

**HAVE THE ONLY DAUGHTERS BEEN EMPOWERED UNDER
THE ONE CHILD POLICY IN CHINA: A POWER-ORIENTED
ANALYSIS AT THE HOUSEHOLD LEVEL**

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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Abstract

As the One-child policy (OCP) profoundly changed the demographic feature and family structure in the past several decades, the proportion of only daughter has been increasing in Chinese families. For the only daughters, the increasing educational and human capital investment from their parents in a familial context as affected by the OCP indicates that they have unprecedented access to empowering resources. This thesis asks the question of whether the only daughters have been empowered within their families under the OCP.

To analyse and explore the empowerment process, the methodological approach is two-pronged. First, quantitative analytical methods will be employed to testify the effects of the singleton status on conventional indicators of empowerment when taking the intersectional inequalities as related to gender and location into account. Second, to further analyse the empowerment at the level of agency, an analysis is undertaken of a recent report about a marriage mode that has ascending popularity in families with sole daughters. By analysing the changes of power relations when only daughters become inheritors of the family, the transformations in women's agency can be delineated.

This thesis finds that although only daughters are significantly more advantaged in terms of accumulating educational and economic resources in their families than daughters with siblings, the impacts of these advantages on reducing gender inequalities are negligible, and are very limited in terms of reducing the rural-urban gap. The discursive analysis shows that sole daughters' practical entitlement to inheritance can lead to greater autonomy in their family lives, and thereby broaden their space of agency. But new problems emerge in the form of greater dependence on the natal family, which may limit women's autonomy and decision-making power. This thesis concludes that although the only daughters have been empowered in some respects, this comes with persistent inequalities and at the costs of dependence on parents in their empowerment. Furthermore, while only daughters are relatively privileged, it remains to be explored whether these improvements in empowerment can stimulate the development on the status and agency of all women and girls in Chinese society, and whether they can be sustained in the post-OCP environment.

Key words: OCP; only daughters; empowerment process; women's agency

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List of Abbreviations

OCP	One Child Policy
SRB	Sex Ratio at Birth
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
CFPS	China Family Panel Studies

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In 2016, the Chinese government's announcement of the universal two-child policy signalled the end of the One-child policy (OCP) (Lee, 2011; Zhang, 2017; Liu, 2016; Hu & Shi, 2020). From 1978 to 2016, more than two generations of Chinese people are influenced profoundly by the OCP (Wang, Gu, & Cai, 2016). In hindsight, this policy significantly shaped the demographic feature in contemporary China (Greenhalgh, 2012). Its effect of shrinking the family size comes hand in hand with the population downsizing effects of economic growth, leading to the drastic shift of family composition in a relatively short time (Basten & Jiang, 2014; Hu & Shi, 2020). But along with the significant artificial acceleration of manoeuvring the shift, myriad problems appeared because of the clash between people's traditional family notions and the top-down family modernisation policy, especially in rural areas (Murphy et al., 2011). As shown in the highly unequal sex ratio in China, the passionate pursuit of a male descendent in Chinese families has not subsided under the compulsory family planning policy, and girls are "missing" – due to the misrepresentation and abandonment of girl children, female infanticide, and the illicit gender-selective abortion (Zhou et al., 2011; Hesketh, Li & Zhu, 2005; Sen, 2003).

However, there has been research paying attention to the specific benefits for the brotherless daughters conferred by the changes driven by the OCP. According to Fong (2002), the restriction of parents having only one child means daughters without brothers can experience the intergenerational investment of money and care evading the impacts of the son preference prevalent in Chinese families. Besides, based on analysis of the first-hand observation materials in Dalian City, Fong (2002) argued that the urban daughters under the OCP were empowered because the patrilineal system that has consistently consolidated the male dominance both in public and private spheres had been broken due to the OCP. Backed up by the resources provided by their parents, the only daughters can get higher education and earn more than men. In this way, they have been able to step out of the family and engage in the public field, which enables their potential to challenge gender norms. Other scholars who did not directly employ the term "empowerment" have also discovered the progress indicative of gender equality and women's empowerment. Lee (2012) verified the higher participation of girls in education as a result of the OCP by the assessment of household data. And Hu and Shi (2020) have found that the presence of male and elderly siblings is negatively associated with the pecuniary and non-pecuniary intergenerational investment of girls in the post-OCP era.

Although evidence exists of only daughters benefitting from the OCP effects, it does not necessarily mean that they are being empowered. Firstly, empowerment for women is a complex conceptualisation, which encompasses multiple dimensions and levels, and most essentially, it is relativistic, subtle, and dynamic because it is about power (Gram et al., 2019). Therefore, despite in one assessment, it turns out positive to indicate the empowerment, it may conclude in opposite direction in another assessment because it involves different dimensions and levels (Garikipati, 2013). In this sense, an assessment of women's consciousness is needed to reveal the genuine picture of empowerment (Garikipati, 2013). Second, the benefits to women are an unintended consequence for the OCP and the implementors of OCP (Zhang, 2017). It means the new policies of encouraging families to have more children may erase any empowering effects that have occurred for women as a result of OCP. Hence, uncertainties about this empowerment appear in aspects such as the sustainability of the empowering effects, and most crucially, the changes in women's consciousness of power and equality.

When exploring the power dynamics around only daughters, it soon becomes clear that their families are invariably involved. Scholars in various disciplines have highlighted the significant changes within families due to the remarkable influence of the OCP on family structures. A study of family demography found the more accumulated intergenerational investments of human capital from parents to children, especially the singleton children were significant under the OCP (Zhang, 2017). Moreover, Fong (2002) has found that with more parental support, daughters can prove their financial and practical capability in old-age support for their parents. This defies the view that "parents have little incentives to invest daughters" (Fong, 2002, p. 1098) and indicates a shift in parents' perceptions about son preference. As Fong argues, this is a virtuous cycle and an empowering dynamic for urban daughters. Thus, within the empowerment of the only daughters, the dynamics at the household level have played an important role.

1.2 Research question and objectives

With these points in mind, this thesis will explore *whether the only daughters have been empowered in Chinese households under the OCP*. In this thesis, the process of empowerment in a familial context affected by the OCP will be the focus to answer this broad question. In line with Kabeer's (1999) segmentation of the process of women's empowerment into respectively resources, agency, and achievement, this thesis aims to explore these components of the empowerment process. First, it examines the resources by exploring from which the only daughters have benefitted within their families under the OCP. Second, it assesses whether the outcomes indicate achievements of

challenging the intersected inequalities for the only daughters. Third, to address the question of agency, it explores whether the agency of the only daughters has improved with the contribution of resources, through a case study of a marriage mode particularly for only daughters. In doing so, this thesis employs a power-oriented paradigm in family feminist studies, which takes power relations and intersectionality into account while interpreting family issues (Few-Demo et al., 2014). This paradigm provides a way in which the power relations and operations can be delineated within the empowerment process by analysing the intersectional social identities of the only daughters.

1.3 Research methods

To examine the research question, a methodology will be adopted to cover both material and relational aspects of empowerment of singleton daughters under the OCP. In terms of the assessment of resources and achievements of empowerment, the thesis will follow Hu and Shi's (2020) approach. Using 2010 China Family Panel Studies (CFPS) data, they examined the impact of sibship structure on gender equality against the backdrop of OCP by observing the differentials upon gender equality indicators as the sibship structure and gender intersect and testing them statistically. Referring to their methods, in this thesis, the 2016 China Family Panel Studies (CFPS) data will be analysed to draw out the differences in resources and achievements of women's empowerment influenced by sibship structure, location, and gender. The sibship structure is the key independent variable for this analysis, and taking gender and location into account, it aims to capture the effects of the singleton status on the gendered and rural-urban gap. Further, the analysis of agency, which is relational and therefore unmeasurable and intangible, will be conducted through a qualitative analytical approach. This will focus on discursive information including published interview materials about the *Liang-tou-dun* marriage in Zhejiang province – a kind of marriage in which the only daughters stay as the member and inheritors of their original family and have the rights to surname children. Through this two-pronged approach, this thesis aims to critically reveal the advantages and disadvantages of the only daughters in empowerment at both material and agency level, and fill some of the gaps in the previous research about the lack of study of empowerment processes and women's agency.

Ensuing this introductory chapter, the main body of this thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter two includes the review of the literature about research related to the empowerment of only daughters in Chinese households under the OCP, as well as the literature facilitates the construction of a theoretical framework. Based on the literature review, in chapter three, a methodological model will be built to illustrate the question-

answering. Following this model, a quantitative analysis of the 2016 China Families Panel Studies (CFPS) data will constitute the remainder of chapter three. The qualitative analysis of information on the *Liang-tou-dun* marriage in terms of the advantages and disadvantages of empowerment will be in chapter four, and a discussion that draws together the quantitative and qualitative analytic results will conclude this chapter. To summarise the arguments, there will be a concluding chapter five at the end of this thesis.

Chapter 2 Review of literature: a theoretical framework about the empowerment of only daughters in Chinese families under the OCP

This chapter reviews the literature revolving around the thematic questions of what women's empowerment is, how family is brought to the analysis of power, and what gendered power and empowerment represent in the Chinese familial context under the OCP. Through this literature review, the contextual factors and key empowerment agents can be identified, which facilitates the construction of a theoretical framework of the empowerment for only daughters under the OCP.

2.1 The One-Child Policy (OCP) and its influences on Chinese households

The one-child policy in China had been officially implemented from 1979 until 2016, when the policy changed to allowing couples having a second child (Lee, 2011; Zhang, 2017; Liu, 2016; Hu & Shi, 2020). Its enactment elicited widespread controversy about the strict enforcement of birth control but there was agreement among scholars that this policy has significantly affected Chinese demographic structure and family lives (Zheng, Gu & Gietel-Basten, 2018). The essential aim of the policy was to contain population growth in light of the huge population basis and anticipated excessively fast growth in the 1980s and 1990s (Cai, 2010). Thus, one of the most important goals of OCP was to accelerate the family downsizing (Hesketh, Li & Zhu, 2005). However, as the Chinese government has claimed success in achieving the goals, detrimental effects of this family planning policy have been induced by the interplay of OCP and the pre-existing socio-cultural factors.

First, with the significantly changed family composition as the result of long-term restriction of birth rate in China, the caring mandate for the aging population has burdened small families seriously (Hesketh, Li & Zhu, 2005). In many urban areas, families composed of four grandparents, two parents, and one child have emerged as a result of OCP, which has also been known as the "4-2-1" structure (Wang & Fong, 2009; Hu & Shi, 2020). The prevalence of the "4-2-1" families indicates that in the foreseeable future, this aged care issue will continue to be serious, or even will aggravate with the consistent low fertility nowadays in China (Zeng & Hesketh, 2016).

Second, a highly imbalanced sex ratio at birth (SRB) has been captured after two decades of implementation. In 2005, it reached 122 males per 100 females, which was then mitigated to 116 in 2010 (Das Gupta, 2010; Greenhalgh, 2012; Loh & Remick, 2015). The extreme imbalance in SRB, or the "missing girls" phenomenon, was led predominantly by the non-registration of female births and sex-selective abortion in

spite of its illegality (Hesketh, Li & Zhu, 2005). Although the implementors denounced such actions and put propagations countrywide to change people's notions of son preference, this family planning policy that was compulsorily executed in a society with dominated by a patrilineal family system induced gender-selective reproduction (Das Gupta, 2010). Furthermore, a series of ramifications ensued. For instance, because of the high SRB under the OCP, the existence of larger numbers of men who are unable to find a marriage partner would trigger the increase of women kidnapping or trafficking, and of illicit sex workers that may bring about higher risks of sexually transmitted diseases (Hesketh, Li & Zhu, 2005).

Third, while the one-child restriction was implemented among urban residents and government officials with few exemptions and severe punishments, the implementation of OCP in rural areas was less strict (Hesketh, Li & Zhu, 2005). For rural areas, which were home to around 70 percent of the population before China's urbanisation, the government set out a conditional release from the one-child policy from the mid-1980s to mitigate its adverse effects on farming households. Families could have their second child after five years if their first was female; and for the underpopulated ethnical minorities, a third child was allowed (Zhang, 2017). With the different ways of implementation, the consequences of the family planning control varied across regions and ethnicities. Research shows that the SRB was higher in most rural areas than in cities (Greenhalgh, 2012; Loh & Remick, 2015), which means the difficulties to find partners will be sharper for the rural young men than their urban counterparts. Moreover, the son preference ingrained in rural areas and the likely presence of siblings influences women' and girls' opportunities in rural households to acquire education and employment. According to the household data assessed by Hu and Shi (2020), the disadvantages of girls located in rural areas in attaining education are significant compared with girls in urban areas.

Thus, although government propaganda endorsed that "having girls is the same as having boys" (Hesketh, Li & Zhu, 2005, p. 1173), attempted to balance the sex ratio, and made adjustments of the policy in line with the conventional family and reproductive norms, it nevertheless underestimated the clash between the "traditional" notions regarding the gender of offspring and the "modern family" concept imposed by the government's intervention. As a result, "family" has become an important battlefield.

2.2 OCP and gender equality

During the OCP implementation, China experienced unprecedented levels of economic

development and enormous social changes wrought by the market-oriented reforms (Zhang, 2017). In light of the impedimental effects of economic growth on the fertility rate, many scholars argued that the OCP played a subordinate role in the fertility drop, and the pre-existing socioeconomic development was decisive in the demographic shift. Evidence from Cai (2010) has shown that the fertility rate in China would have dropped without OCP.

But with the mixed influence of the OCP and the economic development, the benefits of low fertility and improved family finance have played out in Chinese households in different ways. Of most significance is the greater investment of human capital from parents to their singleton child (Zhang, 2017; Lee, 2012). A comparison of urban one-child families and families with twin children shows that the school attainment of the only children has increased by at most 4 percent, and the probability of them acquiring higher education has increased by less than 9 percent. (There is no specific percentages of school attainment before and after in the original source, it just mentions “the school attainment has increased by at most 4%” and alike, the “increase by” means it is not the absolute increase of percentage points, but the increase level is 4 percent). Besides, the analysis of data drawn from the 1989, 1991, 1993, 1997, 2000, 2004, and 2006 China Health and Nutrition Survey (CHNS) conveys that the opportunities of singleton children to be educated have been improved comparing with the non-singletons, and there is no significant difference between only daughters and only sons in schooling years (Lee, 2012).

Therefore, it has been argued that OCP promotes gender equality in education. This argument has been further examined by many scholars. For example, a study on the influence of the OCP on gender relations by Hu and Shi (2020) confirmed that gender equality is more significantly reflected among singleton children than among children with siblings in the 2010 CFPS data. Among the positive results, it is worth noting that one of the most significant improvement was discovered in relation to the educational expenditure, which means the intergenerational investment has played an important role in promoting the gender equality in China under the OCP. Moreover, Hu (2017) attributed greater equal opportunities in education between gender to parents' increasing educational investment in daughters. Thus, under the OCP, in families with only one daughter, the investment from parents would focus on the daughter, which enables the equalisation of educational attainment between gender.

However, besides the positive results indicating that the OCP promoted gender equality, the evidence nonetheless shows non-singleton children benefit less than singleton

children in terms of the gender equality indicators (Hu & Shi, 2020). This gap indicates two points. First, considering that urban populations were in more rigorous compliance with OCP than those in rural areas (Hesketh, Li & Zhu, 2005), the urban-rural gap may aggravate the gap between singleton and non-singleton daughters. The accessibility of resources to girls with siblings in rural areas, especially male siblings, is limited concurrently due to cultural practices such as the ingrained son preference, and geographical remoteness (Murphy et al., 2011). Second, the comparison between male and female only children cannot reflect accurately the gender equality issue (Hu & Shi, 2020). This is because there is nonetheless an intra-gender gap between girls with different sibship structures. While changes against gender inequality occur between singleton daughters and sons, the conditionality of them in terms of the sibship status implies that this gender equality is more likely to be a privilege rather than a universally recognised achievement. Thus, to comprehensively examine the effects of OCP in alleviating gender inequality, it is important to go beyond the comparisons between singleton children and take into account the intersected inequalities between different locations and sibship structures.

2.3 Women's empowerment

“In general, scholars view power as embedded in social interactions; these interactions are not limited to struggles for dominance but include the wide range of ways in which people exert influence. Thus, an increase in power is an increase in one's influence in social relations at any level of human interaction, from dyadic interactions to the interaction between a person and a system.”
(Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010:647)

The quote above outlines the forms that power and the increase in power take in human lives. Power operates not only in the form of systemic domination but also through social interactions, in which the influence of individuals or systems can be exerted in various ways. In this sense, to increase the power of an individual or system, it requires strengthening their influence in social relations.

To explore women's empowerment, in the first place, understanding the “power” in “empowerment” matters. Generally, power has been construed as “control”, which in effect takes different forms, some scholars recognized power as “zero-sum” as any gain in power must be at the expense of power diminished elsewhere (Rowlands, 1995); while some have found that power can be “shared” and hence increased dually (Hur, 2006). Putting this controversy aside, feminist interpretations of power has freed it from being configured in solely personal or institutional terms and linked power

with social movements in an activist way. As epitomised by the well-known slogan “personal is political”, feminists demonstrated that power can be fought for through politicising the inequalities individuals experience in their personal lives. Women’s empowerment, as a famous phrase coined by feminists, has been embedded with the calls for the power that challenge the deepest structure (Batliwala, 2007). Thus, despite it has been depoliticised as a buzzword nowadays, women’s empowerment is critically power-oriented and radical from its inception.

There are two interrelated strands of theorising and understanding the process and key components of empowerment. One analyses people being empowered at a psychological level emphasises the self-efficacy, knowledge, and competence in people’s inner system as the constituents of an empowerment process. The iterative process of this kind involves defining the personally meaningful, power-oriented goals, taking actions that enable achieving the goals, and reflecting the impact of the actions on the whole process (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010, p. 647). In this conceptualisation, the social context is regarded as peripheral as the external factor for an internal system. In contrast, a more macro and multidisciplinary theoretical approach construes a broader picture of empowerment. Putting the “cognitive elements” aside, this perspective brings five progressive steps into focus, from locating social disturbances, conscientising people and then mobilising them, maximising the influences people have made, to ultimately creating a new social order (Hur, 2006, p.529). Comparing with the psychological framework, the latter process can amplify the process of extending personal influence to increase power in the broader levels – community, state, and even global, and thereby is able to give rise to structural changes.

However, since the advent of gender mainstreaming in the wake of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, women’s empowerment has been used as an instrumental and technocratic discourse in many development programs (Cornwall, 2014). It elicited persistent criticisms about depoliticisation and degeneration of empowerment, it is concerned that the empowerment in this term is less able to drive the structural transformations. In the past, women’s empowerment adopted women’s social movements, signalling transformatory changes and a more radical feminist tone (Batliwala, 2007). But as “empowerment” is increasingly referred to by state policies and development programs nowadays, this radical conception has been diluted. It becomes rhetorically “mainstreamed” but realistically narrowed in its coverage of interventions after depoliticising it (Batliwala, 2007). Moreover, with the technocratic use of “women’s empowerment”, women are related to the empowerment from

“power within”, to “power with”, and finally “power to them” (Hur, 2006, p. 525). Rather than emphasizing women gaining power themselves, the technocratic empowerment regards women as the passive recipients of resources (Cornwall, 2014). In this term, women’s self-efficacy, as well as the conscientisation process, are ignored in the practical implementation of empowerment. Overall, the abuse of the word “empowerment” in practice is undermining the ground of empowerment studies irrespective of in psychological or sociological terms (Richardson, 2018).

Correspondent with the psychological and structural approaches highlighted above, scholars found that the genuine picture of women gaining power can only be captured by examining the processes of empowerment through which women experience both internal and external changes. This brings women’s agency into focus, which includes women’s capabilities and awareness that enable their self-empowerment (Kabeer, 1999).

Therefore, to answer the research question of whether the only daughters have been empowered at the household level, the focus needs to be on the processes of empowerment, and agency as a vital component requires special attention. Apart from the exploration of the conceptual elements of empowerment, as the analysis will focus on the household level, it is necessary to explore the family as a part of the empowerment. Furthermore, to understand the empowerment in Chinese households, the familial context needs examination in terms of the broader systems with which families interact.

2.4 Theorising the family and women’s empowerment within families

“... critically reclaiming family as a central organising concept (alongside personal lives) is necessary in order to address crucial personal, public and political dimensions.” (Gillies, 2011:119)

Family, was conventionally presupposed to be the naturally formed unit of society, adopting a sexual division of labour, and maintaining strictly the public-private separation. However, critical perspectives have led to these taken-for-granted acknowledgements of families being fiercely challenged. Among these perspectives, with particular regard to women, feminist research has made significant contributions to re-theorising the family.

Over many decades, feminists have been examining the power imbalance between

women and men, and challenging the gendered separation of the public and private sphere that has been profoundly embedded in people's social lives. Feminists have argued that because of the public-private separation, women have long been represented as a metaphor for family. They were discouraged to get out of the family context and do breadwinning work as "earning for living is not women's responsibility but men's" (as cited by Morgan, 2014, p. 220). Instead, women have been allocated responsibilities inside their families, such as bearing and raising the next generation and looking after the wellbeing of the family. However, in this division of labour and responsibility, the decision-making power in the family was rarely held by women. Rather, the family status that determines the family decision-making power persists to be unequal (Morgan, 2014). These imbalances and inequities were characterised by feminists as "the oppression of women". To break the gendered public-private divide, with the emphasis on women's lived experience, feminist family scholars reflected upon the conventional family structure and strived to "explore the differences in terms of gender, age and generation within the family and household and the ways in which these are structured and provide for different ways of viewing and understanding the family" (Morgan, 2014, p.221).

In order to find out why women are oppressed and how women can be emancipated from oppression, a series of paradigms have emerged for analysing the power dynamics. From an early feminist perspective, it was seen as important to analyse how male dominance in the family is legitimated and how to fight against it. With the influence of the poststructuralist and postcolonial theories, the identification of gendered family issues has witnessed distinctive progress following the development of new analytical tools and methodologies. On one side, the institution, structure, and relationships within family have become subjects of deconstructionist analysis (Morgan, 2014). On the other, the subordinated social identities including gender, race, age, class, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality have been acknowledged as intersectionality. This has helped to shed light on the oppression of women in families as not just a result of male dominance in families, but also of multi-level systemic processes. As well, there is increasing recognition that intersections of inequalities shape subordinated social identities and their embodiment in individuals (Allen, 2016). Against this backdrop, family as a social construct tended to be deconstructed in the studies related to power as the power issues are interpreted revolving around individuals.

These approaches reaped enormous successes in examining the power dynamics. But when it comes to empowerment that entails power to be genuinely increased, the family can hardly be excluded (Collins, 2000). The reasons are two-fold. First,

empowerment is relational, which means if empowerment is supposed to be achieved by every individual, it is important to take into account the context and systems in which individuals interact in practical implementation (Cornwall, 2014). Second, families, as a structure and important institution in cultural, social, and political meanings, are still prevalent in most parts of the world (Gillies, 2011), and the majority of women are situated in families. Thus, as family is still important in people's social, cultural, and political lives, the effect it has on interpersonal interactions that indicate power relations as well as changes in the relations, should be considered.

With the efforts to bring together women's empowerment and family studies, integrating family communication theory and feminist family studies offers a constructive way forward. To trace back, the family communication theory is originated from a strand of family studies across sociology and psychology that is based on post-positivism and logical empiricism, which conceptualises family as "based on, formed, and maintained through communication" (as cited by Few-Demo et al., p. 87). From the integrative perspective, feminism can go beyond analysing the gender difference or the "ideologically" patriarchal terms in the field of family study, by introducing the power-oriented and intersectionality approaches in family communication. This extends the range of communication studies into the power level in both interpersonal and institutional forms (Few-Demo et al., 2014). Furthermore, the analysis of power is enhanced by the introduction of intersectionality, so that the power relations and operations can be tracked along with the intersection of social identities. As outlined by Few-Demo et al. (2014),

"A feminist family studies perspective that embraces intersectionality is one that analyzes how individuals in families and groups negotiate systems of privilege, oppression, opportunity, conflict, and change across time and geography" (p. 89)

Power dynamics are underlying the negotiations and communications with regards to the family issues, which in turn create the space of sharing power and further empowerment. Thinking this approach as a reference for delineating women's empowerment within families, women's gaining of power become recognisable in family communication and negotiations according to the social identities. It is the subject of intersectional power analysis that how the changes in terms of social identity influence the power relations and alterations around women. Hence, it enables the observation and explanation of power dynamics within households. But before adopting such analysis, the contextual factors that help shape the social

identities need to be clarified.

2.5 The transformations of Chinese families

Nowadays, Chinese families are compounded with traditional and modern features. This situation has been shaped by multiple factors. Culturally, although the constrictions or even oppression of the traditional family and clan norms have been widely criticised in the mainstream culture since China's modernization, these reflections focused on the relationship between individual and family (Wu, 2016). Thus, individuals are less bound with their families nowadays, but family as an institution, its existence and institutional effects have never been challenged. Politically, after the structural reform in China, the responsibilities that were connected with the state, like collective earning livings and caring for the young and old, have returned to the hands of families. Moreover, under the dramatic social changes in the transition period, families have been expected to bear the brunt of the aftermath and extenuate the government's burden of maintaining social stability (Wu, 2016). In this sense, in line with the benefits for governance, government tends to encourage strong connections between family members as well as emphasise the traditional family virtues because of their effects in strengthening the function of family system in the face of extrinsic risks.

With regard to women's status within Chinese families, it is argued that the improvement of it has been undermined due to the market reform launched since 1978 (Howell, 2008). In the past, Chinese women's familial status had been strongly influenced by Confucian values, in which women's private responsibilities of caring for the family are clearly separated in contrast to men's public responsibilities. As more power can be called by men engaging in "superior" public activities, women who are oriented inwards are regarded "inferior" in conjugal power relations (as cited by Howell, 2008). But with the propagation of an egalitarian gender ideology like "women can hold half of the sky" by the Chinese Communist Party in the 1950s and 1960s, women's status saw considerable progress. For example, despite inequities still existed in the gender division of labour and income, the rights of women and men in engaging in waged productive activities were practically equalised since the 1950s. According to Howell (2008), in addition to the ideological endorsement of gender equality, such progress was also determined by the capability of the state to mobilise women into the industrialisation process. But in the market-oriented economy today, this capability has become weakened.

The erosion of women's labour market role is due to several factors. Along with the

introduction of the market reform in China, the ideological focus and state's allocation of resources have been re-oriented in a way prioritising economic development (Howell, 2008). Women were pushed back into the confines of the family. Facing the massive unemployment in the breakdown of state-led enterprises and the fierce competition within an opening marketplace, gender has again become a discriminative point with employment. Women workers in the less competitive state enterprises were the first to lose their jobs and the last to be employed in other workplaces (Howell, 2008). As economic growth has been prioritised, gender equality in labour market is intentionally or unintentionally ignored.

In the context of continuous economic growth, the exchange between parents and children is also highlighted in the backdrop of OCP. The OCP was enforced in Chinese households while societal attitudes towards women were being transformed by economic changes in the reform era.. One important impact of these concomitant processes was that fertility has continuously dropped in China over recent decades, exacerbating a trend that had already begun as a result of rapid economic growth. Moreover, there have been predictions that the decreasing fertility in China will stem economic growth in the long term. In response, Zhu et al. (2014) point out that, as encouraged by the Chinese government, the accumulated intergenerational transfer and human capital investment to the offspring can contribute to consistent long-term growth. In fact, in the so-called accumulation of economic resources, the traditional family notion of exchange – “bringing up children for being looked after in old age” (养儿防老) plays a crucial role.

Although the modernisation has given rise to myriad shifts away from the traditional family structure in Chinese households, the power relations in households persist to be profoundly affected by the traditional notions. In contemporary China, the mixed “traditional” and “modern” ways of understanding and forming families are in prevalence (Xu, Li & Yu, 2014), which brings about the unique complexities in Chinese family studies. Therefore, to contextualise the research of empowering effects and resources the only daughters can experience within their families, the power dynamics brought by the cultural, economic, and social background must be considered.

2.6 OCP and women's empowerment in Chinese households

Only daughters have long been the subject of study for those interested in women's empowerment (Fong, 2002). This is because singleton girls are likely to receive more financial and non-pecuniary investment than their counterparts with siblings, and thus

enjoy a more enabling environment for gender equity. In fact, empowerment studies for women and girls under OCP have been going on for a long time, and those exploring the relationship of low fertility and women's empowerment have been documented even earlier.

Fong (2002) explored in detail how the daughters from the urban one-child family could be empowered. She found that urban girls' empowerment occurred by changing from patrilineal, patrilateral, and patrilocal public ties to bilinear, bilateral, and neolocal ones, which was primarily enabled by the only daughters' increasing opportunities to get highly paid work (Fong, 2002). In the past, women's names were not recorded, no matter as daughters or wives, in the patrilineal family pedigree. It symbolised that women did not have a recognisable status to assume a position of power in their families. Further, in the broader community formed by the patrilineal family network, they were precluded from building relationships. However, paid work allows daughters the opportunities of engaging in the local community, and the income can ensure their family status as the breadwinner. According to Fong (2002), daughters' access to paid work is strongly related to intergenerational investment. Therefore, with more intergenerational investments, only daughters can get access to various resources in the public sphere, and can be empowered to challenge the gender norms entangled in Chinese society and strive for more control over their own lives.

However, this empowerment has been impeded by many normative regulations. One such norm is that married daughters would formally no longer be a member of the clan of her birth, and hence they usually were allowed neither to live with their parents for care provision, nor to support them financially without the negotiations with their husbands' family (Zheng, Gu & Gietel-Basten, 2018). Consequentially, parents tended not to invest as many resources and care in girls as compared to their brothers. In this regard, the OCP served as the extrinsic shock which compelled Chinese families to reconsider daughters as the prospective domestic pillar and carer, and begin to reconcile with the "modern" mode of family structure that the OCP intended to bring about.

Furthermore, within the familial context, the status of the daughter is determined not only by the amount of parents' investment and the income they earn but also by the responsibility they bear. In the traditional discourses of Chinese families, the oldest son of a pair of parents will be the inheritor of the family (Gao, 2006). The meanings of the status of inheritor are multiple. Economically, the inheritor will carry on most of the family property, it represents that the inheritors of families are generally the focus of

the intergenerational investment; but this also means that as the inheritors receive more investment from their parents, he (and now also she) also bears more burdens about various family issues, such as caring for younger siblings and for parents in old age (Gao, 2006; Zhang, 2003). Socio-culturally, an inheritor will be in acknowledgement both in domestic and public arena to announce the family stability and continuity (Gao, 2006). As a corollary, the inheritor has been bestowed more power in families than other descendants because they can get access to more empowering resources in and out of the family. In contemporary China, many families that follow this tradition still prioritise sons when considering about inheritance (Gao, 2006; Zhang, 2003). Daughters' equal inheritance, which has been guaranteed by legislation since the 1960s, is neglected in those families (Sargeson, 2012; Zhang, 2003). The reasons for putting less responsibility onto daughter's shoulder are justified, naturalised, and internalised in families (Fong, 2002). Therefore, to empower women and fight against gender inequity, it is important to examine the rights and responsibilities with regard to the inheritance of family property, which is inextricably connected with power in Chinese households.

The gendered unequal inheritance practices have not been addressed in the wake of the OCP. Although the gender-equal inheritance legislation was enacted five decades ago, the practical implementation of it confronted substantial resistance. In practice, the inheritance of daughters has been often violated in an illicit but "justified" manner because in principle, the property of families belongs to parents, who have the legislative right to decide who the inheritor is (Wang, 2013). Therefore, any substantive change in inheritance practices is subject to a shift in parents' perceptions.

But on the other hand, the changes brought by the OCP are, in effect, bringing two normative practices into conflict with each other, respectively the reservation of family property with family line, and the male priority in inheritance. Parents who get used to considering their son as the one inheriting the family have to face the fact that they may not have a son, and if they insist only male can be the inheritor, the person cannot be their descendant. Therefore, it is possible that daughters can inherit when families decide to compromise the latter to fulfill the former. A research has shown that inheritance plays an important role in making the only daughters financially autonomous in a context where money is needed to secure access to most resources (Sargeson, 2012; Qian & Jin, 2018). Hence, one of the effects of the OCP is the transformation of practices regarding the gendered responsibility and rights around family inheritance, which has important meanings for the empowerment of women.

Although parents with only girls accept that their daughter can fill the role traditionally reserved for sons, various disadvantages against women engaging in the public sphere remain as barriers to the further empowerment of women. One such barrier is the gender disparity in income which is due to the gender-segregated labour market, as well as the glass ceiling and invisible discrimination that exclude women from senior managerial positions. (Li & Li, 2008). As long as men earn more than women, the differential investment-return intergenerational exchanges involving male and female children will encourage families to at least attempt to produce sons (Hu, 2017).

Another issue is related to marriage prospects. According to Hu and Shi (2020), some parents of singleton girls continue to expect a marriage that helps families to move up in social status and/or encourages their daughters to find a job that facilitates taking care of their future families (Hu & Shi, 2020). These expectations have led to a new problem, the unaffordable betrothal gift. In the conditions of serious male surplus in contemporary China, some grooms and their families are expected to provide unreasonably high bride prices to marry their brides (Jiang & Sánchez-Barricarte, 2012). In fact, the custom of betrothal gift was originally meant for blessing the new couple; however, it has been distorted in recent years. The excessively high value of bride price becomes informed not only by the patrilineal family system, but also by the money-worship values and the collective unconsciousness among women about how this has attached a material value to them (Si & Wang, 2018). Thus, the numerical advantage of girls in the marriage market does not necessarily equate to more gender equality or women's empowerment. Rather, it may undermine gender equality in the long run.

Moreover, since the market-oriented reform in 1978, social dynamics that affect women's empowerment inside and outside of their families have emerged. Most significant is the gap between the affluent and poor, or the so-called class stratification. With regard to women's opportunities and aspirations for higher education attainment, research by Liu (2016) shows that women from higher socioeconomic groups tend to hold higher aspirations about venturing into the traditionally male-dominated fields, which are associated with higher salaries, while working-class women are less likely to make such choices that are associated with more risks and costs. As Liu (2016) notes, the cultural capital that is generally acquired from family activities in East Asian countries, would affect women's expectations of getting higher education. This indicates that women from wealthier families possess more potential and power to challenge gender norms whereas their working-class counterparts are more limited in their ability to act against the cultural power dynamics within and outside of their familial contexts. Therefore, the dynamics of socioeconomic status should be taken into

account when examining the impacts of OCP on women. The (dis)empowerment processes will vary according to a woman's socio-economic class position, and so might her subjectivity and perceptions about gendered power and empowerment.

In summary, the scholarly literature has identified the importance of seeking the empowerment process and women's agency in studying women's empowerment, and dynamics of power relations and empowerment in the family around the only daughters. It can be summarised that the empowerment of the only daughters is associated with the human interactions and relations within their families. In a Chinese familial context, only daughters can get access to more empowering resources due to parents' greater willingness to invest in their education and career, and because of the recognised social identity as inheritor that differs them from their non-singleton counterparts, they are assigned with more family responsibilities, which helps improve their family status and decision-making power. Based on the review of them, an empowerment model of the only daughters in Chinese families under the OCP has been outlined. However, considering the notable disadvantages, whether and how the pre-conditions can contribute to the empowerment process of only daughters and which role women's agency plays in the process still need examination. In next chapter, the methodology and research methods will be introduced to resolve the questions, and as a part of the methodology, the model drawn from the literature review will be explained explicitly.

Chapter 3 Methodology and data analysis

In line with the empowerment process under the OCP reviewed in the previous chapter, this chapter will construct a model to measure the empowerment process of only daughters in the context of the family. This model is grounded by the understandings of women's empowerment, the integrative family feminist perspective, as well as the mode of women's empowerment within Chinese households. Then the quantitative methods will be described, and the selection of indicators explained. The qualitative approach to be used in chapter 4 will also be explained and justified as related to the research question. Drawing upon the results of data analysis, the impacts of the sibship structure, location, and gender on the empowerment indicators will be examined.

3.1 Measuring women's empowerment

Many theoretical models have been proposed for estimating women's empowerment. One model has been articulated by Kabeer (1999), who segmented the process of empowerment into three constituents: respectively, the *resources* that enable a woman to change; the *agency* that enables a woman to locate goals and take action to achieve them; and *achievements* that constitute the observable outcome. In terms of this insight, Richardson (2018) identifies some problematic practices in indicator selection and methodological design, and provides three recommendations to improve women's empowerment measurements. First, the theories that serve as the basis for the analysis need to be explicitly reviewed, upon which the conceptualisation and framework for researchers' own study can be constructed and informed. Second, to avoid the implicit value-based judgement and biases, such as differences in cultural practices and norms, and the empirical judgements in the selection of indicators, the use of analytical methods must take the different levels of decision-making, the assigned weight of each indicator, and the multidimensionality of women's empowerment in varied situations into account. Third, the comprehensiveness of research will be enhanced by not only using rigorous quantitative information but also supplementing it with qualitative analysis; and by not only theoretical argumentation but also connecting it with practice-level and implementation-level issues.

Gram et al. (2019) pointed out that any of the measurements that researchers choose to adopt are subject to the fact, theory, and value base upon which their research questions are extracted, supported, and explored. However, in trying to construct a model for measuring women's empowerment, it should be recognised that many theories are contradicting each other in some aspects, and facts and values are multidimensional, which means it is unlikely that a universal criterion exists. Therefore, to select compatible theories and indicators that fit with the fact and researcher's own value, the

exploration of methodology must start from the integrative reviews of the research objectives and the existing methods and methodologies.

For measuring women's empowerment in practice, there have been myriads of models of measurement propounded by organisations and scholars. The most universally renowned is the Gender Inequality Index (GII) created by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It includes three dimensions for intergender comparison, respectively reproductive health, empowerment, and the labour market (Phan, 2015). In the sector of empowerment, the "population with at least secondary education" and the "shares of parliamentary seats" are the primary indicators (UNDP, 2020, p.1). However, the inapplicability of these indices in practical research, which is due to the lack of data especially in some developing countries, has been criticised. Apart from the measurement developed by UNDP, many scholars have proposed their own conceptualisations of how to measure women's empowerment. Similar to the design of UNDP, Kabeer (2005) put forward three dimensions for women's empowerment, which are education, paid work, and political representation. At the household level, the core components of women's empowerment have been identified in four dimensions, respectively women's education, their engagement in labour market, their decision-making in families, and the family-related policies (Phan, 2015). As widely agreed by scholars, education and employment are the most important indicators for women's empowerment, and the incorporation of these two has been pervasively acknowledged and justified.

It has been argued that measuring women's empowerment requires more attention to be paid to its process and agency (Garikipati, 2013). In measuring the empowerment effects for women of the microcredit programs in Bangladesh, it has been found the results of measurements that focus on the outcome, such as whether women get access to loans, contradict the findings of those accentuating the process, for example how the loans were used by women. By reflecting on the indicators in terms of the outcomes, Garikipati (2013) argues that the measurements and indicators solely covering the outcomes are not only insufficient but misleading to understand the impact of microfinance on women's empowerment. However, the adoption of most measurement models that go beyond the outcome level has been limited by the lack of available data. Without the in-depth observation of women's lived experience, the process can only be measured via examining changes against indicators like education attainment and employment participation. Even more challenging is the measurement of agency because it is subject to women's own awareness and interpretations, which can only be captured by collecting detailed information through surveys or interviews.

3.2 Methodological model

To answer the research question – whether the only daughters have been empowered in their households under the OCP, the analysis will be at the household level exploring both quantitative and qualitative data. Considering the familial context, as outlined in chapter 2, there are three important factors that influence women’s empowerment process in Chinese households, respectively sibship structure, gender, and class. In terms of the empowerment process, the components include, firstly, the educational and economic resources. In combination with the literature review in chapter 2, as illustrated in Figure 3.1, the educational resources affected by the OCP are the increasing educational investment in girls, and the economic resources are divided into two parts. The first part assumes the resource translated from the educational resources, such as the higher participation of employment and income as the result of higher educational degree; the second part is constituted by the “more practically justified daughters’ inheritance” in their families, which is related to the intergenerational support in some important family financial issues like purchasing home.

The methodological model considers women’s agency as affected by educational and economic resources. Firstly, knowledge acquired from higher attainment of education can broaden women’s horizons, the vocational skills improved by education can also increase women’s opportunity of being employed. Secondly, it is assumed that the increase in income will benefit women’s financial autonomy. Therefore, the educational and economic resources brought by parents’ educational investment, as well as access to inheritance that contributes to higher family status and decision-making power, may foster women’s ability to ensure themselves be empowered. Based on this model, data drawn from 2016 China Families Panel Studies (CFPS) will be analysed to statistically validate the transformations related to the resources. The less tangible and measurable aspect of agency in the process of empowerment will be analysed in chapter 4 through a discursive analysis of a report about a marriage mode that has been increasingly adopted by only daughters raised under the OCP.

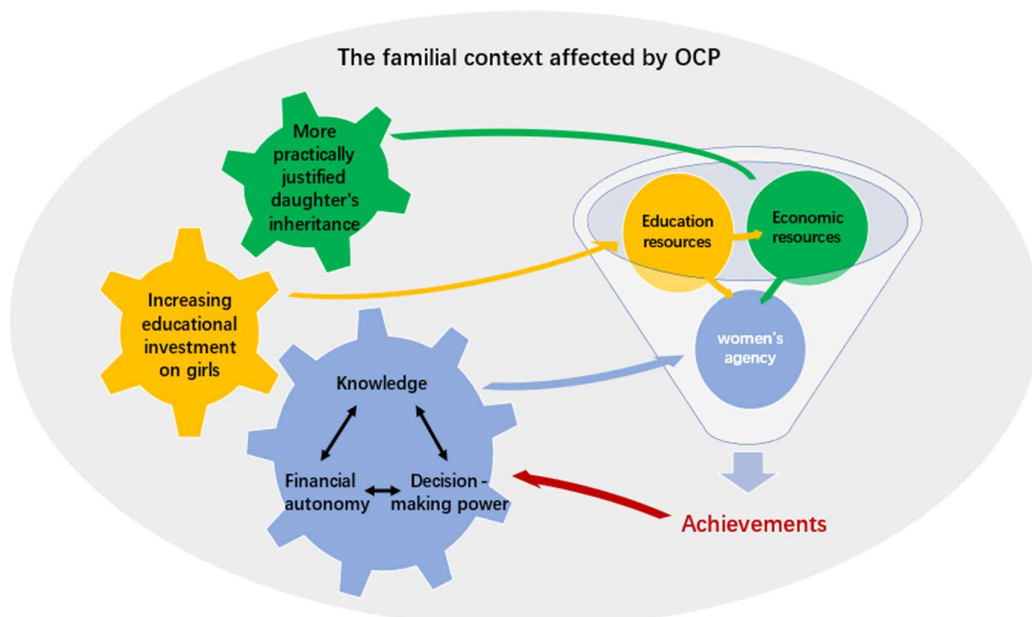


Figure 3.1 The empowerment process measurement model for the only daughters under OCP

Source: Own diagram

The data employed to conduct the first part of the analysis is from the China Family Panel Survey 2016 (CFPS 2016). As the main source of data for this thesis, it investigates family-related issues, such as family finance, children’s education, marriage, employment, and family health both at individual and household levels. This survey is constructed through sampling with different locations, gender, and age with a continuous tracing investigation strategy among over 16,000 households from 25 provinces, thereby providing nationally representative data on Chinese households. In the CFPS 2016 dataset, the valid sample size is 14,763 at household level, and 45,319 at individual level. Compared to the previous panel studies, the following-up rate is 86 percent for families and 82 percent for individuals. As a multi-purpose dataset, it includes over one thousand variables and has been employed not only in gender studies but as a source of research in multiple disciplines, such as economics and public health.

3.3 Independent variables

In line with the methodological model put above, the analysis will employ three independent variables: sibship structure, gender, and location. The reason of replacing class with location is to simplify the data collection, class as an abstract concept is difficult to identify in quantitative methods. In China, the urbanisation from 1978 has contributed to a significant rural-urban income gap nowadays, of the registered urban residents, the ratio of disposable income per capita is 2.64 and the ratio of consumption per capita is 2.11 to those of rural residents. It indicates an overall gap of socioeconomic

status between urban and rural households (Chen et al., 2020). Therefore, in this thesis, it is possible that location can serve as a representative variable to reflect the influence of family's socioeconomic status on daughter's empowerment.

The sibship structure captures children with and without siblings. The categorisation of location depends on the registered urban or rural areas according to the standard set by the Bureau of National Statistics of China. Gender is marked as male or female. Among these three independent variables, the sibship structure is the key subject of the assessment, the influence of it on the dependent variables will be the primary focus of analysis.

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 capture the descriptive features of the valid sample in terms of the three categorical variables. The respondents aged 0-15, who are the main references for educational indicators, are counted in Table 3.1. The statistics of those aged 16-30, who are the main references for employment outcomes, are represented in Table 3.2. The information that can be drawn from the tables is multiple. First, the proportion of singleton children reflects the effects of implementing OCP in different locations. Second, the amount and proportion of only daughters present the extent of gender preference in households of different locations. Third, owing to the tracing strategy of the panel survey in CFPS 2016, by comparing Tables 3.1 and 3.2, it is possible to observe the transformations in terms of the number and proportion of children in different gender and sibship structures in rural and urban areas. Overall, this information provides a broad picture of the survey data that will be employed in further analysis, which facilitates the explanation of the analytical result.

In terms of the sibship structure, Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show that the only-child families account for 46.1 percent of all households in CFPS 2016. Moreover, the difference between 47.2 percent made up by the one-child households in rural areas and 52.8 percent in urban areas, confirms that the OCP was implemented more strictly in urban families. According to the column percentages, among all the one-child families, those with only girls are 5.9 percent less than those with only boys. This indicates that parents are more likely to have a second child if their first is a girl.

Table 3.1 The descriptive data of children aged 0-15 in terms of sibship structure, location, and gender

		Sibship structure			
			with siblings	without siblings	Total
rural	female	Count	1511	744	2255
		Row N %	67.0%	33.0%	100.0%
		Column N %	50.0%	41.5%	46.9%
	male	Count	1508	1048	2556
		Row N %	59.0%	41.0%	100.0%
		Column N %	50.0%	58.5%	53.1%
	Total	Count	3019	1792	4811
		Row N %	62.8%	37.2%	100.0%
		Column N %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
urban	female	Count	800	840	1640
		Row N %	48.8%	51.2%	100.0%
		Column N %	49.7%	44.2%	46.7%
	male	Count	811	1062	1873
		Row N %	43.3%	56.7%	100.0%
		Column N %	50.3%	55.8%	53.3%
	Total	Count	1611	1902	3513
		Row N %	45.9%	54.1%	100.0%
		Column N %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total	female	Count	2311	1584	3895
		Row N %	59.3%	40.7%	100.0%
		Column N %	49.9%	42.9%	46.8%
	male	Count	2319	2110	4429
		Row N %	52.4%	47.6%	100.0%
		Column N %	50.1%	57.1%	53.2%
	Total	Count	4630	3694	8324
		Row N %	55.6%	44.4%	100.0%
		Column N %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.2 The descriptive data of children aged 16-30 in terms of sibship structure, location, and gender

			Sibship structure		
			with siblings	without siblings	Total
rural	female	Count	1395	1012	2407
		Row N %	58.0%	42.0%	100.0%
		Column N %	50.3%	50.2%	50.2%
	male	Count	1381	1004	2385
		Row N %	57.9%	42.1%	100.0%
		Column N %	49.7%	49.8%	49.8%
	Total	Count	2776	2016	4792
		Row N %	57.9%	42.1%	100.0%
		Column N %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
urban	female	Count	1051	1207	2258
		Row N %	46.5%	53.5%	100.0%
		Column N %	51.1%	50.9%	51.0%
	male	Count	1005	1163	2168
		Row N %	46.4%	53.6%	100.0%
		Column N %	48.9%	49.1%	49.0%
	Total	Count	2056	2370	4426
		Row N %	46.5%	53.5%	100.0%
		Column N %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total	female	Count	2446	2219	4665
		Row N %	52.4%	47.6%	100.0%
		Column N %	50.6%	50.6%	50.6%
	male	Count	2386	2167	4553
		Row N %	52.4%	47.6%	100.0%
		Column N %	49.4%	49.4%	49.4%
	Total	Count	4832	4386	9218
		Row N %	52.4%	47.6%	100.0%
		Column N %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

As mentioned in chapter 2, there have been differences in the implementation and effects of OCP. Most prominent is the difference between locations. In most rural areas, families whose first child was female were allowed to have a second child (Zhang, 2017). The outcome of this adjustment can be seen in Tables 3.1 and 3.2, which show that the proportion of the only-child families in all rural households is 39.6 percent, which is 14.2 percent lower than in urban areas. Besides, backing up the scholarly articles pointing out that notions of son preferences dominate more in rural households than in urban ones (Liu, 2016), the data shows that only 42.0 percent of the rural females aged over 16 are the only children of their families, whereas the proportion in urban areas is 53.5 percent. This demonstrates that female children in rural families are more likely to have siblings than in urban families. This proportion is likely to further decrease in the future as among children aged 0-15, there have been 33.0 percent only girls in rural areas compared to 52.0 percent in urban areas.

With respect to gender, among respondents in their current 16-30, the female only children constitute 50.6 percent of the population without siblings while the male constitutes 49.4 percent (Table 3.2). For the 0-15 children, the percentages turn to be respectively 42.9 percent and 57.1 percent (Table 3.1). It reflects a contracting trend of the female's proportion in the only children group in general and indicates that the likelihood of girls having siblings is increasingly higher than boys.

3.4 Definitions of selected indicators

For the quantitative analysis, the thesis will be comparing in terms of three independent variables: the sibship structure, location, and gender. The sibship structure is expected as the core dynamic that has given rise to the changes wrought by the OCP. How these independent variables affect empowerment is the question, and the thesis will be using dependent variables that reflect these influences most sensitively. The indicators for measuring the educational resources are the educational expenditure (pecuniary) and the frequency of discussing what happened at school with child (non-pecuniary). Because the aim of this data exploration is to reflect parents' educational investment for children, I select the dataset especially for children aged 0 to 15 in CFPS, in which the questions related to educational expenditure are answered by parents on children's behalf. Employing the children dataset, the educational expectancy, which is answered by children themselves, has also been incorporated as an indicator reflecting children's own subjectivity about pursuing education. Besides, the dataset for adult respondents aged less than 30 has been selected for indicators about the educational achievements (the highest educational degree) and economic resources (employment and income). For the sake of the possible inconsistencies among the two different datasets, the

comparisons between indicators from different datasets as well as the interpretations to the comparative results will be avoided.

In the CFPS 2016, the questions about educational expenditure take multiple forms, but the quantity of this item can be best represented by the total educational expenditure for children with an explicit amount of money in the past 12 months. This “total” includes the tuition fee, the expenses on accommodation, food, uniform, commuting, books, and other materials needed for school activities, as well as the extra-curriculum expenditure, such as tutoring and interest classes. Besides, the educational investment also takes account of the time spent on children’s education. There are many variables in CFPS 2016 to capture parents’ non-monetary investment in their children, but some are limited in the valid sample size. Therefore, the “frequency of discussing what happened at school with child” has been selected as it has a sufficiently large sample. As children aged over 6 spend most of their daytime in school, parents discussing with children about their school life can represent their care for children’s development. For this variable, the frequency is counted per week: always (5-7 times per week), usually (2-4 times per week), sometimes (once per week), rarely (once per month), and never. With the two indicators in the education sector, the main features of data about educational resources can be covered.

Thinking of the economic resources, the labour force participation, income, and personal assets are appropriate predictors. As there is no disaggregated data for assets at the individual level in the database, this component was excluded from the analysis. In terms of the available indicators for economic resources, the CFPS 2016 data on employment status (excluding self-recruited, freelance, and casual types) and the total income from all jobs in the last 12 months (including all wages, pecuniary and non-pecuniary welfare, bonus, allowances out of tax and insurance fee pre-paid) have been selected. It is worth noting that informal employment has been excluded whereas informal income has been included in the selected variables. Because the empowering effects of formal jobs are relatively higher than the informal ones (Kabeer, 2012), the presence of only formal employment rate can better reflect the extent of being empowered. But informal income has been included, on the grounds that living as a freelancer or starting a business and earning the informal income still requires knowledge and skills acquired from education.

In addition, the “children’s expectation of the minimum level of education” and the “highest education degree in 2016” are also included as indicators. By identifying the changes in terms of them, it benefits in understanding the process that children’s agency

has been affected by parents' educational investment, and the effects of educational achievement on attaining economic resources. For "children's expectation", this question was answered by children themselves, it reflects children's consciousness with the importance of attaining education. The "highest education degree" covers all adult-children aged 16-30; it displays their educational achievements. With both the two indicators related to educational level, eight labels of value that are commonly used have been arranged in descending order from the highest "doctoral degree", to "master's degree", "bachelor's degree", "technical and further education", "senior high school", "junior high school", "primary school", and to the lowest level "no schooling".

Through these indicators, the research aims to answer two questions, respectively:

- (1) are the only child of their families invested more by their parents in education than those with siblings? What about comparing the only girls with the only boys? Does it differ from rural and urban areas?
- (2) Does and to what extent those only-daughters get paid jobs and higher income than girls with siblings? Will it mitigate the gender income gap? Does it impact on rural-urban gap?

3.5 Hypotheses

Referring to the hypotheses formulated by Hu and Shi (2020), the hypotheses listed below are in the similar format:

H1 (the educational dimension): in households with an only child, the parents' investments on children's education are higher than those in households with more than one child (H1a); among one-child families, the gendered difference in educational investments is less significant than families with multiple children (H1b); among one-child families, the rural-urban disparity in educational investments is less significant than families with multiple children (H1c).

H2 (the economic dimension): the singleton children have higher employment participation and income than the non-singletons (H2a); for daughters without siblings, the gendered gap in income and employment opportunities is less significant than daughters with siblings (H2b); for daughters without siblings, the differences between rural and urban areas in the opportunity of being employed and getting high income are less significant than for daughters with siblings (H2c).

The hypotheses listed here contain three main assumptive ideas. First, if the only daughters are empowered under the OCP, not only will they receive more educational

investment from parents, but they would also have a higher participation rate in paid jobs, higher income, higher expectation, and achievements in education in comparison with daughters with siblings. Comparing with the only sons, the gender disparities in the non-singleton groups are expected to diminish among the singleton children. Because of the differences in policy implementation, economic scale, and socio-cultural practices, the families in rural areas are expected to have fewer only-girl households, and the advantages brought by the sibship status in empowerment would help the only daughters in rural households less.

3.6 Multivariate data analysis

The discussion of the multivariate analysis results revolves around the three independent variables, respectively sibship structure, location, and gender. This part of analysis replicates the analysis conducted by Hu and Shi (2020) on the 2010 data set. Their idea of comparing the data in different cohorts divided by the independent variables and testing separately the significance of those comparisons inspired me to adopt a similar method to examine the effects of sibship structure, gender, and location to the empowerment process. For each independent variable, the differences upon indicators in educational and economic dimensions will be separately presented in a table and accordingly explicated. To examine whether the differences exist and are statistically significant, the two-tailed t test is fitted with all dependent variables except for the employment status. For this categorical variable, a binominal logistic regression is employed to testify the significance of classification.

In each table, the aggregated data will be first compared in terms of each independent variable. In addition to the general comparisons, in the sibship table (Table 3.3), the location and gender have been disaggregated into four cohorts: rural female, rural male, urban female, and urban male, and the intra-group comparisons between individuals with and without siblings will be conducted in each cohort. In terms of the differentials between female and male, rural and urban, the comparative results are presented in Tables 3.4 and 3.5. Further in these tables, the differences between gender and location will be examined respectively in two groups separated by the sibship structure. The results of the comparisons will come out as the significance value (Sig. or p-value), which represents the statistical significance of the tests.

Table 3.3 Empowerment indicators affected by sibship structure

<i>Variables</i>	Sample Characteristics										
	Sibship structure							After disaggregating location and gender <i>p (with siblings vs. without siblings)</i>			
	Valid N	Min.	Max.	Mean/ % of Total	With siblings	Without siblings	<i>p (with siblings vs. without siblings)</i>	Rural		Urban	
					Mean/ % within	Mean/ % within		female	male	female	male
<i>For children aged 0-15</i>											
<i>Total educational expenditure of the child in the past 12 months (yuan)</i>	5,296	0	70,000	3,020.29	2,468.58	3,763.16	.000	.000 t=-3.502	.000 t=-5.268	.000 t=-5.017	.000 t=-3.756
<i>Frequency of discussing what happened at school with child</i>	5,832	0	4	2.10	2.08	2.12	.192 (ns)	.898 (ns)	.003 t=-2.942	.750 (ns)	.892 (ns)
<i>Expectation of minimum level of education</i>	2,464	1	8	5.32	5.25	5.39	.011	.731 (ns)	.410 (ns)	.133 (ns)	.082 (ns)
<i>For children aged 16-30</i>											
<i>The employment status (percentage of being employed in CFPS 2016)</i>	7,411			62.8%	73.1%	74.5%	.361 (ns)	.237 (ns)	.361 (ns)	.000 Exp=1.402	.063 (ns)
<i>Total income for all jobs in the past 12 months (yuan)</i>	3,612	0	619,200	26,385.76	24204.58	29020.23	.000	.032 t=-2.154	.119 (ns)	.055 (ns)	.237 (ns)
<i>Highest educational degree in CFPS2016</i>	8,815	1	8	3.51	3.38	3.66	.000	.215 (ns)	.000 t=-5.145	.000 t=-3.793	.000 t=-5.089

Notes:

- (ns): not statistically significant in the 5% level.
- The label of value in “Frequency of discussing what happened at school with child”: “4” = “always (5-7 times per week)”; “3” = “usually (2-4 times per week)”; “2” = “sometimes (once per week)”; “1” = “rarely (once per month)”; “0” = “never”
- The label of value for “education level or degree”: “8” = “doctoral degree”; “7” = “master’s degree”; “6” = “bachelor’s degree”; “5” = “technical and further education”; “4” = “senior high school or equivalent”; “3” = “junior high school”; “2” = “primary school”; “1” = “no schooling”

The sibship structure

As affected by the OCP, the increasing number of only-child families rendered the comparison between singleton and non-singleton children feasible. It can be observed that the differences brought by the sibship structure are noticeable (Table 3.3). This is best exemplified by the results in general comparisons, except for the “employment status” and the “frequency of discussing what happened at school with child”, it shows children without siblings are significantly different from those with siblings in all indicators ($p = 0.000$). In comparisons among four categorised groups, the difference regarding the total educational expenditure in the last 12 months are of high significance among all subgroups between children with differentiated sibship structure ($p = 0.000$), and the t values are negative, which indicates the differentiation benefits the latter of the two comparative objects – the children without siblings. Additionally, the highest educational degree varies significantly according to the sibship status among rural males, urban females, and urban males ($p < 0.005$). In terms of the economic dimension, it shows a significant difference in the total income for all jobs between rural females with and without siblings ($p = 0.032$), and on the employment status among urban female groups ($p = 0.000$). This evidence confirms that in the mentioned aspects, the only-children are more advantaged in resources provision than children with siblings.

There are also some differences that are not significant. In regard to the “expectation of the minimum level of education” and the “frequency of discussing what happened at school with child”, the differences regarding the former one are not significant across all categories while the latter is only significant in the rural male group ($t = -2.942$, $p = 0.003$; Table 3.3). Moreover, the impact of sibship structure on employment status is limited across the groups, as well as in the rural female, rural male, and urban male subgroups. It shows that there are few measurable effects of sibship structure on parents’ non-pecuniary investment, children’s expectations of education, and the opportunities of being employed.

Thus, according to the results of data analysis, the H1a can be partly confirmed because the non-pecuniary investment from parents does not change as the sibship status differs. In terms of H2a, it also can be partly confirmed since there is no significant difference with employment status affected by sibship structure.

Table 3.4 Empowerment indicators affected by gender

<i>Variables</i>	Gender							After disaggregating the sibship structure								
				Female				Male			With siblings			Without siblings		
				female		male		Sig.			female		male		Sig.	
	Valid N	Min.	Max.	Mean/ % of Total	Mean/ % within	Mean/ % within	Sig. (female vs. male)	Mean/ % within	Mean/ % within	(female vs. male)	Mean/ % within	Mean/ % within	(female vs. male)			
<i>For children aged 0-15</i>																
<i>Total educational expenditure of the child in the past 12 months (yuan)</i>	5,296	0	70,000	3,020.29	2,981.78	3,053.05	.554 (ns)	3,356.85	3,608.74	.485 (ns)	3,918.14	3,658.85	.262 (ns)			
<i>Frequency of discussing what happened at school with child</i>	5,832	0	4	2.10	2.11	2.09	.481 (ns)	2.11	2.04	.095 (ns)	2.10	2.13	.475 (ns)			
<i>Expectation of minimum level of education</i>	2,464	1	8	5.32	5.41	5.25	.002	5.35	5.14	.006 t= 2.762	5.50	5.32	.025 t= 2.237			
<i>For children aged 16-30</i>																
<i>The employment status (percentage of being employed in CFPS 2016)</i>	7,411			62.8%	62.7%	85.3%	.000 Exp=3.450	60.4%	87.0%	.000 Exp=4.373	65.7%	83.1%	.000 Exp=2.612			
<i>Total income for all jobs in the past 12 months (yuan)</i>	3,612	0	619,200	26,385.76	21,353.04	30,967.21	.000	19,375.71	28,758.06	.000 t= -7.374	23,835.06	33,563.20	.000 t= -5.292			
<i>Highest educational degree in CFPS2016</i>	8,815	1	8	3.51	3.54	3.49	.085 (ns)	3.44	3.32	.003 t= 2.993	3.65	3.67	.563 (ns)			

Notes:

1. (ns): not statistically significant in the 5% level.

2. The label of value in “Frequency of discussing what happened at school with child”:

“4” = “always (5-7 times per week)”; “3” = “usually (2-4 times per week)”; “2” = “sometimes (once per week)”; “1” = “rarely (once per month)”; “0” = “never”

3. The label of value for “education level or degree”:

“8” = “doctoral degree”; “7” = “master’s degree”; “6” = “bachelor’s degree”; “5” = “technical and further education”; “4” = “senior high school or equivalent”; “3” = “junior high school”; “2” = “primary school”; “1” = “no schooling”

Gender

With investigations of the effect of gender against the indicators, the results in Table 3.4 confirm that there is no statistically significant discrepancy between male and female children in receiving educational investment and acquiring education degree. However, it shows a stark gap between gender in terms of the economic resources. First, the percentage of being employed in female and male group is significantly different ($p = 0.000$), and the odds of being employed is 3.450 times greater for males as compared to females ($Exp = 3.450$). Second, males are earning significantly higher income than females ($p = 0.000$), the average income of females is approximately 30 percent lower than males. Besides, the table shows the expectation of girl children for their minimum level of education is significantly higher than boy children ($p = 0.002$).

But when the comparisons are put in groups of different sibship statuses, the singleton status can be found exerting its beneficial effects in fostering gender equity. As shown in Table 3.4, among the singleton children group, the gendered gap against all indicators is less significant than among non-singleton children. Males' probability of being employed is still higher than females', but the extent to which has decreased from 4.373 times higher to 2.612 times, and the discrepancy in the income level between gender is shrinking. Moreover, it is interesting to find that the indicators on which women with siblings perform significantly better than men lose significance in the comparison between females and males without siblings. For example, in the with-siblings group, the highest educational degree of female children is higher than male with 10 percent level of significance ($p = 0.085$), but in the group of children without siblings, the significance drops to $p = 0.563$, which demonstrates the smaller possibility of differentiation between gender. Similarly, in the aspect of the expectation of education level, although the gender difference is consistently significant, the level of significance has decreased among the only children.

Accordingly, hypotheses H1b and H2b can be accepted here. Although the gender gaps are nonetheless statistically significant, this analysis captures that the gendered differences scale down with the effects of the singleton status irrespective of educational and economic dimensions.

Table 3.5 Empowerment indicators affected by location

<i>Variables</i>	Location							After disaggregating the sibship structure					
				Rural		Urban		With siblings			Without siblings		
	Valid N	Min.	Max.	Mean/ % of Total	Mean/ % within	Mean/ % within	<i>Sig. (rural vs. urban)</i>	Rural	Urban	<i>Sig.</i>	Rural	Urban	<i>Sig.</i>
								Mean/ % within	Mean/ % within	<i>(rural vs. urban)</i>	Mean/ % within	Mean/ % within	<i>(rural vs. urban)</i>
<i>For children aged 0-15</i>													
<i>Total educational expenditure of the child in the past 12 months (yuan)</i>	5,296	0	70,000	3,020.29	2,245.17	4,200.52	.000	1,983.67	3,410.65	.000 t= -10.864	2,691.28	4,951.95	.000 t= -10.420
<i>Frequency of discussing what happened at school with child</i>	5,832	0	4	2.10	2.11	2.07	.206 (ns)	2.08	2.08	.970 (ns)	2.17	2.07	.019 t= 2.355
<i>Expectation of minimum level of education</i>	2,464	1	8	5.32	5.18	5.54	.000	5.17	5.43	.001 t= -3.239	5.19	5.60	.000 t= -5.455
<i>For children aged 16-30</i>													
<i>The employment status (percentage of being employed in CFPS 2016)</i>	7,411			62.8%	72.3%	75.8%	.000 Exp=1.199	72.8%	74.4%	.247 (ns)	71.5%	77.2%	.000 Exp=1.352
<i>Total income for all jobs in the past 12 months (yuan)</i>	3,612	0	619,200	26,385.76	20,685.92	31,312.57	.000	19,226.22	29,515.07	.000 t= -8.016	23,012.32	33,048.35	.000 t= -5.269
<i>Highest educational degree in CFPS2016</i>	8,815	1	8	3.51	3.20	3.85	.000	3.13	3.72	.000 t= -15.933	3.29	3.97	.000 t= -17.151

Notes:

1. (ns): not statistically significant in the 5% level.

2. The label of value in “Frequency of discussing what happened at school with child”:

“4” = “always (5-7 times per week)”; “3” = “usually (2-4 times per week)”; “2” = “sometimes (once per week)”; “1” = “rarely (once per month)”; “0” = “never”

3. The label of value for “education level or degree”:

“8” = “doctoral degree”; “7” = “master’s degree”; “6” = “bachelor’s degree”; “5” = “technical and further education”; “4” = “senior high school or equivalent”; “3” = “junior high school”; “2” = “primary school”; “1” = “no schooling”

Location

The differences seem to be led most significantly by location comparing with the other two independent variables (gender and sibship structure) because in Table 3.5, in all educational and economic indicators except for the “frequency” one, the general distinctions between locations are of high significance ($p = 0.000$). This confirms a notable gap between rural and urban areas with respect to empowering resources. But it is worth noting that in terms of the “frequency of discussing what happened at school with children”, the means in rural families are higher than urban, and in the without-siblings category, it is significant that the frequency of discussing what happened at school with children in rural households is higher than in urban households ($p = 0.019$, $t = 2.355$). It may denote that the pecuniary investments from parents in rural areas are less than those in urban areas, but this may to an extent be compensated by rural households spending equal or greater amounts of time on caring for children’s education.

However, only drawing the significance from the aggregated survey data is not enough. To see whether the rural-urban gap in empowering resources can be alleviated by the advantages brought by the without-siblings status, the results of examinations of differences between locations in disaggregated with-siblings and without-siblings subgroups are also presented in Table 3.5. It is evident that regarding the educational resources, although the relative difference of monetary educational investment between rural and urban areas is slightly lower among children without siblings (80 percent higher) than those with siblings (130 percent higher), in aspects of “frequency”, it shows a sharpened gap between urban and rural households. Interestingly, it indicates rural parents tend to spend more time caring for their children’s school life when they have only one child, but this trend is not reflected among urban parents. Similarly, the location-based difference in expectation of children about the minimum level of education becomes more significant for singleton children than the non-singletons. In terms of the economic resources, adult children who have no siblings are observed living with a slightly less rural-urban disparity in income amount than their counterparts with siblings; however, this disparity turns out deepened in view of the educational achievement and employment situation.

Therefore, the hypotheses H1c and H2c can be refuted here. There is no evidence that supports the answer “yes”, and if there is, it is very subtle. Hence, it is complex to answer the question of whether the advantaged sibship status benefits rural children to mediate the disadvantages of empowerment caused by the urban-rural gap.

Interpretation

To interpret the main features of the data, the results in the first place confirm that gaps exist between singleton and non-singleton children in both resources and outcome. Under the OCP, the only children in families have benefited from higher investment in education, and are more likely to acquire better education and have higher educational degrees. With the advantage related to the singleton status, the singleton children are more likely to find higher-paid jobs. When only considering the sibship structure as an independent variable, the assumptions mentioned above can be accepted.

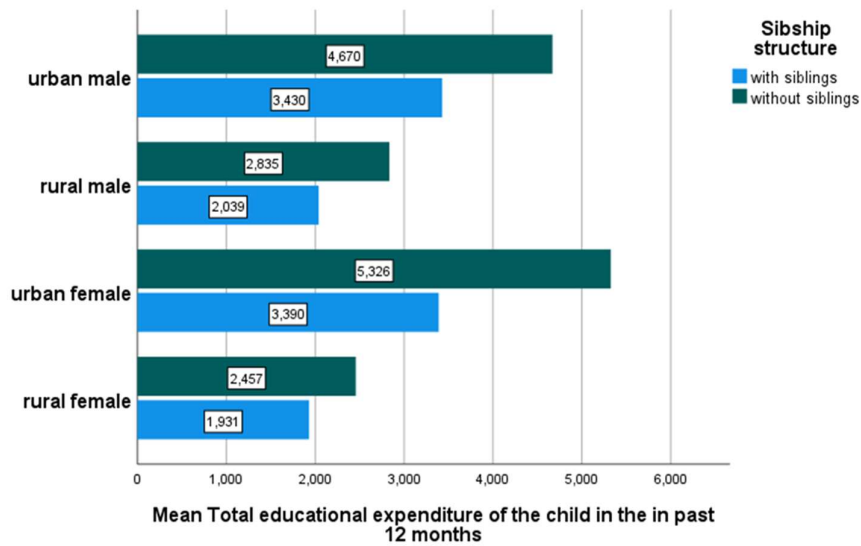


Figure 3.2 The means of the annual total educational expenditure by gender and location (yuan)

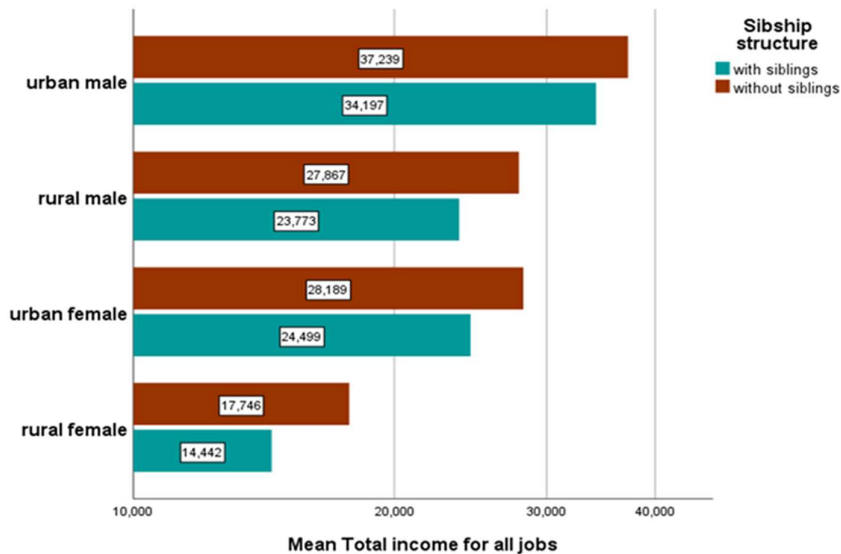


Figure 3.3 The means of the annual total income by gender and location (yuan)

However, it becomes increasingly complex after introducing the two other variables – location and gender. With the same location and gender, the differences between with and without siblings become much less significant. The implication that can be drawn is that the benefits taken by the OCP for the singleton girls are being diluted by the impediments informed by the intersecting inequities about gender and locations. As illustrated by Figures 3.2 and 3.3, the inter-gender and inter-location gaps are nevertheless noticeable. First, regarding the educational resources and outcomes, there are remarkable improvements for the only children comparing with children with siblings in rural areas; however, the disparity between rural and urban has barely been mediated by the positive influences brought by the changes of sibship structure. Second, at the income level, although higher income can be observed among the without-siblings group than those with siblings, the intergroup comparisons show that the gaps between gender, especially in rural areas remain to be stark. Hence, most of the rural-urban comparisons turn out highly significant results.

Thus, in terms of the findings, it can be found the singleton status plays a positive role in accumulating the resources from family for daughters, but this process has continuously been counteracted by the deeply rooted inequalities in Chinese society. Gender inequalities in the first place can be identified inducing differences of high statistical significance in Table 3.4. As scholars have pointed out, the gender inequalities play out pervasively and stubbornly not only in the job market, but in some traditionally male-dominated fields, like the parliament and academia (Li & Li, 2008; Liu, 2016). Similarly, the inequalities related to the location have played a conspicuous role in shaping the disparities. Furthermore, in this analysis, the inequalities have been found situated in the intersectionality of gender and location. A shred of strong evidence for this intersectional inequality can be detected in Figure 3.3. No matter with or without siblings, females located in urban areas can earn more than males in rural areas, but the rural females are always the most disadvantaged group in income earning. Thus, the differentials between individuals are given rise to in an intersectional manner, but within the intersections, the alleviating or strengthening effects that the sibship structure can make are very limited.

However, there are also some positive hints within the data. First and foremost, as visualised in Figures 3.4 and 3.5 – in Figure 3.4 and 3.5, the logarithm of respectively 3 and 5 are used to make the comparisons more sensitive, and the picture more intuitively clear – females on average have higher educational achievements and expectations in acquiring education than males. It means they are aware of educational programs as a route to self-development. Hence, their educational aspiration can be

interpreted as a sign of girls' raising awareness of the need to empowering themselves, by making use of the available educational resources, the systemic gender inequalities that consistently disempower women are possible to be counteracted.

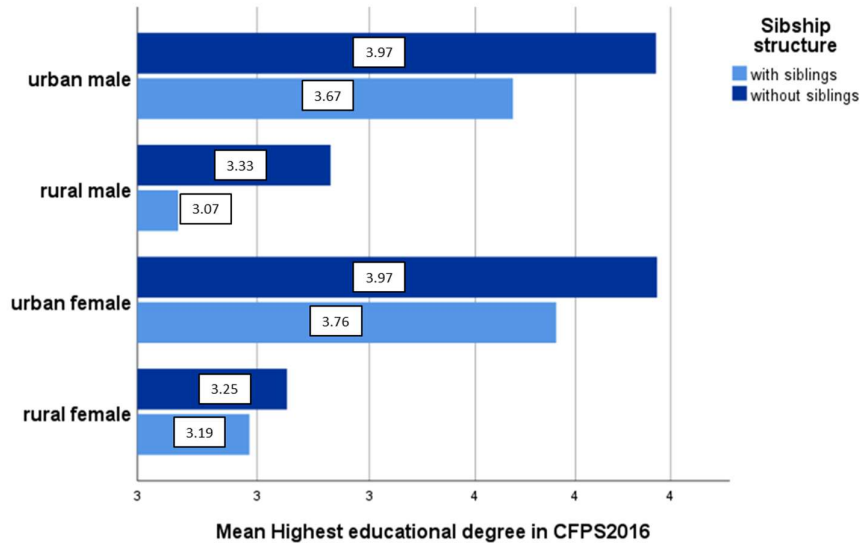


Figure 3.4 The means of highest educational degree by gender and location (taking the logarithm of 3; 3=senior high school)

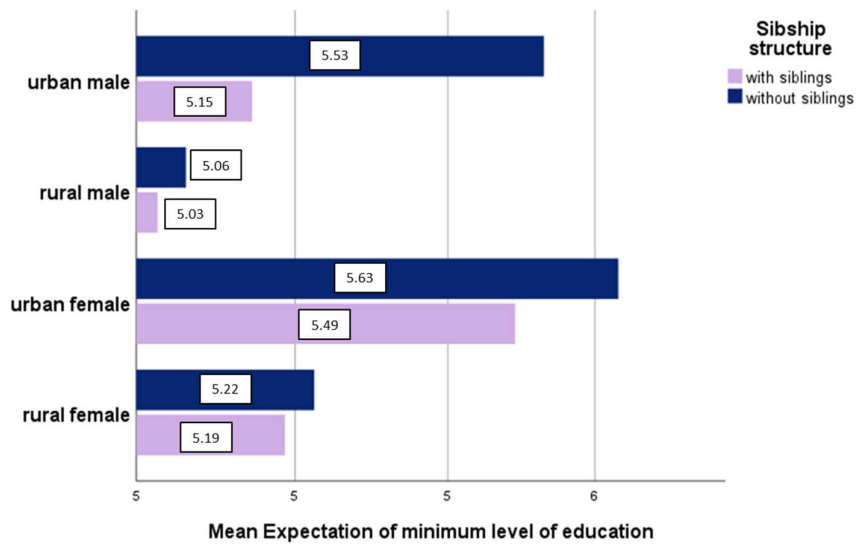


Figure 3.5 The means of expectation of minimum educational level by gender and location (taking the logarithm of 5; 5=technical and further education)

Second, even though the educational investments are nevertheless significantly different in different locations, the equalising educational expenditure from parents

between daughters and sons irrespective of the sibship structure suggests that among families of the younger generation, the influences of son priority and preference are diminished.

To sum up, consistent with the argument proposed by Fong (2002), the urban girls without siblings are the main beneficiaries of the OCP. It can be concluded that the singleton status has brought about more educational and economic resources for girls, but this improvement is not powerful enough to challenge the inequalities in relation to gender and location. Besides, drawing upon the intra-gender comparisons, the measurements for the singleton daughters turn out positive, but the gaps between singleton and non-singleton daughters in educational investments and income remind us that, although OCP has contributed to the empowerment for the only daughters in educational and economic aspects, these beneficial effects have been critically compromised for girls with siblings. In terms of women's empowerment, among all the changes brought by the OCP as presented in the data, daughters' increasing awareness in pursuing education and the fewer son preferences of younger parents can result in increased empowerment opportunities for female children. Looking into the future, this suggests that there is a potential increase in women's agency, as women are aware of the importance of that enhancing their status and power position in family and society.

Chapter 4 Are women in the *Liang-tou-dun* being empowered?

To answer the research question of this thesis how only daughters have been empowered/disempowered within families under the OCP, it is necessary to go beyond the statistical data on educational investment and income. To examine women's agency, this chapter will focus on a particular type of marriage practised increasingly by only girls – the *Liang-tou-dun*, literally the “two-places-stay” model of marriage. In this kind of marriage, the bride will not marry “out” of their own family and “into” the groom's family, but in principle stay the status of a member of her original family. The *Liang-tou-dun* has been increasingly accepted by Chinese families, especially those with only daughters (Wang & Di, 2011), most notably because of their needs to preserve the familial property that will be inherited by their only daughters. Hence, by analysing information about this type of marriage with the power of intersectionality approach, it is possible not only to examine how the “more practically justified daughters' inheritance” comes into play accruing women's autonomy, but also to delineate the changes at the agency level.

As the basis for the qualitative analysis, the information gathered includes research articles that have observed the *Liang-tou-dun*, and reports produced by a news agency. The main source of the qualitative information for analysis is a report produced by Xinhua Net – a nationally influential governmental news agency in China. Considering the materials drawn from the original report are in Chinese, I have translated them into English before referring to them in analysis. This report entitled “the *Liang-tou-dun* phenomenon in Jiangsu and Zhejiang province” cites a series of interviews conducted with various people to depict their views of this kind of marriage. Most primarily, the reporter made conversations with more than 20 families practising this marriage mode in Zhejiang province, most of which are from Min Feng village, the location of a field research by Zhao (2020). In this urbanised village, over 70 percent of population aged under 30 are adopting the *Liang-tou-dun* there. In addition to people within the *Liang-tou-dun*, the interviewees include scholars, the government functionary in the marriage department, some legal professionals, and a not-for-profit match-matcher. It also refers to a poll of 2032 people on the internet about their attitudes towards the *Liang-tou-dun* and children's surnaming which shows 23.2 percent of the participants think this new marriage mode is unacceptable. 54.7 percent of the participants were willing to accept that children can inherit their mothers' surname, whereas 47.5 percent of them suppose children should be surnamed following their fathers. By reviewing the literature that has studied this marriage model, the background, conditions, development as well as explanations for it will be introduced in the following paragraphs. Based on the information from the report, the analysis can be conducted on the empowering effects

for women in the *Liang-tou-dun*.

In this chapter, the first section reviews the background, conditions, and scholarship of the *Liang-tou-dun* phenomenon. Section 2 focuses on the process in which the more practically justified daughters' inheritance contributes to women's autonomy as reflected in the *Liang-tou-dun* marriage. Section 3 explains how women's agency benefits from the process. In section 4, a critical reflection will be applied which addresses the empowerment. Following this will be the discussion of both quantitative and qualitative analysis in section 5, which integrates and explicates the analytical results.

4.1 The background, conditions, and scholarship of the *Liang-tou-dun*

The increasing popularity of the *Liang-tou-dun* is in response to the expanding number of families with sole daughters under the OCP. To ensure that the familial property that will be inherited by the only daughters is preserved in their own families, and parents in old age can be cared properly, people have adjusted the traditional marriage model to be the *Liang-tou-dun* (Zhao, 2020). This marriage model arranges the independence of assets belonging respectively to the wife and husband. To demonstrate this, father and mother's surname will be respectively inherited by the children, and because of it, the couple in the *Liang-tou-dun* are required to have at least two children irrespective of their gender (Wang & Di, 2011). In fact, these arrangements serve to address the practical needs comprising of carrying on the family line, family-based aged care, and family property preservation.

Additionally, there are multi-faceted conditions that enable the *Liang-tou-dun*. First of all, it should be pointed out that the right to surname children after their mother and the right of daughter's equal inheritance are protected in legal terms, which facilitates the *Liang-tou-dun*. Second, as the result of the stricter implementation of the OCP in some relatively more prosperous areas, a large number of families that only have a daughter are abundant in material wealth, hence may have the concerns of how to ensure the family property being inherited accorded with their own family line. Thirdly, in terms of the geography of the *Liang-tou-dun* prevalence, the important premises of these marriages are the spatial proximity and similarity of the domestic economic structure of the two sides of the family. Namely, the radius of young people seeking their future spouse is limited, which in some ways constitutes the common ground of the inter-family negotiations and therefore facilitates the *Liang-tou-dun* marriage. Fourth, although various new kinds of aged care modes are being popularised to deal with population aging, the aged care for older parents is still largely dependent on their

families, and looks to remain so in the near future (Chen, 2010). Reasons leading to this status quo are intertwined, including the still-developing institutions of professional and available aged care for the elderly, which has been impeded in social and cultural terms by the ingrained notion that caring for the elderly is a private matter that occurs within the family. Last but not least, the transformation from the “marrying-out” marriages to the “two-places-stay” ones has led to less knitted patriarchal clan connections and people’s reconceptualisations of them. In other words, people accepting the new marriage mode are preserving traditions – like continuing the family name and passing property on to children – in a modernised way. Therefore, it is not surprising that the villages in affluent coastal provinces like Zhejiang, which have experienced rapid urbanisation, are the places where the *Liang-tou-dun* marriages are increasingly prevalent. Therefore, it is not surprising that the *Liang-tou-dun* have been found most predominantly in villages of the coastal affluent provinces of China, like Jiangsu and Zhejiang province, in which the urbanisation has brought myriad resources that contribute to the local economy and residents’ living standards.

Many Chinese scholars have explored the *Liang-tou-dun* marriage. The first academic exploration was done by anthropologist Fei Xiao-Tong, whose famous field-based research on “Peasant Life in China” captured the early form of *Liang-tou-dun* marriages. He observed that in families which had only daughters, a marriage practice that gave the offspring their mothers’ surname was adopted (Fei, [1938]1980). However, at that point, this new marriage mode was not widely recognised and practised. In the past decade, as the *Liang-tou-dun* became increasingly popular, research has explored the substantive meaning of this pattern of marriage, linked the practice to changed micro-power dynamics within families, and pondered the implications for Chinese society. For example, Wang and Di (2011) examine this marriage form in western Sichuan Province, and found that it offered more freedom for the newly-built families to address multiple familial issues. In particular, they find that this marriage form enables new ways of dealing with the traditional responsibilities of family-based care for the aged, by adapting the household composition and, at the same time, potentially challenging traditional norms.

However, there have been few articles linking this issue with women’s rights and empowerment. In this regard, Deng, Hoekstra, and Elsinga (2019) provide a hint by asking how the gender of the adult children affects the intergenerational transfer within their families, and most significantly, the transfer of housing assets. By interviewing people with purposively selected gender, age, occupation, and sibship structure, their research revealed the persisting notion underlying the uneven transfer from parents that

‘there is no need to support daughters in housing since they will marry out and their husbands have the responsibility to house them’. In this sense, the *Liang-tou-dun* marriage, which involves parents of singleton daughters supporting them through purchasing or passing on housing assets, offers new ways of addressing power relations through intergenerational transfer and empowering women through financial autonomy.

4.2 Women’s autonomy in the *Liang-tou-dun*

As women’s desire for greater financial independence from their husbands arises, more and more women start to actively pursue their own home as a source of security in their lives (Deng, Hoekstra & Elsinga, 2019). However, because of the relentless upsurge of house prices, most women are not able to purchase housing assets independently. In some families, to secure the daughters’ financial autonomy in their new family, parents tend to support them financially by purchasing a new home as they get married, or if they cannot afford the full amount, assisting them with the mortgage payments. Besides, some parents with more than one residential property may choose to gift one to their daughters by registering it under their daughter’s name.

But, as mentioned earlier, there are also families that stick to the traditional patrilineal inheritance. In their opinion, daughters do not need to buy housing before marriage because that is the responsibility of their future husbands. Therefore, in the face of high housing prices and related restrictions to home purchasing, and the high sex ratio that has led to an excess 20 million men (Greenhalgh, 2012), a paradoxical situation emerges whereby daughters are expected to marry with sizeable betrothal gifts but supported much less by their families. In families where girls have male siblings, this is probably because their brothers need more parental support to buy housing and pay the high bride price in order to get married. In this account, daughters in families with traditional notions are unlikely to receive equal housing support from their parents as sons.

However, the difference between daughters with and without siblings can be reflected in the *Liang-tou-dun* case. Similarly intended to preserve traditions, parents are more willing to provide support to their only daughters regarding some important financial expenses, like buying a home (Xinhua Net, 2021). The reason is that the only daughters have been recognised the inheritors and also caregivers of their family in the future. In accordance with the customs and notions about the intergenerational exchange, not only for securing the home for their daughters, but the investment is also closely associated with the quality of care when parents step into old age. Revolving around this social identity, the intra-household power relations have been changed, which allows the only

daughters with this identity opportunities of empowerment. Further, affected by these transformed power relations, when negotiating a marriage with another family, the social identity of the inheritor of a family will continue to serve as the important power dynamics in the inter-household interactions. Like one interviewee stated who has been in a *Liang-tou-dun* for ten years:

“It is natural that I provide care and companion for my parents because I am their only daughter, and I will inherit our family property. So, my parents and I chose to negotiate a Liang-tou-dun, I do not need my husband and his family to prepare housing or some other bride price and equally, we would not pay for dowry.” (Xinhua Net, 2021, own translation)

With regard to buying housing in preparation for the new family, it is no longer the responsibility of the groom’s family but has been transformed into a matter that is decided through inter-family negotiations. As indicated in a report that investigates this marriage, the families of the bride and the groom would negotiate their respective part of the investment in purchasing a house based on the mutually agreed arrangements for the marriage (Xinhua Net, 2021). In this way, at the household level, the prior negotiations between the two sides endeavour to make the power relations balanced. The effects of these negotiations trickle down to the individual level, for the wife and husband who are now the delegates of their families, the power balance would be maintained in their marriage. From the perspective of women, the empowering process in the *Liang-tou-dun* begins with the sharing of power between their families, and as the result of the equality that has been established by their original families, the woman would in principle have equal autonomy and decision-making power to her husband.

To sustain the inter-spousal as well as inter-household power balance, according to Zhao (2020), the *Liang-tou-dun* highlights “sharing the responsibilities” instead of splitting them along natal family lines. This “sharing” is not merely reflected in the relations between the young spouses, but also in the inter-generational family relations. This is suggested in the statements of two women who have formed their family through *Liang-tou-dun*:

“We usually take turns in terms of living with parents as a companion. It is not like I go back to my parents with the child in my surname and my husband go back to his parents with child in his surname, we will live as well as move together as a family.” (Xinhua Net, 2021, own translation)

“My husband and I have our work to do and both sides of parents can help us in looking after the kids when we are busy.” (Xinhua Net, 2021, own translation)

Also as indicated above, the *Liang-tou-dun* represents the young couple's stronger connection with both natal families. Comparing with the conventional mode of marriage where a woman has to be limited by the taken-for-granted responsibility of devoting herself to her own household and to caring for the parents of her husband, the *Liang-tou-dun*, which usually is accompanied by greater relational and geographical proximity to both parental families, bring about beneficial intra-household and inter-household cooperation for women. This is because the sharing of responsibility among family members does not only happen in financial issues, but also in family care work, which helps relieve the double burden of women. To a large extent, the sharing practice is coming into play in relieving women in their traditional role of taking care of children and domestic work, and freeing them up for engaging more in their careers and other public affairs.

In summary, because there are compelling socio-cultural reasons to permit only daughters to inherit family property, women who are identified as the inheritor of their families can get access to more resources to manipulate the power relationships, thereby they can be self-empowered to fight against gender norms associated with the traditional family patterns and notions. The process of this empowerment is substantively a process in which the new power structure has been built through the interactions and negotiations of two families involved in a marriage. When families adopt the *Liang-tou-dun* marriage mode, the only daughters can experience more autonomy in their marriage. The *Liang-tou-dun* affords them more room to consider their own needs and aspirations, and to take action to achieve them by making power-oriented decisions, as the next section explains.

4.3 Women's agency in the *Liang-tou-dun*

As analysed in the last section that the inheritor serves as one of the power dynamics in the *Liang-tou-dun*. In the power-oriented analysis, the power relations around the only daughters have changed after the identity of the inheritor has intersected. With the new power relations, the only daughters can get access to more resources. Moreover, in addition to empowerment at a material level, it also benefits women's empowerment at the agency level.

In China, the family as the smallest unit of civil society, has been crucially situated in social, cultural, and political terms (Ban, 2016). The inheritance of a family does not simply mean the inheritance of family property, but also implies the establishment of social status as the representation of the individual family in the broader community. It also involves shouldering of responsibility and obligations for handling family-related

issues in the public arena. For instance, in the traditional patriarchal family based on son preference, male descendants are not only obliged to bear the brunt of care provision for their aged parents, but are also accountable to pillar the whole family and family members. Besides, in some activities for men only, sons can be the delegate of their family in matters relating to the larger kinship network (clan) or the local community. Consequently, in families that stick closely to the traditions, the dominance of sons has been preserved at the structural and institutional levels. However, this sturdy building of patriarchy faced a significant shock by the top-down enforcement of the OCP. The *Liang-tou-dun* marriage has emerged as a way to reconcile the tradition of patrilineal inheritance and the reality of families that only have daughters, while simultaneously creating a more supportive public environment for gender equality.

Insofar as the empowerment of the only daughters is concerned, this reconciliation makes the improvement of their agency possible. As the bearer of the whole family, not only have these daughters attained more autonomy in their own lives, but the accountability also grants them different thinking and behaviour pattern along with the changing of their social role. For example, empowered by the equalisation of sons and daughters in familial inheritance rights as well as obligations, women are more likely to engage with the community and be aware of their equal rights alongside men in the public and private spheres. As one female villager living in a *Liang-tou-dun* marriage reveals:

“I may have some “special” experiences because of the Liang-tou-dun – I do not think they are special though, they become more and more usual in our lives. I can worship the ancestor as formally only men are allowed to do, I can attend the Dragon Boat Festival banquet as a delegate of my family, and some occasions that women were not allowed to partake in the past, are now open for me.” (Xinhua Net, 2021, own translation)

In this case, the perpetuating gendered public-private separation within families has been broken, which not only can make a difference in women’s experience, but more importantly, is able to gradually give rise to the formation of women’s own awareness and interpretations for the gendered norms and gender equality. For instance, because the *Liang-tou-dun* requires a couple to have at least two children, there are critiques that this arrangement under the *Liang-tou-dun* is a veiled compulsion of nurturing two children which infringes on women’s reproductive rights (Xinhua Net, 2021). In response to such criticism, some interviewees in this marriage offer a different opinion:

“Actually, we do not like people labelling us like the ‘fertility machine’, we have the room of making our own decisions in whether and how we give birth to children. Only if we agreed to have two babies would we choose to make a Liang-tou-dun, and if we would not

like to, we would not necessarily conduct a Liang-tou-dun. (Xinhua Net, 2021; own translation)

This quote shows that the transformed social role and experience of the only daughters benefit their autonomy in the family, and more importantly, influence their own understanding of equity and power in decision making about family issues like having babies.

To sum up, women's agency as an important part of empowerment, can be influenced by the inheritance status. As the family structure changed alongside the enforcement of OCP, the power dynamics of family inheritance have intersected with the gendered power structure ingrained in the socio-cultural settings. It results in the changes of inter-spousal and/or intergenerational relations. Through a power-oriented lens, with the changed power relations operating in the only-daughter families, daughters are more likely to challenge the gender norms in social entities, thereby to be aware of the equal rights between gender and develop their own understandings about gender equity.

However, like most novel constructs, the *Liang-tou-dun* also has many shortcomings that have been uncovered. Regarding women's rights and empowerment, the most critical concerns are the sustainability of this marriage and the intergenerational power imbalance as the cost of the inter-spouse power balance. The next section will reflect on these problems.

4.4 Reflection on “women being empowered” in the *Liang-tou-dun*

As discussed in the previous section, a new form of power structure has been built by the increasing interventions of the wife's family which are based on an acknowledgement of sole daughters as the inheritor of the family. Thus, it could be argued that the most far-reaching impacts exerted by the OCP have not been to lower the population growth rate, but to bring about a socio-cultural transformation around gender roles and responsibilities, and the relative power status of women and men, that have been long ingrained in Chinese society. But can this be sustainable? There are many concerns around this conditional equality between wives and husbands, and the most frequently raised question is: When singleton girls become less numerous and dominant, how will this affect gender relations in the family and society?

To understand this question, it is important to bring the universal cancellation of the OCP into the picture. In the face of the rapidly aging population, the Chinese government has successively enacted the selective Two-child policy in 2013, universal Two-child policy in 2016, and universal Three-child policy in 2021. Without the

restriction to an only child, the proportion of only daughters will inevitably decline, as indicated in the findings from CFPS 2016 discussed in chapter 3. In this regard, the sustainability of the gender equality and women's empowerment reflected in the *Liang-tou-dun* will be determined by whether or not parents' perceptions have shifted towards gender equality so substantively that the gender of their offspring is no longer a particular consideration in terms of inheritance. In some of the literature (Wang & Di, 2011; Zhao, 2020), it has been suspected that this marriage as well as its empowering effects will disappear along with the decrease of singleton daughters in the future.

In terms of the suspicions, arguments have been put forward by scholars who adopt a critical perspective on the *Liang-tou-dun*. It was criticised that the child surnaming practices are in effect "veiled patriarchy" (Qi, 2018, p. 1001). As Qi (2018) points out, the ultimate motivation and intention of adjustments around surnaming practices are to preserve the family names of mothers, which are the heritages of the patrilineal family system in Chinese society (Qi, 2018). Therefore, in contrast to the progressive implications of surnaming children after their mother in the western discourse, understanding the same phenomenon in China appears to be more complex. The "veiled patriarchy" in Chinese society may lead women to be less conscious of the unchallenged patriarchal structural oppression (Qi, 2018). According to this argument, the deeply rooted patrilineal inheritance ideas among Chinese families cannot be easily eliminated, and correspondingly the ground of son preference in reproduction and family inheritance will hold as a strong impediment to empowering women.

Women are regarded as having more autonomy and decision-making power in their households in response to their own needs, which serves as an important proof of them being empowered in the *Liang-tou-dun*. However, this has also been challenged by Qi (2018), who shifts the focus from the inter-spouse (horizontal) to the intergenerational (vertical) power relations. As Qi (2018) points out, vertically, power imbalance may be retained or even strengthened within the intergenerational relationships. Greater influence of the paternal generation – through financial investments and symbolic ties – may lead to a reduction in women's financial autonomy and decision-making power within their families. For instance, in a case investigated by Deng, Hoekstra, and Elsinga (2019), a woman stated that her parents refused to provide support for her plan of buying a housing asset because she did not want to marry in the way they expected. Thus, the greater dependence on the woman's natal family comes with more power interactions with parents, especially at times when children are incongruent with their parents. This suggests that in the *Liang-tou-dun*, as the result of both sides of parents being involved, the power dynamics and communications are more complex. Although

there are prior negotiations that clarify the extent of power on each side, any imbalance in the power relations between two families would unavoidably influence the stability of the younger family. In other words, one of the costs of a more equally built family between the only daughter and her husband is that the complex power dynamics necessitate greater energy and time investment to maintain a balance in the whole extended family. This means that the autonomy of family members in some aspects of family life will be impeded.

Apart from the potential disadvantages for women's empowerment in the *Liang-tou-dun*, many commentators point out that the excessive dependence on the natal family would hinder the integrity of the new family (Xinhua Net, 2021). Firstly, the separative surnaming of the next generation may lead to excluding some parts of the family from the nurturing of children. Second, because of the high level of involvement of the natal families, parents may be too entangled in the conflicts of the young couple to let the new family operate and evolve independently, which, in the future may discourage children growing in such families from taking responsibility and managing their own family lives. Besides, although this marriage mode is created and permitted legally, there are many risks within this marriage according to the contemporary law system. For instance, a report by Xinhua Net (2021) quoted a case that a divorced couple of a *Liang-tou-dun* disputed custody of their sole child, in which some arrangements before the marriage between the two families in private are invalid in court. Therefore, the *Liang-tou-dun* has both benefits and risks in practice for individuals and families arranging and practising it.

4.5 Discussion

Chapters three and four discussed academic literature, survey, and discursive data to explore whether the only daughters under the OCP are more advantageous in accumulating the educational and economic resources, and hence to improving their autonomy, agency, and decision-making power. However, considering the sustainability issue of the *Liang-tou-dun* as well as the resource gap between daughters with and without siblings revealed in the statistical results, a question remaining is whether the empowerment of only daughters is able to make a difference for women in Chinese society more generally.

As discussed in the former sections of chapter 4, the autonomy of wives in the *Liang-tou-dun* is contributed by the sharing of responsibility with other family members in terms of taking care of the whole family, and the sharing model is essentially grounded by the transformed power structure within households. In effect, the autonomy-

benefited power structure has not emerged only for women in the *Liang-tou-dun*, but is prevalent in a marriage in which the conjugal power relations are relatively equal. In most cases, women's autonomy and decision-making power in the family are determined by their available resources (Qian & Jin, 2018). Most remarkably, it is influenced by economic resources including income and properties. In this way, women with strong financial support and/or a high level of income are facilitated in building a power structure that benefits women in their marriages. Following this logic, in many families where wives are able to earn more than husbands and/or with strong parental support, the spousal structure of power, as well as the familial division of responsibility, would probably shift to be less "traditional".

However, considering the stark gap in average income between women and men, and the persistent resistance of daughters' inheritance in Chinese households, especially those in which daughters have male siblings, the likelihood of women pursuing more resources than their husbands and/or brothers through their own income or support by their natal families is relatively small. As a form of embodiment of patriarchy in Chinese society, the gender inequality in the labour market has been mutually reproduced with the pertinacious patrilineal notions in households, as discussed in chapter 2. In the backdrop of OCP, daughters in households dominated more by the patrilineal notions are more likely to have male siblings, which to a large extent decides that they are less likely to be invested with equal resources as their brothers. As interrelated with the son priority notions in the family, the gendered inequities as reflected in other social institutions, such as the labour market, continue to serve as impediments for women's access to empowering resources. Thus, it may be more difficult for daughters with siblings to be empowered to achieving an equal intergender power relation comparing with the only daughters.

Of women's empowerment in wider population, the complexity is illustrated by a news story that has captured the attention of the Chinese public. In 2020, a female pedagogist Gui-Mei Zhang was awarded as one of the ten most inspiring people of China. By constructing a senior female high school in Yunnan province where students are not required to pay tuition fees, she has significantly contributed to increasing the accessibility of educational resources for girls from rural families (Xu, 2020). However, while she has been widely praised for this egalitarian initiative, the strict principles of the school have given rise to some controversy. One principle is that students at the female high school, are strongly dissuaded from becoming "dependent" in any forms in the future. The headmaster Zhang once rejected a donation from one graduate because she has become a housewife, which goes against the principle. As interpreted

by all walks of life, there appear to be many different views on it. Some people suppose it hinders the graduates' freedom to choose the lives they like; but more people opposing this point of view denounce that only a population with vested interests would say so (Zhu, 2020). According to this latter point of view, concepts of "freedom" and "autonomy" are hollow and disconnected from the structural oppression related to class, gender, and other intersected identities lived by girls in rural areas.

This debate reflects the difficulties of women's empowerment in contemporary China. There have been gaps between different populations at both material and perceptual levels. Along with the subordination of groups of women in mainstream discourses, the question of what kind of empowerment they need is inevitably overlooked. For those born with more resources, women's empowerment is represented by the development of knowledge, autonomy, decision-making power, and their own agency. However, engineering up this process of empowerment tends to be much more difficult for women who are living with intersectional disadvantages, because they are situated in a position in which little power and resource can be shared with them and they have much less chance to interact with other human beings or systems. To them, the empowerment process has too many taken-for-granted presuppositions to make them incorporated. Thus, only seeking and measuring objective results of empowerment processes in line with the conventional representations is not enough, there are further enquiries about how to make it more applicable for the marginalised women.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

In this thesis, the question of whether the only daughters are empowered has been addressed at two levels - process and agency. Consistent with previous research, the assessment of the CFPS data turns out that the singleton daughters experience more educational investment from parents, and attain higher outcomes both in educational and economic terms, such as educational degrees, employment, and income than the non-singleton daughters. Additionally, it also shows the advantages of the singleton status can be taken to fight against gender inequalities. Moreover, their ability to access inheritance in only-daughter families has not only contributed to their economic empowerment and independence, but also fostered their agency in the interactions with other individuals and larger communities as inheritors of their families. Therefore, according to the analysis in chapters 3 and 4, both in terms of the process and women's agency, it can be concluded that only daughters have been empowered under the OCP.

However, drawing upon the comparative results between gender, it can be found the alleviative effects of the advantaged sibship structure on gender inequalities are negligible. Women's empowerment nonetheless is counteracted by pertinacious gender inequalities in social, cultural, and economic contexts. As shown in the CFPS 2016 data, the remarkable income gap between females and males indicates the gendered unequal circumstance in the labour market. The lower income in spite of the higher education degree of women, helps reaffirm the disadvantages for daughters in the intergenerational exchange (Hu, 2017), which may turn back to reinforce the son preference in some Chinese households. Thus, in terms of the empowerment, the impediments informed by unequal inter-gender power relations are nevertheless restricting only daughters' independent access to economic resources, thereby limiting their financial autonomy and decision-making power (Qian & Jin, 2018). In the meantime, the difficulties in achieving women's power-oriented goals, which counteracts the influence of resources, can undermine the development of women's agency (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010).

Additionally, as illustrated in the quantitative results, few effects can be made by daughters' singleton status on the rural-urban gaps. Both in educational and economic dimensions, differences between rural and urban areas are nonetheless notable. It means that the empowerment process discussed in this thesis may be much more difficult to be successfully engineered for women with low socioeconomic status. As the inequalities intersected, daughters with siblings in rural areas become the most marginalised group. Therefore, to discover more nuanced and specific approaches in practical empowerment for the more disadvantaged women, it is necessary to go beyond

this model, and to find ways to examine their (dis)empowering experiences in specific contexts in more detail.

An interesting finding of this study is that the empowerment mode of the only daughters under the OCP depends heavily on their parents. As analysed in chapter 4, the new power structure in the *Liang-tou-dun* marriage is based on parental support which, substantively, is decided by parent's perceptions about the gendered inheritance practice. Consistent with the prior studies of the intergenerational exchange mode in Chinese families, parents provide financial support as an exchange for the responsibility of old-age care bore by their adult children (Hu, 2017; Lei, 2013). Indeed, this exchange benefits the only daughters as reflected by the increasing educational investments and justified rights on inheritance. However, it also implies the empowerment of only daughters comes at the costs of unequal intergenerational power relations (Qi, 2018). As significant intergenerational differences in perceptions exist (Hu & Shi, 2020), the dependent relationship is like a double-edged sword, it may empower the daughters in fighting against the traditional patriarchal power, but at the meantime may restrict their's autonomy and power in decision-making.

This thesis has been limited in several ways. Firstly, this research focuses on the household level, hence is not able to contour the multilevel picture of women's empowerment under the OCP, including the aspects of legal protections, social campaigns, and the available institutional resources for women. Second, due to the lack of appropriate data, the impact of individually owned property on empowerment – especially housing assets which are the most fundamental economic resource for Chinese families nowadays (Deng, Hoekstra & Elsinga, 2019) could not be compared through quantitative analysis.

In June 2021, the Chinese government has launched the Three-child policy, meaning that all married couples in China can have three children. However, combined with the outcome of the two-child policy released in 2016, the prospect of this three-child policy remains questionable (Zeng & Hesketh, 2016). An investigation of the fertility desire for young people turned out that over 20 percent of the participants are unwilling to have children, with the reason mentioned most frequently that they are unable to afford the cost of bringing up a child; and the willingness of women is significantly lower than men's (Chen, 2020). Putting the imminent population decline aside, as the era of OCP will finally wrap up, nobody can predict the influence of the wilting reproductive desire on women's empowerment. Hence, the sustainability of the empowerment discussed in this thesis requires further examination.

As Adams and Castle (1994) have argued about household dynamics, families are the ultimate battlefield for women's empowerment. But family as a social system cannot pivot the structural transformation that is required to achieve gender equality.

Women's empowerment is multilevel and multidimensional. To make the educational and economic resources more accessible to all women and girls, only depending on family can hardly make difference, the state's intervention and social contributions are still required in transformations. Therefore, to substantively change the power status of women in families, it calls for further research about how to broaden the accessibility of empowering resources for women.

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