
- (3) What are the experiences of gay Chinese women?

(4) How do Chinese women respond to feminism?

Following a small group of Chinese women for five years using a range of narrative methods, including life history individual interviews, focus groups, WeChat group videos and email-exchanges, and a research diary, young Chinese women's life stories were presented. The study reviews young Chinese women's life experiences from three perspectives; family relationships, system of HE institutions and life state and values of LGBT people, taking a qualitative approach. The thesis focuses on the participants' life stories as daughters, students and women, shows the power of family and the educational environment, their pursuit of and t feelings about choosing their own life path. The study analyses the impact of traditional culture on young women, the confusion and conflict in personal decision-making, the improvement in seeking a breakthrough and their attitudes, the way they make decisions about family, education and personal affairs, as well as their concept of sexuality demonstrated in all these things. The study, influenced by postmodern feminism, finds that the social status of young Chinese women has made great progress, while traditionally it was low and passive; however, they have to sacrifice more and assume more responsibilities than men in striving for equal rights. The study also demonstrates that young women are still at a disadvantage in social status compared to men. There are many reasons for this situation, such as the so-called 'vulnerable' identities of women, and the constraints of cultural norms. The thesis shows the resources of young Chinese women in daily affairs, in major affairs such as education, employment, studying abroad, and employment and in personal affairs,

e.g. marriage and LGBT, through a description of their life experiences, to make up for the lack of previous studies which have simply explored the status of women from the perspective of gender equality.

Family Relationships and Education

To answer the research sub-question 'What are the experiences of Chinese women in the family?'

The study finds that emotional warmth and understanding in parenting have a significant positive impact on children's life experiences, while parents' refusal, denial, severe punishment, excessive interference and protection, and harsh criticism, cause serious psychological frustration and dissatisfaction in children, which lead to many negative emotions. For most young women, parents are not the primary people to whom they would like to pour out their hearts. When they have negative emotions, they do not ask for help from parents; they lack effective parent-child communication. Also, the study finds that certain events have a significant negative impact on the life experiences of young women, and unpleasant experiences can lead to negative emotions. For them, because it's a sensitive period of great changes taking place in their body and mind, even a trivial everyday incident could cause great fluctuations in their mood. During this sensitive period, these girls face confusion and pressure in their studies, campus life, social life, career choices, sexuality and psychology; all these characteristics make them more likely to have negative emotions and low satisfaction in life when facing life events. This research

also explores how the family, school, personality, and life events work together to influence young women's attitudes toward life and self-development.

Family Education

Many contemporary families have a one-sided view of the purpose of education, such as expecting children to get great results and go to a good university. As a result of these purposes, they often force their children to participate in various training courses. Through this research, I have found that 'learning and achievement' is the topic of greatest concern to traditional Chinese parents. The shadows of traditional principles of upbringing and high expectations in terms of education, still exist in contemporary family relationships. Parents would rather pay a great deal more attention to intellectual education than moral education in terms of educational content.

The study also shows that, most of those families whose parents have received a higher level of education and enjoyed relatively materially lives, do not want their children to bear much pressure in the future, and encourage their children to learn and live happily. They care more about their children's all-round development than their academic performance; they hope their children can master a special skill and cope with future life with ease. However, for parents in poor families, they still have very high expectations for their children, just like their parents once did for them. They hope that their children can achieve great results in academic studies and get higher positions and incomes in the future.

For example, when I met **Emma** for the first time (September 2014), she gave me the impression that she was a cheerful and talkative girl. As a junior, she was preparing to study abroad the next year. Emma's parents are civil servants, and they have a high level of education. During an interview with Emma, she bluntly said there was no generation gap between herself and her parents, or at least there was no generation gap yet, and, when she was talking about this, she was full of admiration for her parents. My chat with Emma continued in a relaxed and pleasant mood, and I could obviously feel the intimate harmony of their family from her words. I asked her if she had thought about the reason why her family was so harmonious. She said: 'Maybe my mom and dad are still young at heart, or maybe I'm precocious. So, I never felt that there were any barriers in talking to them.'

For those children, their parents are not authoritarian and they can be friends with their children. Parents can communicate with their children with a positive, understanding mentality. Only this mode of communication ensures the parent-child relationship is harmonious.

However, in contrast, Betty's growth and development is seriously affected by her family environment. Betty's parents have a primary school education. They adhere to the educational concept of 'spare the rod and spoil the child', so whenever Betty did something wrong, her father would punish her hard. During the process of the interview, when Betty recalled being beaten as a child, Betty was still afraid of it. I could feel that being beaten as a child was deeply impressed in her memory, and this kind of fear had a profound influence on the formation of her introvert personality.

University Life

To answer the research sub-question 'What are Chinese women's experiences of university life?'

Chinese education, especially higher education, is experiencing an era of transformation from traditional education to modern education, and one of the realities is that universities are continually trapped in the exam-oriented education system (Fan, 2018). This gap between the ideal and reality prompts us to reflect on the root cause of higher education system. Based on this understanding, we can construct a value orientation for future university education, and thereby promote young women to receive more valuable and equal higher education.

The Gaokao

This thesis mainly discusses the impact of the gaokao and higher education resource allocation on women students.

As far as the practical issues are concerned, the reform of the gaokao has failed to change the remnants of the traditional feudal imperial examination culture (Li and Wei, 2017). One of the most negative effects is that the gaokao has not effectively alleviated the academic pressure on students. Based on interviews, there are two reasons why the gaokao cannot achieve the purpose of 'burden reduction', one is that 'the primary characteristic or purpose of the gaokao is the survival of the fittest', and it is inevitable that it will put certain pressure on the candidates; the other is 'China has a tradition of attaching importance to examinations since ancient times and which is deeply rooted' (Li, 2016, pp.371-72).

The so-called 'tradition of attaching importance to the examination' is highlighted by the continuation of traditional Chinese culture in present society. Traditional culture in contemporary China can actually strengthen the pressure of the gaokao due to the social environment, cultural values and social psychology of the people. This is one of the important reasons for the excessive burden of academic work. At the same time, one of the reasons why students have difficulty in getting rid of the limitations of the exam is that it gives people the impression of being 'fair' on the surface (Bian, 2017). However, the reality of that 'one exam decides one's life' is not only unfair, but also wastes many talents. In particular, it greatly aggravates the academic burden of young students and restricts the development of students' innovative thinking and creative ability (Pei, 2004).

Resource Allocation for Higher Education

In addition, the rapid development of China's economy, regional distribution, gender issues and development trends for the population have all had a huge impact on the development of higher education (Ma, 2012). However, the investment in higher education has not increased with economic growth, which means the development of higher education faces the problem of insufficient funds (Wang and Xu, 2013). This study also indicates that some universities ignore the conditions in their faculty and of their facilities and the real needs of society, blindly offering majors and expanding enrolment, or improperly pursuing the ranking of the schools.

The quality of campus living environment is closely related to the quality of life and study of all students in the university. However, the uniqueness of women students

often tends to lead to many conflicts and problems in their dormitory interpersonal relationships. On the one hand, many interviewees said that the space in the dormitory is small, there is not enough living space, the living conditions in the dormitory are generally poor, and the management of the dormitory is also relatively weak. On the other hand, because all the members in the university dormitory come from different regions, different families, and have different experiences, and their modes of life also vary from person to person, the relationship between them will be affected as a result. During the process of the interview, I found that university students would spontaneously form a social circle and form small groups with their roommates who had the same interests, financial status and personality as them. **Betty** has mentioned that there were three girls who came from the city in their dormitory and they had rather good economic background in their family. They were always spending a lot of money when they went out for dinner and shopping. However, Betty's family was not rich, and in the beginning, Betty wanted to keep a good relationship with all of her roommates; therefore, sometimes, she would go out with her roommates together for dinner and shopping. But later, considering her own finances, she no longer went out with everyone. As time passed, the other three girls stopped calling her when they went out for group outings, and their dormitory was naturally divided into two small groups.

When this conflict in the dormitory occurred, many students felt that they didn't know how to deal with it. They wanted to change the status quo and promote a harmonious relationship in the dormitory, but they didn't know how to communicate

with each other properly. They often tended to deal with problems intuitively and emotionally, and this often made the situation and relationships even worse, resulting in some completely preventable arguments and exacerbated conflicts.

In addition, there are also many problems in the dining environment on the university campus. Because of the large number of university students, the traditional university cafeteria finds it difficult to meet the dietary needs of students. There are a large number of students in the university, and that number increases every year. It is difficult for the cafeteria to meet the meal needs of all the students with such a large population. Through the interview, I found that most of the interviewees considered the cafeterias to be crowded, and the service attitude of the cafeteria staff and managers, especially the staff members in the cafeteria who deliver the food, to be rather bad. What's more, the hygiene in the cafeteria is also less than ideal. Many interviewees said that the personal hygiene of the staff is poor, and the cafeteria smells in summer, and so on.

Campus facilities are a necessary condition for the existence of a university, and they play a vital role in students' campus life. Therefore, the university campus has to strengthen their construction and maintenance of infrastructure so as to meet the requirements of students. In campus life, students should recognise that everyone has their individual lifestyles and values, and they should also try to accept and understand the way of life of other students. When conflicts occur among them, they should communicate with each other frankly and in good time, and try to respect each other and gain mutual trust.

The Impact of Young Women's Personality on their Growth and Development

University students are in their youth. Their thinking and cognitive abilities are rapidly improving (Wang et al., 2001). Personal independence and social role adaptation are their development tasks in socialisation. This research shows that the principal needs of university girls relate to the need for belonging and self-esteem in interpersonal relationships.

For example, **Emma** had a clear plan for studying abroad after entering the university, and her dream came true after graduating. Later, she came to England and completed her master's course. She has a very satisfying job in Wuhan now. Of course, all of this cannot be separated from the continuous encouragement and support of her parents.

At the same time, the participant **Fiona** was also resigned to a boring job, a 'stable' job in her parents' eyes. Later, however, she defied them to become an executive in a trading company with prospects for the future.

I remember **Daisy** said at the beginning of the interview that she wanted to work in the big cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, after graduation, because she hoped to broaden her horizons and seek better advancement in her career. Even though her parents had asked her to return to her hometown many times, she still stuck to her dream and worked in a financial institution in Shanghai.

From the perspective of students, when they enter university from a relatively closed high school environment, they begin to have contact with society as an independent individual, form a concept of self in the interaction with others, and gradually clarify

their own values; more importantly, they start to formulate preliminary plans for their future. These are all steps towards self-actualisation.

To Challenge the Traditional Pattern

To answer the research sub-questions 'What are the experiences of gay Chinese women?'

During the first stage interviews, it was a surprising finding that almost all of the answers from participants were nearly identical. They complained about the shortage of university support facilities, the shortcomings of the Chinese education system and the authoritarianism of their parents. For me, as one of them, the interview results were not shocking, given the way we were taught at school and at home. Chinese young people rarely get the time or chance to exercise their imagination and assert their desire for. Right from the day we enter school we are pushed into a culture of exams and more exams to achieve so-called success. To pass those exams, we are made to learn by fixed standard rules. Teachers dare not encourage students to think outside the box. For all Chinese young people, there is hardly any room for themselves, either in class or at home.

However, previous researchers (Wang and Xu, 2004) have suggested that individuals with higher educational levels seem to be more enlightened, tolerant and understanding towards different life attitudes. As a researcher, I want to break through and deviate from traditional style conventions. For this reason, I decided to explore the issue of LGBT in China.

Through three years of in-depth interviews and uninterrupted WeChat and email contact with Never-Give-Up, this research proves that there are 'minorities' in society, and different groups have biases against them. As a minority in society, the LGBT group has endured a one-sided understanding of mainstream society for many years. Prejudice against LGBT is not only about rejecting them in general, but also about having misconceptions about this group, and this is because there are misunderstandings that have deepened the rejection of LGBT groups. The social attitude towards LGBT is very complex in China, and such a social environment has a huge impact on the identity of LGBT people themselves, and these effects are not simply defined by 'promoting' or 'hindering', they are complex and far-reaching as well. Due to the existence of discrimination and prejudice, it is very important for many LGBT people to hide their identity, but, as a result of this, some deeper problems emerge, and they also lose opportunities to protect their rights and interests. For example, Never-Give-Up did not confide her sexual orientation to her parents initially. Her parents kept arranging heterosexual blind dates, and, in order to honour her parents and satisfy them, she had to meet these men, despite her reluctance. Later, when her parents knew the truth that she was LGBT, they forced Never to see a psychiatrist. They thought LGBT was a disease that needed treatment. Of course, not all participants believe that we are in a society full of prejudice. They are more willing to believe that the social environment is tolerant, and such a tolerant attitude can be expressed in fashion, the national attitude, public opinion and other aspects of society.

Society's view of LGBT is not a static but a dynamic process. As time goes by, the overall attitude will show some obvious changes. The interaction between social environment and individuals is a complex one. This not only relates to the attitude of society towards LGBTs, but also the mainstream culture of heterosexuality in society (Tang et al., 2015), which dictates that a man should love, marry and have children with a woman, where men are play the role of protector in the family, etc. All these potential cultural assumptions are shaping the life and behaviour of LGBTs.

In summary, LGBTs have a very different perceptions of society. Some LGBTs believe that there is significant discrimination and prejudice in the social environment, that homosexuality is rejected by society, while others believe that the social environment has gradually changed and most people can tolerate and accept the existence of LGBT; social attitudes vary significantly across time and place. Relatively speaking, people show higher acceptance towards LGBT in large cities, but they are generally excluded in remote small towns or rural areas. Social attitudes are also different for different groups; the development of the internet and propaganda media has greatly promoted a change in the overall social attitude; the impact of the social environment on LGBTs is not limited to the recognition of identity, but also their behaviour and sexual identity.

In addition, we can see from my research that China's social organisations are also developing in most workplaces, and some social organisations specialising in LGBT have gradually emerged. Most of the workers there are LGBTs. In the spirit of 'helping others to help themselves', these organisations provide health counselling and

publicity for the LGBT groups and organise gatherings as well, so as to help LGBTs to establish a good sense of identity and handle all kinds of pressures in life.

As can be seen from the interviews, they can establish a stable and trusting relationship in such a small group, they have their own way of interaction and communication, and they have established internal codes of conduct and norms. Such groups provide the members with a sense of belonging and of being supported. In addition, the popularity of the internet has quietly changed people's lives, and it has had a huge impact on LGBTs as well; it enables them to understand that they are not alone in the world, which has greatly prompted the acceptance and recognition of their own identity as LGBT and helped them in reflecting on and planning their lives. When people communicate with friends of the same identity, they may understand each other better and support and help each other because of they share the same orientation.

The continuous deepening of Chinese traditional culture has made the value of the family prominent, and the pressure to marry has gradually increased. Traditional culture attaches great value to family and children; it's a very serious matter in a Chinese family if one does not get married or have a child. Although the participants are young people, they do not care much about this, nor do their friends emphasise it, but when it comes to parents and relatives, such a concept is obviously strengthened, and their repulsion of LGBT is obvious.

What should not be overlooked is that there is a family behind every LGBT person. In interviews, there were very few people who had truly confessed to their parents;

only a few participants had told their parents about their sexual orientation. Many interviewees said they would have a huge amount of psychological pressure if their parents knew. Many participants made it clear that they did not want to hurt their parents' feeling, especially in rural areas. Discrimination and prejudice have a very severe influence, which represents a very powerful force in their mind, which cannot be changed easily. So, some people leave their hometowns to go to big cities where they are surrounded by strangers to rid themselves of such pressure.

In Summary

The attitude of the young people towards my research has changed a lot compared to how they responded in the early stages five years ago. Some interviewees were not good at expressing themselves then; some would keep silent. **Anna** once said that, when she was growing up, her parents always taught her not to get involved in politics because she might end up like other university students (Tiananmen Square event). Some even laughed those sensitive issues away when they were faced with the interview from five years ago. However, nowadays, they speak with passion and assurance, daring to speak bluntly about social reality and talk about democracy and freedom freely when asked the same questions in interview five years later. They have a broader horizon. They have enhanced their ability to analyse and observe problems and strengthened their social conscience.

When it comes to studying abroad, both Daisy and Emma showed a yearning for the freedom and democracy of foreign countries. Recalling her experience of studying abroad, **Emma realised the weakness of China's education system and** said:

Through more than a year of study and life, I have found that what I have seen and learned at home are not necessarily right. The world is multifaceted. Maybe there is no absolute right or wrong in this world. The things that are right in one country, may not be right in another country.

(WeChat interview, August 2018)

In the interview, they have learned to express their feelings, tell the truth, and reveal problems. In particular, they have become more eager for equality and freedom in their daily life. They yearn for the respect and love of their parents in their family life. In schools, they call for improvements to the gaokao system, which determines the quality of the rest of their life. They also ask universities to improve living conditions and the quality of life of all the students, and offer all students an equal opportunity to compete. In society, they emphasise human rights, and they pursue individual independence and equal social status with respect to employment and marriage. They hold their own opinions on all aspects of life and do not want to be bound by traditional culture. In the interviews, it was found that the independence of these female youth groups is strong, especially for those who grew up in a relatively good family. They have begun to express their own wishes and opinions in the context of the family. Meanwhile, since the new media, such as the internet, has grown exponentially, making more and more information available, everyone in these female youth groups, influenced by multiculturalism, has a distinctive view on matters relating to all aspects of their own life.

2. Changing Culture in China

To answer the research sub-question 'How do Chinese women respond to feminism?'

In the past 40 years of reform and opening up, profound changes have taken place in Chinese society. This research shows that particular values, such as family values, views on marriage, gender, and spouses, have experienced fundamental changes. These changes have not only altered the traditional values which young women depend, but also raised many new issues for changes in social relationships.

The Change in Traditional Family Concepts

The traditional concepts of carrying on the family line and bringing up children for the purpose of being looked after in old age are deeply rooted in Chinese culture. In a traditional patriarchal family, normally the father possesses the power to govern all the affairs in the family. He not only has the decision-making power for all the family affairs, but also control over all family members as if they were his private property, especially the children (Liu and Bao, 2009; Qin, 2013). Children are supposed to be cautious and obedient. One fact we have found in the traditional family environment of China is that parents have an absolute right to speak about their children's education and shape their children's upbringing according to their own wishes. Through the interview, we were able to learn more about the nature of education in traditional Chinese families. Parents strictly discipline their children in all aspects of their life, in terms of, for example, the manner of their children regarding their words, deeds and behaviour, from their early childhood. Parents train their children

to do as they require, without giving reasons for doing so. **Betty** repeatedly mentioned that, when she was a child, she would be beaten by her parents whenever she did something wrong, and the fear made Betty more estranged from them.

...when my dad checked my homework, I was always nervous, and afraid of making any mistakes, and then I would have to stand in the corner. At that time, I was afraid of my father. I remember when my father raised his hand. I would flinch and recoil from him, close my eyes and my tears would well up.

In the opinion of parents, it seems natural and conventional to behave like this because the parents have to ensure the success of their children's education through asserting their authority. If the children do not follow their parents' instructions, they will be punished, even suffering corporal punishment.

This authoritarian upbringing not only caused physical hurt to Betty, but also brought her great psychological trauma. When the parents beat and scold their child, it may make the child feel afraid of their parents. In this way, the child will lose trust in their parents, and perhaps even in the world itself, affecting their interaction with others in future. This also led Betty to become unsociable and timid on campus because of her feeling of inferiority.

Since youth in modern times grow up in the context of the integration of Chinese and Western cultures, the rapid development of the economy, and the impact of the internet, they are gradually pursuing a rather different culture from that of their parents. After analysing the life experiences of the participants, research finds that they prefer to do what they like and try new things as they grow up, and they also hope to get recognition from their parents. They yearn for freedom and more room

for free development as well. As young people are increasingly becoming the centre and the focus of family life, parents are paying more and more attention to their children, so parent-child relationships are becoming more intimate. At the same time, the intimacy of parent and child relationships has gradually broken the traditional family model in which only the father has the final say, and led to a new family model which seeks democracy and equality.

What calls for particular attention is that young people the context of a society in which the pace of life is increasingly accelerating will also bear the dual pressure from both family and society while they are pursuing their freedom. They feel more pressure as they pursue more liberty.

The Awakening of Chinese Women's Subjective Consciousness

With regard to Chinese women's status in traditional society, the conventional idea is that the traditional woman is based on the general repetition of women's life routines, doing housework, ageing, being a daughter, being a wife, being a mother, even though it's going to be different for every woman (Kessler, 2011).

Postmodern feminism believes that, in traditional Chinese society where patriarchy rules, women have always been in a passive, obedient position, suppressed and neglected for a long time, and women's potential autonomy has been concealed in the dust of history (Liu, 2011). In traditional society, men are regarded as those who should make money to support their families. Women' minds are instilled with the idea that only marrying well can realise the value of women. Girls must learn to do

housework and needlework, and be gentle and obedient, be good wives to men, and good mothers to their children (Fuwa, 2004). Postmodern feminism advocates re-constructing the female subject from the real experience of women themselves, and arousing the self-consciousness and subjective consciousness of women as complete people (Feng and Li, 2011). In today's Chinese society, women have equal legal and political rights with men. Especially in the process of modernisation, education is popularised and women can receive more educational resources compared with in the past. The increase in education has provided a broader space for women's development. They are eager to compete with men in all areas of the socio-political economy, rather than returning to the family to be full-time housewives (Leung, 2003). Economic independence allows them to be free agents of their own lives, rather than being vassals of a patriarchal society (Gupta, 2007).

While urban women are financially independent, their female subject consciousness has undergone a certain degree of awakening, paying more attention to their own feelings, hoping to break the traditional dualistic gender view and propose a gender equality-based concept of equality between men and women. On the basis of acknowledging the uniqueness of individuality, the traditional high expectations of men and the depreciation of women should be abandoned, and an equal new 'relationship' should be built between men and women.

3. Review of the Research Process

The research data collection started in September 2014 and ended in October 2018.

The collection process lasted five years and consisted of three one-on-one interviews, two group interviews, three WeChat group interviews, and frequent WeChat chats and e-mail exchanges.

The first stage of the field work was on Chinese women students' life experiences in HE in Tianjin from September to November 2014. It originally included nine women participants ranging in age from 21 to 30 across four universities. Two initial participants withdrew from the study due to personal reasons in 2015. The study then expanded into a longitudinal study of seven women's lives across the five years, with the addition of Never-Give-Up and LGBT participants.

People tend form stereotypical perceptions and judgements based on their past. In fact, this fixed mode of thinking is largely influenced by traditional thought and culture, which often has a negative effect on individual development. If we do not change our thinking and rely solely on the traditional mode, we will certainly face problems dealing new phenomena. Therefore, we should break the shackles of traditional culture and actively explore a more enlightened view of life. Contemporary society is one that has access to a plethora of information that challenges traditional mindsets. Postmodern feminism stands out as a powerful force against tradition. It emphasises individuality and pluralism, and emphasises equality between people on the basis of respecting individual differences, which opens up a new direction for research. Traditional Chinese parents usually regard everything

related to the growing up and the development of their children as their responsibility. They actively urge, help and even force children to build a family and get married.

In order to challenge the traditional pattern, I decided to explore the LGBT issue. Never-Give-Up gave me her consent to adopt her story in my study. She is a clinical doctor in Tianjin. We had one WeChat interview in October 2016 and one face-to-face interview in September 2017; we still keep in touch with each other, sharing ideas and speaking quite openly.

As a friend, Never-Give-Up invited me to join their monthly gathering in Tianjin's 'Anxin Home'. After expressing my intentions, six women agreed to have a chat with me about their life, ideas and their relationships with others. In October 2017, an interview was carried out in 'Anxin Home'. All the interviews allowed me to gain a lot of information in many respects.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study

The Strength of a Longitudinal Research Study

This study gives a thorough understanding of the characteristics and changing trends of the interviewees in the past five years. It starts from the individual characters, family backgrounds, social, cultural and political factors, analyses the factors affecting young women's life experiences, extends from 'entering university' to 'after entering university', 'graduating from university', 'working experience' and 'marriage concept', so as to understand and hold the current situation of young women's development in

China more completely. Five years of research has given me enough time to get to know and talk to the interviewees in depth; such an opportunity gives me a more comprehensive view of my study, and is no longer based on visits as the sole criterion for judgements. In the past five years, the interviewees have gone through a series of major transitions, from university to society, to the workplace, to getting married and having children. Their attitude towards life, how to orientate themselves in a new group, how to deal with their relationship with their parents-- all these are what they need to face, and, at the same time, it also opened my eyes.

Take **Emma** as an example. Emma was very optimistic throughout the interview. She mentioned many times about thanking her parents for creating a good learning environment for her so that she could do what she wanted without any worries. I remember in my first interview in 2014, she said she wanted to study abroad and broaden her horizons after graduation. Her dream of studying abroad came true in 2015. Two years of studying abroad meant a great deal to her. On the one hand, she increased her professional knowledge and, on the other hand, she improved her ability to adapt herself to a new environment and deal with different situations independently. Over the past two years, Emma and I have maintained frequent contact through WeChat. I can see how much her life has been enriched through studying abroad. She told me that she hopes to develop herself further in Wuhan after returning to China. At the end of 2016, she returned to China and worked as a lecturer at an overseas education agency in Wuhan. Her parents were also satisfied with her work. Emma's parents both work in government agencies and are

well-educated. They have been doing their best to create the best conditions for Emma's development. Emma has absolute trust in her parents and will listen to them respectfully, then tell them what she thinks without reservation. This is a family with mutual trust. Emma's development experience has taught me that parents' educational level, professional status and family economic status can positively help their children grow up, and vice versa.

In the example of **Betty's** family, Betty comes from a rural family in Jiangxi Province. Her mother is a housewife, who also works in the farm, and her father is a common worker. Betty grew up in a village where men were more important than women. There is a sister in the family. There is no boy in the family. Her father is the absolute authority in the family. He has a bad attitude towards the two daughters and often loses his temper. Betty's introverted personality was created in such a family, which had a great impact on her university life. Luckily, four years of university study allowed Betty to re-evaluate herself, and led her to gradually open her mind and start trying to fit in with her circle of friends and find her niche in the world. After graduating from university, she wished to become a teacher. Although her father kept urging her to marry and have children, she felt that she could not marry for marriage's sake. She had been waiting for romantic love. From Betty's story, we can see that family environment plays a vital role in people's growth and the formation of personality. But university experience will make people grow up in a subtle way, broaden their minds and constantly improve their ability to judge themselves

independently of their family. I also believe that these experiences will have a positive impact on her future life.

I was most impressed by **Never-Given-Up** in the interview. She grew up in an alternating state of constant self-doubt and self-affirmation. It wasn't until a one-off opportunity in Hong Kong brought her to know of the existence of LGBT communities that she felt she h was not alien. When she explained everything to her parents, her parents could not come to terms with her revelation and even asked her to see a psychiatrist, and introduced a boyfriend to her. As time went on, her parents gradually began to change their attitudes, from a negative attitude to keeping silent. Then, one day, Never-Give-Up took her girlfriend to dinner with her family. Never-Give-Up's mother said, 'As long as you are happy, I will be fine.' No one knows what kind of complex struggle Never-Give-Up's parents have experienced in their hearts, but I think it is a great inspiration for Never-Give-Up to have her parents' acceptance and support. Today, Never-Give-Up and her girlfriend are still living happily together, showing us that LGBTs have a future.

After few years of follow-up interviews, I became a friend of many interviewees. I started out just aiming to get research data, and today I have become a friend they can talk to. I have a deep understanding of their family backgrounds and life experiences, which would not be achieved through merely an interview.

To Encourage Participants to Tell the Truth

This study is conducted by designing interviews in a variety of ways, and obtains a lot of effective and practical first-hand information by making full use of the available

resources. Looking back on the whole process of the interviews, there are many details that deserve serious consideration.

Firstly, I have to admit that I made a very serious mistake at the beginning of the study. To understand the 'real' LGBT world, I became a member of one LGBT online community, and read many relevant articles about LGBT life and made several friends to chat with. In order to obtain the 'most authentic first-hand information' information, I pretended to be a gay woman. At that time, I believed it was the only way to get their attention and their trust; I even considered it was a smart way to let them sound off and tell me exactly what their stories were. By speaking to them at this level, I gained their trust. However, not until my supervisors pointed out my mistake, did I realise that my behaviour was completely dishonest. If I didn't recognise the seriousness of the problem, it would cause a huge problem in my study. As a result, I apologised to members of the LGBT community and told them about my experiences and answered their questions as honestly as I could. I told them what I was doing. Two of them granted me interviews, but only one gave me her consent to adopt her life story in my study without revealing her name. We built a relationship of mutual trust which helped a lot in the following interviews. Through this experience, I began to investigate how I could obtain effective interview results.

In the interview process when talking about personal experiences, the interviewer's behaviour can greatly affect the information, and the main influence lies in the interaction process between the interviewer and the participants. Therefore, it was key to figure out how to encourage how to participants to provide substantial and

accurate information. I found that, during the first interview, the participants they often socially desirable responses. Sometimes they would think about their answers for a while or even gave irrelevant answers to avoid the questions. At first, I changed how I asked questions. For example, I posed some simple and straightforward problems, such as, 'Have you ever encountered difficulties?' 'Do you think you are doing this right?' 'Are you satisfied with your present life?' There were also a lot of general questions that participants were unable or unwilling to answer, such as, 'How do you feel?' 'What is your wish?' 'What is your plan?' These questions are formulaic, and responses were general and lacked individuality. In the meantime, interviewees often disregarded many details that they had experienced, and many important details were neglected. So how could I gain effective access to their thoughts in the interview?

The truth is that, when I am observing the participants, they are also observing me. Whether they are willing to speak and open their hearts, largely depends on my attitude towards them. Therefore, I constantly adjusted my attitude throughout the interview process. Sincerity and respect are the key to the success of interviews. I had to be sincere to give the respondents a sense of security. Only if I was really interested in the participants and wanted to understand their true opinions would they slowly lower their defences, open their hearts and express themselves honestly. If they found that I showed that I was not really interested in them and their views, they would just want to complete the task as soon as possible; then real communication could not have been achieved, neither could effective and credible

interview materials be obtained. In addition, I had to fully respect the participants, since everyone wants to be respected and no one is willing to communicate with people who do not respect them. My job was to understand the truth of the matter, not judge. So, sincerely respecting the participants and satisfying their psychological need to be respected, made them willing to open their hearts and share their thoughts with me.

Another point is that during the interview I could not ask leading questions. For example, in an interview with the participants about the gaokao, I firstly told them my experience, including the sense of helplessness and dissatisfaction, which led to the participants' answering this with various complaints; obviously, they ignored the fact that the gaokao may be the key to changing the fate of many rural and remote candidates. It was only when one of the participants said that she couldn't have her present life if this examination didn't exist that I realised that I had made a very serious mistake. So, in the following interviews I tried to avoid any suggestive words that might influence or limit the participants' answers.

Generally, I am very satisfied with the overall results of these interviews, especially particular details that emerged details. First of all, I established a harmonious and mutually trusting interaction with many participants. During the five years of follow-up interviews, I learned a lot and laid a solid foundation for this research. Some participants were unable to get into the interview quickly because of excitement or nervousness, and, in order to calm their emotions, I would firstly engage in small talk to get them to relax and build rapport with them. A dress, a cup

of delicious coffee, or a viewpoint about a heated social event, and even the respondent's hobby could be the topic. And this is the method I often adopted to ease the tension in interviews.

Traditional Research Methods Combined with New Media

In addition to traditional one-on-one interviews, group interviews and emails, this research also adopted the most convenient instant communication software, WeChat, as an effective means of information exchange. This social media-based research interview tool allows users to gain knowledge, share knowledge, exchange ideas and explore issues. At the same time, through WeChat, I could communicate with the participants more easily, and share the timeliest first-hand information instantly. For example, when Emma first came to study in the UK, she shared a lot of new things with me every day and I could see her daily trivia, mental states as well as participation in the discussion of social hot topics in real time on WeChat. At the same time, by sending text, pictures, audio and video clips, emojis and other information, I could clearly understand her thoughts and opinions.

Also, I used WeChat for one-on-one and focus groups to discuss topics that I was interested in or needed to track. There are three instances of formal WeChat group interviews over the entire research period: (1) a brief WeChat interview about LGBT carried out in August 2015. The participants were Anna, Fiona and Emma. It was a freestyle interview, in which each participant could express any ideas and standpoints; (2) five participants (Anna, Betty, Candy, Fiona and Daisy) and myself held a video chat together through WeChat in April, 2017 on the topic of family

relationships and the generation gap; (3) the third online WeChat group interview about students' campus satisfaction took place in August, 2017 and the participants were Anna, Betty, Daisy, Fiona, and Grace. This interview focused on university dormitory relationships and interpersonal relationships. Since I am in the UK and most of the participants are in China, this interview method not only saved time and facilitated communication, but also minimised the cost of interviews.

Research on Self-awareness and Self-realisation

Rather than a process of learning about the life experiences and influencing factors of contemporary young women, this research actually involved a process of peeling off stereotypical labels and re-recognising myself. I am one of thousands of young women, with all the life events I have experienced no matter how big or small, such as getting along with parents, facing the gaokao, university life experience and my choices after graduation (studying abroad, postgraduate study, job hunting), getting married, becoming a mother. In the future, I have to face employment, educate my child, support the elderly, decide to migrate or return to my motherland; all these issues are faced by contemporary Chinese women to some extent. Through the research, I hope many more people can understand the living conditions of contemporary Chinese women, and experience the lives of ordinary Chinese women. Based on their own experiences and keen feelings, they can understand the changes in social awareness and social status of contemporary Chinese women more intuitively and thoroughly.

Through this research, we can clearly see the changes in society as well as the changes in modern young women's social consciousness. Women have begun to independently establish and manage their own lives, and they dare to actively pursue the life they are longing for.

From the attitudes of Betty and Daisy, we can see that traditional culture is deeply rooted in people's minds. Traditional culture has a huge and profound influence on contemporary women's lives. However, with the improvement of women's subjective consciousness, this influence is diminishing. From their responses throughout the interviews, women's pursuit of independence is a gradual process. A thousand years of feudal culture is difficult to eliminate in a short period of time, but they are gradually getting rid of its influence and perpetually improving themselves through constant self-challenge and self-perfection. Especially for those participants who were born in the late 1980s, their attitudes towards family life, education, and marriage are more pragmatic. They are no longer satisfied with 'taking care of the husband and kids'. Instead of constantly complaining about inequality in life and society, it's better to use a more rational vision and mentality to position the social status and self-worth of women on the basis of recognising the differences between men and women, providing mutual respect, stepping out boldly relegating the imprint of feudal traditional culture on women to the past through self-confidence and economic independence. Chinese women are beginning to experience the right to deny and break the shackles of outdated cultures and concepts and seek their self-development.

Rethinking How I Could Make this Study Better in the Future

On the basis of the methodology of the life history study, this thesis attempts to select a proper means through which the interviewees can fully express their thoughts and describe their life experiences in detail. In this way, inaccuracies could be reduced as far as possible. At the same time, some questions raised by the interviewees can be systematically analysed and questioned through this investigation. In addition, this study focuses more on the development of young women, instead of conducting a discussion on gender inequality as the core issue such as in previous studies (Bauer, et al., 1992; Liu, 2011; Ficher, 2014). As a matter of fact, it pays close attention to the formation of young women's life experiences. During interviews, a relationship with equality, respect and trust was established between the interviewer and the majority of interviewees. As a result, many interviewees were willing to share their real-life experience, and even more private topics like sexual orientation could be fully expressed and discussed based on this relationship. All the above provides ample information for this research. However, the qualitative research method also makes for small progress in research for lack of quantitative exploration. Although the factors affecting the life experiences of young women are clearly classified, the influence of various factors cannot be reflected upon using the quantitative analysis.

At the same time, it can be found that young women living in big cities have a higher standard of living than those living in rural areas. As a consequence, those women with poor living conditions in remote rural areas could not be fully interviewed in the

study. Meanwhile, the research placed an emphasis on young women themselves, excluding the attitudes and opinions of the family, teachers and friends of these interviewees. The individual does not exist in isolation and has a variety of interpersonal relationships with those around them. What do these young women look like in their neighbours' eyes? How to describe, evaluate and deal with the relationship among these neighbours is of profound significance for a comprehensive analysis to promote the development of women. All these key issues mentioned above need further study.

Finally, the study included a brief discussion of the application of Photo Elicitation. The real, intuitive and vivid features of photos are able to meet the researchers' demand for quick access to information, and, at the same time, effectively improve the effectiveness and reliability of the research. This research method is widely used in the chapter on HE in China, and, in particular, it is conducive to the presentation of the gaokao and university life. The pictures displayed by these photos give audiences a clear and intuitive perception at first sight, which is helpful to stimulate the desire and aspiration to have a further of the situations depicted in the photos. Furthermore, it also enhances the strength and authenticity of interviewees' statements about their life experiences. However, this method has not been similarly applied in other chapters. This study involved many relatively private topics, so that confidentiality of interviewees was also a basic ethical principle to be observed in this study. Photo-elicitation was only an aid to enhance the quality of my research. When

the participants' privacy was threatened in the course of research, I would not hesitate to protect the participants' privacy.

Women have very good prospects for their future development. There is, however, a question of how to ensure that the status of women is respected and the recognition of female's values is the focus of my future research. There are more and more voices of young Chinese women in pursuit of freedom and democracy. How to turn these voices into effective social action is worthy of investigation. The main issues are as follows: (1) how should the subjective consciousness and identity of female groups be enhanced? Under the influence of feudal thought, there is an imbalance in the development of men and women throughout China's history. However, times are different. Nowadays, especially in the context of China's social diversification, urbanisation processes have been accelerated, and the role of women in social life has multiplied becoming more complex as they juggle their responsibilities at work and in the family. (2) I hope to focus on how to improve the living standard of women and improve their living environment in my future research. I would like to consider how the social status of women can be maintained and improved, how to change traditional thought, eliminating discrimination against women and minimising the influence of traditional female culture. These are all the key directions of my future research on women.

4. Research Rethinking and Further Study

This research is aimed at women, which has been done by women and done for women. The purpose of the research is not to satisfy curiosity. Instead, as a female researcher, I want more people to have an understanding of the current development situation and problems of young women in China. Most contemporary Chinese women undertake multiple roles, including social and family ones. There are inevitably conflicts between various roles, and it is necessary for women to make a choice when balancing these; they are often under tremendous pressure. Now, with the improvement of their economic and social status, more and more women have begun to pursue freedom, equality and an independent personality. However, the traditional Chinese concept of women, which has been adhered to for thousands of years, still exists. Parents of these women will still have the concept that women are happiest if they have a stable job, find a capable husband and have a smart child. This traditional family concept still influences the survival and development of women today.

This research has proven many times that in the process of women's growth, no matter if they face family problems, educational problems and career problems, they easily get confused and baffled and they are unable to have an accurate understanding of themselves. Females have been in a state of 'aphasia' in traditional society, when female and male perform so-called self-expression in accordance with the hegemonic discourse of male-centred society. The traditional Chinese patriarchal system or domination, has become a universal and omnipresent ideology, not only in

society, but also in the family, that is to say, women are strictly ruled by men at any level. At the same time, this kind of feudal thought also admonishes women through customs, etiquette, culture, etc., and deeply affects women's values. Therefore, women will choose to retreat and compromise in the face of conflict with others in the family, in education and at work. If females want to improve their status, they must construct their own experiences and be understood by others in order to subvert the male hegemony in society.

In the research, many interviewees mentioned the position of their fathers have absolute discourse power and they can only measure themselves by their fathers' standards. The development of Chinese women is still in an unbalanced state. Due to the relatively backward environmental and economic conditions of women in remote mountainous areas and ethnic minorities, they have also been greatly restricted. Postmodern feminist theory is a theory that advocates the pursuit of equality in differences. It pays more attention to the transformation of different women's experiences and finds out the most suitable way from many different existences. It is the diversity of postmodernism that helps to promote the establishment of social and family relations based on respect for gender differences, while effectively taking into account the well-being of female groups with diverse needs and diverse experiences. It challenges stereotypical assumptions about women's subordination. To achieve an equal and free family relationship, it is necessary to establish an equal and harmonious relationship based on gender differences. Dialogue and consensus are the means of communication, instead of, conflicts or acceptance in the past.

Postmodern feminism emphasises women's 'discourse' and 'plurality', and opposes 'universality' and 'standardisation', and focuses on women's unique attributes. In order to develop in an all-round way, women must break through the constraints of traditional culture and stereotypical ideas. In terms of education, it is necessary to stimulate the formation of women's consciousness of personality, character formation and self-identification. Taking the gaokao as an example, the educational goal should be changed from the value of knowledge and accuracy of students to the ability to acquire knowledge and create new knowledge so as to stimulate students' thirst for knowledge. Only in this way can students come out of the framework of the syllabus, and constantly understand themselves and develop themselves in the course of seeking freedom as well as truth.

Postmodern feminism emphasises the differences between men and women, and between individual women, difference that emerge because of class, family and regional demographics. The research carries out a further discussion on LGBT topics. Individuals are born as males and females, who have no natural gender identity. We gain gender identity during growth and become gendered only through social construction (please see page 268). Although our sex is inherent, gender is neither intrinsic nor fixed, but a product of social interaction. During the continuous communication with the interviewees, it is obvious that who we become is largely determined by our culture as well as the social environment that we have contact with. The LGBT groups mainly express the traditional, mainstream, hegemonic parent-child relationship and the social order which suppresses and cracks down on

this group of people. Despite the increasing recognition of women's social status, the status of women in a patriarchal society is still shaped by masculinised discourse. Since women have always lived in the male hegemonic discourse they have lost their right to speak out. This is also an important reason for women's oppression. To change such a situation, we must deconstruct and subvert male dominant discourse. It is postmodernism that calls on people not to blindly follow traditional authority. People should respect different voices and diverse choices. According to the information provided by research respondents, the Chinese LGBT community have begun to resist the prejudice and oppression imposed on them and fight for the right to pursue love and happiness. Postmodernism emphasises not trying to obliterate or eliminate differences, but emphasises the difference between people and culture, and opposes authority and essentialism. Therefore, in the context of postmodernist opposition to dualism, the mainstream and the marginalised no longer contend with each other, and truth and fallacy are no longer absolute. Post-modernist diversification can help the LGBT people in China to no longer be attacked and gradually gain their own right to speak; that is, individuals should have the right to make individual choices and to establish themselves sexual relations that they like without harming others. In the final analysis, the development of women is the all-round development of people, which is associated with the long-term orientation of the family and the relationship between the family and men and women. If women want to achieve real development, they must build their own culture, thereby using women's discourse power to win more rights. The issue of women's

development is far from a simple dispute between right and the wrong, but it requires more detailed research. From the perspective of postmodern feminism, there is a need to break the antagonism and move towards pluralistic coexistence. As for me, the reason why I chose the topic of LGBT as part of the research was not to hunt out strangeness or doubt. I just want to record that there are some people we know or some people that we don't know in society. It could be argued that some live a life that is different from others. Under the pluralistic situation of postmodernism, LGBT people need to achieve their own discourse power.

The development of modern society has brought about a brand new lifestyle for mankind. Rapid development and transformation have led to a change in the status of women. The received models of traditional society are constantly being questioned and challenged, while the creative value and cognitive competence of the younger generation have been highlighted.

More importantly, the rapidly developing society has increased the differences between generations. In such a social context, it is obviously inappropriate for the previous generation to understand and guide today's youth based on their own childhood experiences.

Plans for Postdoctoral Study

Certainly from what has been shown so far as the study progressed, more and more respondents are pursuing freedom, seeking to establish their own value from a fresh and provocative perspective, which indicates the development of postmodern

feminist theories in China has attracted more and more attention and discussion. Although this thesis has provided a more in-depth discussion on the basic values and different family and social relationships of young women, due to the limited scope of the research, many issues have not been discussed in depth. There are still a number of problems in the development of Chinese women. This opens up many important issues for serious consideration.

1. The mainstream culture is still male-dominated society. Judging from the law, in the Assurance Law of Woman's Rights and Interests of People's Republic of China⁹, women have always been placed in the position of vulnerable groups equal to children. In the domestic sphere, women are the main force behind household chores and child-rearing. The number of university students has been rising, with the women students rising year by year. Yet, the employment rate of women graduates has been dropping year by year (Xian and Guan, 2010). Compared with their men peers, it takes longer time for women graduates to find jobs, and the jobs they have are of lower pay and there are far fewer women in top jobs than men (Li, 2015). Advertisements stating 'Male graduate only' means women graduates are refused or shut out many jobs (Tan, 2017). In addition, women's political participation is an important scale to judge female's social status and the degree of their discourses. The present situation of women's political participation in contemporary China is still deeply influenced by the traditional gender culture, facing the problems of lack of participation and lack of access to power (Zhang, 2013; Guo, 2016). Problems such as

⁹<http://law.51labour.com/lawshow-18552.html>

never having a female leader in China still remain (Zeng, 2014) and few women participate in state leadership. It seems that Chinese women continue to follow the lead of males by taking on supporting roles in family life and work. All the phenomena are caused by the culture of the entire society. From the remnants of the feudal thoughts of the old society to the various policies introduced by the state today, they all reflect the serious disjuncture between male and female.

2. Chinese women's freedom consciousness is currently in its infancy, having been influenced by feudal and traditional thinking for a long time; the theory and goal of truly comprehensive progress of women have not been established, so it is impossible to promote their full transformation. For example, the value of women and the relationship between women and society are all issues that they face in order to achieve their all-round improvement. At the same time, gender differences between males and females have not been studied, and the reconstructions of female's social and family status are only measured according to male standards, and no system and culture that truly reflects the value of women has been constructed. Therefore, Chinese women focus more on themselves and continuously question their self-worth.

As far as research progress is concerned, the exploration and research of the factors that influence the overall development of Chinese women are still subjects for my future research.

Firstly, we need to consider how to ensure women's education in poor areas. In China, there is inequality in the education of boys and girls in the vast majority of

poverty-stricken areas and remote mountain areas. Girls have low enrolment rates, high drop-out rates, low completion rates and high illiteracy rates (Fang, 2018). Over half of these girls live in poverty-stricken areas and ethnic minority areas in western China. The number is absolutely huge. These girls have become the main obstacle to the popularisation of the nine-year compulsory education policy and the total elimination of illiteracy in China, which is also a major obstacle to women's higher education enrolment and quality of education. The implementation of special assistance programs such as the Spring Buds Project¹⁰ to help girls out of school has improved this situation greatly. However, in general, it is still a very serious problem for girls to be lacking in education. The change in the status quo requires a process of continuous improvement from the conceptual to the practical. How to strengthen the awareness of people, especially girls' parents so that they recognise the importance of girls' education, how government departments guarantee women's education rights, and whether they should implement and monitor coercive measures are topics that require further research.

Secondly, influenced by post-modern feminism, women's development must be on the basis of recognising differences and respecting differences. My research shows that there are more and more voices of young Chinese women in pursuit of freedom and democracy. How to turn this voice into effective social action is worthy of our deep thought. Women's development relies not only on the establishment of

¹⁰Spring Buds Project: has been launched, organised and carried out by the China Children and Teenagers' Fund, under the leadership of the All China Women's Federation. The goal of the plan is to assist girls of poor areas of China to return to school, which will benefit the welfare of the whole society.
<http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/poverty/95786.htm>

national laws and regulations, but also on women's awakening and actions. Because of gender discrimination, women will encounter a variety of problems in their studies, and employment. So, my future research will consider how to help women university students treat the relationship between career and family and their different roles in life, and how to help provide them with a more self-reflective mode through education.

Besides, with the continuous changes and development in Chinese society, from the traditional family to the modern family, a number of changes have taken place in China's family lifestyle, such as the increase in nuclear families, the equalisation of family relationships and changes in household income consumption patterns. These changes also lead to a gradual change in parenting styles, which directly influence parents' attitudes, expectations, goals, strategies and behaviours towards their children. Thus, future research can explore parenting styles and the impact of the changes on the modern family.

Postscript: A Female Researcher's Happiness and Bitterness

The reason why I want to write about my own life experience is that there have been some changes in my thinking about study abroad, especially after childbirth. On April 3, 2016, I become a mother, and this new identity has given me a lot of blessings, as well as a happy experience in this new role. My son, as a new life, has brought so much new experience to me which was far beyond my imagination with his naughty, crying moments, and the moments we smile at each other after waking up every morning. However, when returning to my studies, I felt very anxious. In particular, the pressure of the thesis makes me face and accept other things that new life has brought to my life, besides the happiness. Many times, deep in my heart, I feel very helpless as a female researcher.

In China, influenced by traditional Confucianism, or perhaps as a result of social choices, men do not have any paternity leave, and mothers are obliged to take care of the children. The one-child policy has brought about small families with the mother going to work and the grandparents taking care of the children. In every family, the mother often has the main role of raising the children, because, due to their work, a considerable number of fathers may be unable to participate in the childcare process. Therefore, female researchers, like all mothers in the world, have to take care of their children in addition to their own work and study. Undoubtedly, it is the mother's duty and that cannot be replaced by anyone else. But, here, I want to

criticise many male chauvinists for their view that giving birth to a child is a female's obligation, and taking care of the child is the mother's primary duty.

Although there are no institutional obstacles affecting woman's academic research work, traditional culture, one's upbringing, basic education and other factors have inadvertently increased the barriers for women to work in the field of academic research. At the family level, most parents think that academic research is boring and hard, and, for many girls, even if they are capable and ambitious, they have to consider their parents' feelings and choose so-called popular or softer options as majors. At the social level, the concept 'it is better to marry well than learn well' is prevalent. Furthermore, influenced by the idea that a woman's place is at home the majority of women's value comes from her role in the family, which undoubtedly causes prejudice against women in academic research.

After giving birth to my son, and talking with my female friends, I realise that many women have experienced or are experiencing postpartum depression or anxiety. Of course, it's a relatively slight depression. But through the talk with my friends, I feel that childbirth and parenting have brought about a great many psychological changes to women. With the development of society, women are getting more education, and many are receiving higher education; as a result, more and more women have their own jobs and careers, and quite a few women have achieved financial independence and thought individual, and comparatively fewer women are willing to abandon their work and return to being a housewife. I acknowledge that women have more choices in modern society; their roles are no longer defined as mothers

and housewives. But no matter how advanced society is, most women still have to take on the obligation of giving birth and becoming mothers. Therefore, women must experience the role conversion process from school to workplace, from a student to a social person, and a carefree girl to a mother. The fertility process is much more complicated for modern women than I had imagined; they have to undergo physiological changes as well as psychological changes.

Everything I have mentioned are nothing but excuses for the slow progress in my academic career. But, as a matter of fact, many outstanding female academics I know never let themselves down for fertility and family reasons, and that mainly depends on one's work ethic and academic attitude. If you have faith in scientific research, you should accept that it brings you on this path, with its bright side, consisting of happiness, enrichment, freedom and reason, as well as its bleak moments of loneliness, bitterness and frustration.

Appendices

Appendix 1. First stage interview questions

Step 1—Preliminary Questions

1. How old are you?

2. Where were you born?

3. Are you from a single-child family?

4. Where did you go to university? And did you like it?

5. What is the highest grade you completed?

6. Did you ever get into any type of trouble while attending university?

7. Please choose the important elements of success: (Goal, courage, opportunity, perseverance, confidence, diligence, strategy)

8. Please choose the important elements of failure: (Conceit, hesitation, laziness, self-abasement, anxiety, pressure, cowardice)

9. Did you have any special events in your life?

10. Would you like to tell me your life stories?

Step 2 — Plan for first interview session

Session 1 General conversation	(one-to-one interview 1 hour)
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Part 1 Warm up	(5 minutes)
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1. Introduction to the research project

2. Have participant sign Audio Consent Form for this interview

3. Start tape players and state data, time, location, pseudonym of participant

And ask some questions such as:

How did you feel about the interview atmosphere? Are you ready to be interviewed?

Informal oral presentations by participants from personal experience of memories

Biographical Information

- 1. When/where were you born?**
- 2. Are you/have you been married?**
- 3. Do you have any children?**

Family Heritage

- 1. Can we talk about your grandparents?**
 - a. How did your grandparents earn a living?**
 - b. Did they help to bring you up? Were you close to them?**
 - c. Did your parents receive education?**
- 2. Were there any old people who were especially important to you when you were a child?**
- 3. Can we talk about your parents? Can we talk about your mother?**
 - a. Can you describe her character to me?**
 - b. What kind of work did she do? Did she receive education?**
 - c. Does your mother have any siblings? Did they all receive education?**
 - d. When/where were they born?**

Childhood

- 1. Where did you grow up?**
 - a. Describe the house you lived in**
 - b. Describe the sort of food you ate**
 - c. Describe the games you played as a child**

Schooling

- 1. When did you start school?**

a. What school did you go to?

b. What did you think of these schools?

2. Did you go to university? Can you tell me about your college or university life?

Where did you go to university?

How many majors were there?

How many students in the class?

Did you have any favourite teachers? Why did you like her/him?

3. What did you most enjoy studying?

4. When you left college, what did you want to do?

Community

1. Can you tell me about the community you lived in?

2. Did you have a favourite place to meet with your friends?

3. How did you make your living? How did you get your first full-time job?

Part 3 Background to the research

(10 minutes)

In looking back on your life, is it often possible to identify certain key “turning points”? I am especially interested in a turning point in your education career. Please identify a particular episode in your life story that you now see as a turning point.

Part 4 Conclusion

(5 minutes)

Make a general conclusion and ask the participant to bring some photos about their turning point for the next interview.

Step 3 — Plan for the second interview session

Session 2 Semi-structured one-to-one interview

(1hour)

(using photo/visual images to make sense of life experiences)

Part 1 DLE and UES survey

(15 minutes)

Each participant should complete the DLE survey, for those who received higher

education they should complete the UES survey in addition.

Part 2 Describe Turning point (Positive)

(20 minutes)

Think back now and describe to your high school experience that stands out in your mind as especially important or significant. It may be a positive or negative memory. What happened? Who was involved? What did you do? What were you thinking and feeling? What impact has the event had on you? Why is it important? You can use photos or video images to describe.

Describe a specific event from your university experience that stands out as being especially important or significant.

Describe one more event, from any point in your life that stands out in your memory as being especially important or significant.

Part 3 Life challenge (Negative)

(20 minutes)

Looking back over the various chapters and scenes in your life story, please describe the single greatest challenge that you have faced in your life. How have you faced, handled, or dealt with this challenge? Have other people assisted you in dealing with this challenge? How has this challenge had an impact on your life story?

Part 4 Conclusion

(5 minutes)

A brief summary about this interview

Design of Daily Life Experience and University Experience Questions

Daily Life Experience (DLE)

University Experience

1. Parental control vs. student's freedom

Who's to say that they're right and you're wrong?

As a single-child, if you have an opportunity to enter a university, what kind of parental attitudes will influence your choice or decision?

1. Participation in higher education

Higher education is not a compulsory part of the Chinese educational system. How do you feel about this?

What are your views on higher education?

2. Academic achievement

2. Satisfaction with university

Is there anything important you are worried about successfully entering into university?	Are you satisfied with the facilities in the university, such as, student accommodation, bathroom, restaurant, and gym?
How do you view your professional future?	
3. Positive social status	3. Interpersonal effectiveness
What kind of status is it? When and in what circumstances was it produced? How did it come into existence? Did you experience or observe what is being talked about?	Do you develop strong relationships and are you able to learn much from other people's experience and perspectives?
4. Expression of negative emotions	4. Participation in social activities
Did you experience any barriers to accessing the university which are different from those experienced by male students?	Do you, or do you think students in university should, spend time on extracurricular activities?
Do you feel you should be doing something else?	How would you deal with people who might not be readily convinced by your idea or response despite your good intentions?
How would you deal with a man who had strong feelings against studying or working in a cooperation project between men and women?	
5. Social maturity	5. Conformity to female's educational role
Are there any differences between the current education system and traditional education structure?	If I were a parent think of sending my single-girl to your university, tell me in a minute or less why I should do so?
Do you think your education qualifies you for your current position?	How have you contributed to the development of positive relationships between yourself and the university?
6. Personal development	6. University management
Are you preparing for a further	What particular management task have

<p>qualification?</p> <p>How do you believe educational qualification will improve your performance?</p>	<p>you found most effective to balance educational resources?</p> <p>Having seen around the university and spoken to senior staff, what defects or limitations do you see?</p>
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7. Influence of friendship

In what practical ways were your friends able to help with your daily life or academic progress?

What do you think is the greatest concern your friends have about you at present?

8. Socio-cultural values

How would you sell your idea of a balanced approach to those people who see value only in good examination results?

What do you think about the idea of “women were expected to be subordinates”?

Step 4 — Plan for the third interview session (group work)

Session 3 Group work pairs interview	(1 hour)
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<p>Part 1</p> <p>(10minutes)</p>	<p>Getting into a group</p>
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Start by getting into a group of two, ask two participants to give a brief monologue introducing themselves.

<p>Part 2 Generating group Ideology</p> <p>minutes)</p>	<p>(35</p>
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Now, I would like to ask a few questions about your fundamental beliefs and

values, please give some thought to each of these questions

1. Consider for a moment the education career in your life. Please describe in a nutshell your experiences.
2. What experience have you had with other people from culturally diverse backgrounds?
3. Describe your experience(s) studying in an urban setting.
4. How well has your college/university prepared you for the further development?
5. Share three interesting stories which happened in your university experience
6. What kinds of exams do you like to have?
7. What cultural changes do you hope to see over the next few years?

**Part 3 To be a happy lady
(minutes)**

(20

1. Describe your educational path after high school.
 2. When and how were you awakened to social inequalities based on gender and social class?
 3. What experiences, social movements or events, or people were important in shaping you as a female?
 4. How do you define power?
 5. What have been the greatest challenges you have faced?
 6. Describe your relationship with your parents when you were growing up.
 7. Who had power and privilege in your family and how did that affect you and your family?
 8. Can you give an example of how gender and social class were important in building your understandings of yourself and society?
 9. What memories do you have of being discriminated against or seeing others who were victims of discrimination?
 10. What significant historical events do you recall most clearly from your life and
-

how have they affected you throughout your lifetime?

11. What else would you like to share about your university experiences?

Appendix 2 Interview questions about family relationship

Did you think there is a generation gap between you and your parents?

Have you ever felt that your ideas are always different from your parents?

How is your life different from your parents?

In terms of your personality and the way you treat people, do your parents have a great influence on you?

Can you make any comments on your parent-child relationship in the family?

If something happy/unhappy comes up, will you share it with your parents?

Will you ask your parents for help when you encounter difficulties?

Do you trust your parents and take their advice?

Do you think your relationship with your parents needs to be changed?

What is the biggest problem you have encountered in your family?

Appendix 3 Interview questions about studying abroad and employment

Views of university students on studying abroad

1. If you have the opportunity, do you want to study abroad?

2. What are the reasons for you to choose to study abroad? (Advanced study; broaden views; foreign degrees are more competitive, which can help you find a better job in the future; high living standards abroad; for immigration; others)

3. What are your concerns about studying abroad, if you have an opportunity to do so? (The cost and expense; culture and lifestyle differences; can't adapt to abroad; parents' different attitudes; uncertain about the future)

4. Are there many people around you who choose to study abroad?

5. What do you worry most about studying abroad? (Separation from families and friends; culture differences)

Views on employment

1. What would you like to do mostly after graduation? (Seeking for a job, postgraduate study, self-employed, studying abroad)

2. Who do you think has the greatest influence on your idea of employment?

(Parents, relatives, teachers, friends, successful people)

3. What do you think bothers you most in employment? (lack of work experience, lack of social relations; the pressure coming from parents, gender discrimination)

4. What factors do you give priority to in job-hunting? (Development opportunity; working location; wages; self-actualisation)

5. What is your preferred area for job-hunting? (Hometown/big city)

Appendix 4 Wechat interview about LGBT

1. How do you first get to know about homosexuality? (Internet, magazines, movies, classes, parents)
2. Have you ever talked about homosexuality with your parents?
3. Have you ever talked about homosexuality with your friends?
4. When did you start talking about homosexuality?
5. Are there any homosexuals around you? Have you ever known and cared about gay people?
6. Which of the following option do you think your attitudes belong to? (Very traditional, rather traditional, neutral, open, very open)
7. How do you think the society should treat homosexuality? (e.g. not live up to the mainstream culture, lack of communication with the outside world)
8. If your friends, relatives and classmates were homosexual, could you accept it?

Appendix 5 Interview questions with Never-Give-Up

1. Do you think you are a homosexual?
2. What is the concept of homosexuality in your mind? (The love between the same sex, and the affection that deserves respect.)
3. When did you start to realise that you are different from the people around you?
4. What channels did you learn about homosexuality through?
5. Do you parents know about your situation? What is their attitude?
6. Does your identity of gay have an impact on your work?
7. What do you think is the attitude of society towards homosexuality? Has there been any change?
8. Is the current national law on homosexuality comprehensive in your opinion?
9. What do you think is the biggest obstacle to a gay's emotional life? (Public opinion; discrimination by some people; opposition from the family)
10. Do you think gay groups are a vulnerable minority group?
11. What do you think will be the final trend of gay people in China at present? (The government does not interfere in it, we have to face life alone)
12. Why are homosexuals not accepted by some people in your opinion? (Due to the traditional concepts and culture; gay groups are too private and lack communication with the outside world. It takes a certain amount of time for most people to accept new ideas and new things)

Appendix 6 Application For School Ethical Approval

School of Education
Faculty of Health, Education & Society

Application No:

(for EdREC use)

APPLICATION FOR SCHOOL ETHICAL APPROVAL

Part A: Ethics Cover Sheet

Part B: Ethical Review Statement

Part C: Ethics Protocol Proforma

**EDUCATION
RESEARCH
WITH
PLYMOUTH
UNIVERSITY**

This form consists of three sections. Parts A and B must be completed in ALL cases. Depending upon the method of data collection / analysis, Part C may also be required (see the Ethics Review Statement).

All documentation should be submitted **electronically** to Claire Butcher, Administrative Assistant (Research), tel: 85337, claire.butcher@plymouth.ac.uk. At the same time, a hard copy of this application form, signed by all relevant parties, should also be submitted to Claire Butcher.

Part A: ETHICS COVER SHEET

1	Principal Investigator: Wenjun Liu
2	Other members of project team who will have access to the research data: Professor Jocey Quinn; Dr Suanne Gibson
3	Project Title: A life history study of womens'experiences of higher education in a Chinese urban city
4	Repeat Submission? No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Version Number:
5	Proposed project start date: 14/01/2013
6	<p>Summary of aims, objectives and methods (max 250 words)</p> <p>Aims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To advance understanding of the current situation of gender equality in Chinese HE To investigate the experiences of women in HE <p>Objectives:</p> <p>To answer the following research questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What are the experiences of HE amongst Chinese women living in urban cities? How are those experiences shaped by social, cultural, economic, political and family factors? What do these experiences reveal about gender equality in HE? <p>Methods:</p> <p>The project will work with a sample of 10 women aged 23-33 in Tianjin who have studied in HE. The study will adopt a life history approach and also include visual ethnography. A series of 5 interviews will take place. Visual ethnography will help informants resurrect past memories and accompanying emotions when the informants are less capable or reluctant to express themselves in written or verbal form, and when abstract feelings or opinions which are difficult to express are to be explored. The research will adopt the three dimensional approach---interaction (personal and social); continuity (past, present, and future); and situation (physical places and the storyteller's place), to collect participants' life experiences in order to investigate gender equality in</p>

	Chinese HE.	
7	What will be the outcomes of this project? This study may have the potential to change the lives of Chinese women, or at least how they identify themselves and how they reflect on their feelings. A critical analysis of the witnesses themselves is a key step towards understanding the magnitude and nature of the problem at a deep level, and the proposed study intends to make this critical step.	
8	Tick one: <input type="checkbox"/> Staff research <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MPhil / PhD research <input type="checkbox"/> EdD research	
9	Is the project subject to an external funding bid? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (please complete questions 10- 14) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (please go to Section B)	
10	Bid amount:	
11	Bid status: <input type="checkbox"/> Not yet submitted Submission deadline: <input type="checkbox"/> Submitted, decision pending <input type="checkbox"/> Bid granted	
12	University Project Finance Team costing approved with Dean's signature: Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> No: <input type="checkbox"/> (Please see School Research & Enterprise Officer as soon as possible)	
13	Peer Review <input type="checkbox"/> obtained <input type="checkbox"/> not yet obtained	
14	Partners & Institutions:	
	Name (including title)	Institute / Organisation:

Part B: ETHICAL REVIEW STATEMENT

The purpose of this statement is to clarify whether the proposed research requires ethical clearance through an Ethics Protocol. Please read the relevant section of the guidance notes before you complete your statement.

Please indicate all the categories into which your proposed research fits:

	Data collection / analysis involved:	Action required:	
1	This study does not involve data collection from or about human participants.	➤ Complete this Ethical Review Statement and add a brief (one page) description of your research and intended data collection methods. No ethics protocol required.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	This study involves the analysis or synthesis of data obtained from/about human subjects where such data are in the public domain (i.e. available in public archives and/or previously published)	➤ Complete this Ethical Review Statement and add a brief (one page) description of your research, the nature of the data and intended data collection methods. No ethics protocol required.	<input type="checkbox"/>

3	This study involves the analysis of data obtained from/about human participants where the data has been previously collected but is not in the public domain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Complete this Ethical Review Statement</i> ➤ <i>Please complete Part C – Ethics Protocol Proforma</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	This study draws upon data already collected under a previous ethical review but involves utilising the data in ways not cleared with the research participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Complete this Ethical Review Statement</i> ➤ <i>Please complete Part C – Ethics Protocol Proforma</i> ➤ <i>Submit copy of original ethics protocol and additional consent materials (if relevant) attached.</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	This study involves new data collection from/about human participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Complete this Ethical Review Statement</i> ➤ <i>Please complete Part C – Ethics Protocol Proforma</i> ➤ <i>Submit information for participants AND consent forms in style and format appropriate to the participants</i> 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Please Note: Should the applicant wish to alter in any significant regard the nature of their research following ethical approval, a resubmission should be made to the School Research Ethics Committee. The resubmission should be made with reference to one or more of the categories laid out in this document. 'Significant' should be interpreted as meaning changing in some fundamental way the research purposes and processes in whole or part.

Applicant contact information:

Address: Nancy Astor 210
Plymouth University
Drake Circus
Plymouth PL4 8AA

Email: wenjun.liu@plymouth.ac.uk

Fax:

Telephone: 07511388356

Signed:

Date:

For MPhil / PhD / EdD research:

Director of Studies: Professor Jocey Quinn; Dr Suanne Gibson

Signed:

Date:

School Approval:

1. Research not involving human subjects.
Research has been agreed by the School Research Ethics Committee as not requiring ethical approval
Signed:
Chair, School Research Ethics Committee
Date:

2. Research requiring an Ethics Protocol
Confirmation of Ethics Approval
(following consideration by School Research Ethics Committee, or Chair's action)
Signed:
Chair, School of Education Research Ethics Committee
Date

Part C: ETHICS PROTOCOL PROFORMA

Please indicate how you will ensure this research conforms with each clause of the University of Plymouth's *Principles for Research Involving Human Participants*. Please complete each section with a statement that addresses each of the ethical principles set out below. Please note that you should provide the degree of detail suggested. Each section will expand to accommodate this information.

Please refer to Guidance Notes when completing this proforma.

1	Informed consent <i>Please attach copies of all draft information / documents, consent forms, questionnaires, interview schedules, etc intended for the participants, and list below. When it is not possible to submit research instruments (e.g. use of action research methods) the instruments should be listed together with the reason for the non-submission.</i>				
	A detailed information sheet will be given to all potential participants, including the aims and purposes of the study, and what is required of them should they volunteer to a participant. Following a period of time (5-10 days), and having had the opportunity to ask additional questions freely, a written informed consent will be provided.				
2	Openness and honesty <i>It is generally accepted that research with human participants would not involve deception. However if this is not the case, deception is permissible only where it can be shown that all three of the following conditions have been met in full.</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deception is completely unavoidable if the purpose of the research is to be achieved. 2. The research objective has strong scientific merit. 3. Any potential harm arising from the proposed deception can be effectively neutralised or reversed by the proposed debriefing procedures. <i>If deception is involved, applicants are required to provide a detailed justification and to supply the names of two independent assessors whom the Committee can approach for advice. Please attach relevant documentation and list below.</i>				
	A detailed information sheet will be given to all potential participants, including the aims and purposes of the study, and what is required of them should they volunteer to a participant.				
3	Right to withdraw <i>Please provide a clear statement regarding what information has been provided to participants regarding their right to withdraw from the research.</i>				
	All participants in this study will be volunteers. They may withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason.				
4	Protection from Harm <i>Indicate here any vulnerability that may be present because of the:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o participants e.g. children or vulnerable adults. o nature of the research process. <i>If you tick any box below, please indicate in "further information" how you will ensure protection from harm.</i> <i>Does this research involve:</i> <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td>Children</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Vulnerable adults</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>	Children	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vulnerable adults	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Children	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Vulnerable adults	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

	<i>Sensitive topics</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	<i>Permission of a gatekeeper in place of consent from individuals</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	<i>Subjects being academically assessed by the researcher</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	<i>Research that is conducted without full and informed consent</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	<i>Research that could induce psychological stress and anxiety</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	<i>Intrusive intervention (eg, vigorous physical exercise)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	<p>Further information:</p> <p>There are no significant risks to subjects who participate in this study. The main ethical issue arises in relation to the psychological and value burden placed on participants in terms of different personal lifestyles and attitudes in the interview sessions. Particularly in China, discussion is touchy on the subject of politic or governmental policy. Women in China are often afraid to speak freely influenced by traditional culture. Sometime, women's social role are ignored and denied, who cannot compete equally with men. To protect them from harm and danger, I will keep their personal details and the information collected during this study in strict confidentiality and look after in a good orderly manner. In addition, to protect women's rights and promote gender equality, the Chinese information office of the State Council published the National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2012-2015) on June 11, 2012, in which the government promises to implement the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests, promote gender equality, and guarantee the lawful right and interests of women. If any informant encounters any problems in the research, they can freely call the hotline "12338", which will provide services to women in Tianjin. The hotline, established by the All-China Women's Federation, a non-profit organisation, will provide legal, marriage, family, and psychology and education consultations to women and children.</p> <p><i>Do ALL researchers in contact with children and vulnerable adults have current CRB clearance?</i> Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> No: <input type="checkbox"/> N/A: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>If Yes, Please give disclosure number(s). (Use extra sheet if necessary)</i></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Name</th> <th>Number</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="height: 40px;"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>If No, please explain:</p>		Name	Number		
Name	Number					
5	<p>External Clearance</p> <p><i>I undertake to obtain written permission from the Head of any external institutions (school, social service, prison, etc) in which research will be conducted. (please check box)</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><input type="checkbox"/></p>					
6	<p>Participant/Subject Involvement</p> <p><i>Has this group of participants/subjects already been the subject of research in the current academic year?</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>					

7	<p>Payment <i>Please provide details of any payments, either financial or in kind, made to participants for participation, compensation for time given, etc.</i></p> <p>No payment will be made for their involvement in this study.</p>
8	<p>Debriefing <i>When? By whom? How? Please provide a clear statement regarding what information has been provided to participants regarding debriefing.</i></p> <p>According to the information sheet, it will take approximately 20 months for all of the information from the interviews to be analysed and written up. At the end of this study, I can send participants a summary of the results of this study if they wish. When the study is completed, I intend to publish the results in order to investigate the current Chinese education policy and increase in efficiency and equality of women in HE internationally.</p>
9	<p>Dissemination of Research <i>Please provide a clear statement regarding what information has been provided to participants regarding dissemination of this research.</i></p> <p>The results of the research will be used for a PhD research project and may at a further date be published in an academic journal. You will not be identified in any report and publication. The additional information that participants require can be divided into the following two categories: 1. General information about research (Please contact the author) 2. Specific information about this research project (Please contact the supervisory team)</p>
10	<p>Confidentiality <i>Please provide a clear statement regarding what information has been provided to participants regarding confidentiality issues.</i></p> <p>The interviews are confidential and the individual will use pseudonyms to protect their identity. The records of this study will be kept private. Each of the informants will be given a detailed information sheet about the aim and purpose of the study. In order to protect the participants' identity, each of the participants will be randomly assigned an English pseudonym, i.e. Anna, Betty, Cindy, Diana, Emma, Fiona, Gloria, Helen, Inna, and Jenny. The records of each interview will be stored securely in 10 years and only researcher has access to the records. Interviewing on the primaries, investigation, analysis, and evaluation should be recorded, to establish the qualified research procedures and properly kept. All the photos presented by the interviewees will be coded in chronological order to ensure the proper storage of the items and ease in search.</p>
11	<p>Ethical principles of professional bodies <i>Where relevant professional bodies have published their own guidelines and principles, these must be followed and the current University principles interpreted and extended as necessary in this context. Please state which (if any) professional bodies' guidelines are being utilised.</i></p>

Appendix 7 Application for Approval by Education Research Ethics Sub-committee



10 April 2014

CONFIDENTIAL

Wenjun Liu
Plymouth Institute of Education
Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Plymouth University
Room 210
Nancy Astor Building

Dear Wenjun

Application for Approval by Education Research Ethics Sub-committee

Reference Number: 13/14-35

Application Title: *A life history study of women's experiences of higher education in a Chinese urban city*

I am pleased to inform you that the Education Research Ethics Sub-committee has granted approval to you to conduct this research.

Please note that this approval is for three years, after which you will be required to seek extension of existing approval.

Please note that should any MAJOR changes to your research design occur which effect the ethics of procedures involved you must inform the Committee. Please contact Claire Butcher on (01752) 585337 or by email claire.butcher@plymouth.ac.uk

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Velle'.

Professor Linda la Velle
Chair, Education Research Ethics Sub-committee -
Plymouth Institute of Education
Faculty of Arts and Humanities

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Professor Linda la Velle
Chair, Education Research
Ethics Sub-committee
Plymouth Institute of Education

Appendix 8 Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study as a part as part of a PhD project. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to participate. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

Thank you very much for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

Wenjun Liu

Institute of Education

Plymouth University

Drake Circus

Plymouth

PL4 8AA

Title of the Research

A life history study of young Chinese women's experiences under the influence of the traditional culture and its contemporary evolution

What is the aim of the research?

This study will address the question of 'culture' and its impact upon gender equality in Chinese urban areas, with a focus on the higher education (HE) experiences of single women. The aim of this study is to hear the voice of ordinary people and interpret this voice in order to advance our understanding of the current situation of gender equality in Chinese.

Why have I been chosen?

I am inviting Chinese women aged from 23 to 33, who were born in China and are living in Tianjin, to take part in my study, and I hope to have 10 young people take part (five of them from a family with one child).

Does the participant have to take part?

No. It is up to the participant to decide whether or not to take part. If they decide to take part, they are free to withdraw from the research at any time up until the data analysis stage of the project and without giving a reason. To withdraw from the study you they need to call me on 07511388356 or send an email to wenjun.liu@plymouth.ac.uk.

What will happen if the participant is happy to take part?

If the participant is happy to take part and is satisfied with the explanations provided by the researcher, they will be asked to confirm that they agree to take part in the study (by signing a consent form).

I will ask participants to answer some questions about their feelings and about their life experiences. This involves five interview sessions focusing on their life history, accompanied by a survey and a visual ethnography. For the first stage there will be two interview sessions. Ten participants will have a general conversation with the interviewer in the first interview session and in the second interview session they will receive a survey asking about their daily life experiences (DLE). The DLE will ask the participants to assess various aspects of their life histories from primary school through to university, i.e., their relationships with parents, friends and teachers, their academic achievements, learning expectations and goals. Most of the items come with a further explanation. The next interview will focus upon issues raised by the participants in the previous interview and they will follow new lines of development initiated by both participants and the researcher. In session 3 and session 5, 10 participants will be asked whether they are willing to be divided into two-person groups based on shared memories. At an appropriate point in the research, participants will be asked to bring copies of photographs from their life to discuss with the researcher. Bringing them is voluntary. With their consent the researcher will store them safely and may use them in publications or presentations. If so, they will be adapted so no one can be identified in or from them. Once informants have fully understood the issues surrounding the research study, they will be asked to sign an informed consent form. The group work interviews will be carried out in a strictly confidential situation. It is important that participants do not tell anyone outside the group what other participants have said. If they are not willing to participate in the interview face-to-face, they can choose to participate via telephone

or via the Internet. Obviously, they are allowed to refuse to participate in the group work without giving any reason, instead, a face-to-face interview between the participant and the interviewer can be held. All the sessions will be audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

Will participants receive any payment for their involvement in this study?

No payment will be given for the participants' involvement in this study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

I hope that participants will enjoy talking to me. Sometimes participants may derive some emotional benefit from sharing experiences from their life with another person. The contributions will help others. This study will help us to investigate the status of Chinese woman in HE. We will be able to use this information to further understand how the equality of education has developed in a traditionally male-dominated society.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part or if something goes wrong in this study?

Sometimes talking about life experiences can be distressing. Any complaint about the way participants have been dealt with during the study or any possible harm they might suffer will be addressed. I will make sure to provide participants with the contact details of someone who will be able to help them further. If they encounter any problems, they will be able to call the hotline "12338", which provides services to women in Tianjin. If the participant wants to stop the interview they can do so at any time.

How is confidentiality ensured?

All the information recorded will be strictly confidential and kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and used only by researchers working within the research team. Data from the study concerning the participants will be stored anonymously and destroyed 10 years after the completion of the study.

The recorded interview will be coded so that no information given by the participant which directly relates to them can be passed on.

If you choose to withdraw from the study, all information provided by you will be destroyed.

What is the duration of the research?

Five one hour interviews and group interviews

There is as yet no firm timescale, it depends on the timetable of each of the participants.

Who has reviewed this research study?

The study will be reviewed by the University of Plymouth Ethics Committee.

What will happen to the results of the study?

I hope that it will take 36 months for all of the information from the interviews to be analysed and written up. At the end of this study, I will send participants a summary of the results of this study if they wish. When the study is completed, I intend to publish the results in order to investigate the current stage of Chinese education policy and increase the social status and rights of women.

Rights of participants

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Participants may withdraw at any time up until to the data analysis stage of the project.

Contact for further information

If participants require any further information about this study, or have any questions they should contact either:

Wenjun Liu

Phone: 07511388356

e-mail: wenjun.liu@plymouth.ac.uk

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet

Appendix 9 Consent form

Please note that if you have any unanswered questions about this study then you should NOT complete this form

Please read and complete this form carefully. If you are willing to participate in this study, ring the appropriate responses and sign and date the declaration at the end. If you do not understand anything and would like more information, please ask.

1	I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	YES/N O
2	I confirm that I have had the opportunity to discuss the study with research. I do not have any further questions about this study.	YES/N O
3	I understand that the information collected during this study will remain strictly confidential and accessible only to appropriate members of the research team.	YES/N O
4	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.	YES/N O
5	I understand that audiotape material of me will be used solely for research purposes.	YES/N O
6	I understand that all information about me will be treated in strict confidence and that I will not be named in any written work arising from this study.	YES/N O
7	I agree to take part in this study.	YES/N O

I freely give my consent to participate in this research study and have been given a copy of this form for my own information.

Signed (participant)

Date

Name in Block letters

Signature of researcher

Date

This project is supervised by:

Researcher's contact details (including telephone number and email address):

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