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**Negotiated Dynamics: Exploring the role of parental educational expectations as a mechanism for encouraging children's social mobility**

**A Thesis submitted to Durham University for  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**By**

**Ke Cui**

**School of Applied Social Sciences**

**Declaration**

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## **Acknowledgements**

First of all, I would like to thank the 42 parents and children who shared their life experiences with me. Thanks also for their time, energy and insights.

I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to Professor Lena Dominelli, who has consistently encouraged me to become a better student, researcher and academic. Her guidance, criticism, and advice have been invaluable to this research and will undoubtedly influence my future academic life.

Thanks also to Dr. Sam Hillyard, for commenting on this research and encouraging me onwards.

Particular thanks must go to my parents, for always accompanying me through ups and downs through this journey of achieving a PhD, for their constant emotional and financial support.

A special thanks to Dr. Timothy Sim, who has always made time to listen and encourage me onwards.

Last, but by no means the least, I would like to thank the School of Applied Social Sciences, Ustinov College and my friends at Durham University, for giving me a family full of happiness while I was 12,304 km away from my home in China.

## **Abstract**

In this study, I investigated the role of parental educational expectations in promoting children's social mobility. I paid attention to Chinese socio-economic developments, the changing social structure and dynamics of social stratification as well as the development of education from the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Thus, I examined and analysed the changing patterns of parental expectations for their children's education, factors shaping their construction in this regard and effects of parental educational expectations on their children's educational attainments along with the aforementioned changes in social contexts.

In view of the explorative nature of my study, a reflexive qualitative approach was adopted in the research design. The data were collected through semi-structured life history interviews. Research participants were selected from my home city, Hebi, located in the north of Henan province, China. Participants in my study were classified into three Generations, which represent parents who bore their first child in 1960-1979, 1980-1989, and 1990-2000 respectively and their children. Thematic coding was adopted for data analysis.

The findings revealed that, first of all, as it had been generally presumed Chinese parents attached great importance to their children's education and held high educational expectations. Secondly, besides the influence of Confucian philosophy, Chinese parents predominately grounded their educational expectations in their social contexts and family backgrounds. Thirdly, parents' educational expectations impacted on children's educational outcomes mainly through parents' involvement in their children's education to make their educational expectations come true. Moreover, I emphasized that children's educational achievements were determined by an interaction between parental expectations and children's aspirations regarding education. Thus, I suggest that children's social mobility is an outcome of the negotiated interaction between parents' agency, children's agency, and social, economic and political factors and contexts determining the positioning of people in society. Nevertheless, I maintain that it is beyond the scope of the current thesis to comment upon the relevance of these research findings beyond the small sample studied. It could serve as the basis for a large-scale study that attempts to examine the situation in China more generally. Finally, I conclude with some policy and practice recommendations regarding the narrowing achievement gap and lessening social fluidity occurring in contemporary China.

## Table of Contents

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| <b>Acknowledgements</b> .....  | <b>i</b>    |
| <b>Abstract</b> .....  | <b>ii</b>   |
| <b>List of Tables</b> .....  | <b>xi</b>   |
| <b>List of Figures</b> .....   | <b>xiii</b> |
| <b>List of Abbreviations</b> .....   | <b>xiv</b>  |
| <b>Glossary of Chinese Terms</b> .....   | <b>xv</b>   |
| <b>Timeline of Key Social Events and Social Policies Relating to This Study (1949-present)</b> .....   | <b>xiv</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 1 Introduction: Research questions and aims of the thesis</b> .....                         | <b>1</b>    |
| Introduction .....   | 1           |
| Research background and motivation for the research design.....  | 1           |
| The relationship between social class/stratum and educational attainment .....                         | 2           |
| The relationship between educational attainment and class destination .....                            | 5           |
| Parental educational expectation and its role in children’s educational attainment .....               | 7           |
| Factors influencing parental educational expectations.....   | 7           |
| The relationship between parental educational expectations and children’s educational attainment ..... | 8           |
| Parental involvement and educational outcome .....   | 11          |
| Parenting style and educational outcome .....  | 13          |
| The role of Confucian thought in educational beliefs of Chinese.....                                   | 15          |
| The mediating role of educational expectation/aspiration in social mobility .....                      | 17          |
| Definition of Terms .....  | 19          |
| Expectation and Aspiration.....  | 19          |
| Educational attainment .....   | 19          |
| Occupational attainment .....  | 20          |
| Occupational gender segregation.....   | 25          |
| Gendered occupational aspiration .....   | 26          |
| Parenting style .....  | 27          |
| The Western-based conceptualisation of parenting styles .....  | 27          |
| Critiques to Western-based parenting styles using a Chinese perspective .....                          | 29          |
| The conceptualization of parenting styles in my thesis.....  | 31          |
| Statement of the Research Question.....  | 32          |
| Fundamental objectives of this thesis .....  | 34          |
| Chapter Summaries.....   | 35          |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Organization of the Thesis .....   | 35        |
| <b>Chapter 2 People’s Republic of China: An overview .....</b>                               | <b>37</b> |
| Introduction .....   | 37        |
| Maoist Era: 1949-1976.....   | 37        |
| The socio-economic situation .....   | 38        |
| Economic recovery.....   | 38        |
| Interruptions to economic growth.....  | 41        |
| The Cultural Revolution .....  | 44        |
| The social structure.....  | 46        |
| “Two classes and one stratum” .....  | 48        |
| Rural-Urban dualistic structure.....   | 52        |
| Educational development .....  | 53        |
| The Confucian educational tradition .....  | 53        |
| Women’s inferior status vis-à-vis men in accessing education in China (221 BC-1911)<br>..... | 54        |
| Education in the Republic of China .....   | 55        |
| Education in the Maoist era.....   | 56        |
| Women’s improved access to education during the Maoist era .....                             | 60        |
| Post-Maoist Era: 1977-present .....  | 61        |
| Economic reforms: rural reforms and urban reforms .....                                      | 62        |
| Rural Reforms.....   | 62        |
| Urban Reforms.....   | 63        |
| Socio-economic development .....   | 64        |
| The growth in national economy.....  | 64        |
| Increased household income .....   | 65        |
| Improved living standard .....   | 66        |
| Urban-rural income inequality.....   | 66        |
| Control population growth: The one-child policy .....  | 67        |
| Social structure evolution .....   | 68        |
| Educational development.....   | 72        |
| Return of the National University Entrance Examination.....                                  | 72        |
| Reforms in the education system .....  | 73        |
| Devalued academic degree in Chinese labour market .....                                      | 80        |
| The mediating role of education in social mobility persists .....                            | 82        |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Conclusion.....   | 84        |
| <b>Chapter 3 Research Methodology and Research Methods .....</b>                    | <b>85</b> |
| Introduction .....  | 85        |
| Research Methodology .....  | 85        |
| Narrative method.....   | 85        |
| The advantages of narrative method.....   | 85        |
| The disadvantages of narrative method .....   | 86        |
| Validity and reliability in narrative research .....                                | 87        |
| Life history method .....   | 87        |
| The differences between life story and life history .....                           | 88        |
| The values and drawbacks of life history method .....                               | 89        |
| Reflexivity and researcher’s insider or outsider role .....                         | 91        |
| Reflexivity.....  | 91        |
| Researcher’s insider or outsider role .....   | 91        |
| Sampling criteria and the sample .....  | 92        |
| Different sampling strategies in social research .....                              | 92        |
| Sampling criteria for the current study.....  | 94        |
| Stratifying the sample on a generational basis.....                                 | 94        |
| The sample size .....   | 97        |
| The recruitment of research participants .....                                      | 97        |
| Researcher’s role and its implications for the recruitment of research participants | 99        |
| Ethical considerations .....  | 101       |
| Informed Consent .....  | 101       |
| Data collection .....   | 103       |
| Forms of interview .....  | 103       |
| Structured interview .....  | 103       |
| Unstructured interview.....   | 103       |
| Semi-structured interview .....   | 104       |
| Data collection strategy for the study .....  | 104       |
| Pilot the interview.....  | 105       |
| The significance of pilot study .....   | 105       |
| Procedures of the pilot study.....  | 106       |
| Reflections on the pilot study .....  | 106       |
| Recording and transcription .....   | 109       |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Researcher’s role and its implications for data collection .....  | 110        |
| Interviewing a close friend of mine .....                         | 110        |
| Interviewing a person I did not know .....                        | 112        |
| My research role as an insider-outsider .....                     | 113        |
| Data analysis .....   | 115        |
| Data analysis procedures .....                                    | 115        |
| Researcher’s role and its implications for data analysis .....    | 117        |
| Conclusion.....   | 118        |
| <b>Chapter 4 Findings: Generation A .....</b>                     | <b>119</b> |
| Introduction .....  | 119        |
| Sample and Background Information .....                           | 120        |
| Children’s educational levels are higher than their parents.....  | 121        |
| A life contingency: the Cultural Revolution .....                 | 123        |
| Inter-generational mobility.....                                  | 125        |
| Summary .....   | 127        |
| Parental Expectations for Their Children.....                     | 127        |
| The classification of parental expectation .....                  | 127        |
| Detailed descriptions of parental expectation .....               | 128        |
| Summary .....   | 131        |
| Factors Influencing Parental Expectations.....                    | 132        |
| Social Context.....   | 133        |
| Rural-urban divide.....   | 133        |
| Unified job-assignment system.....                                | 135        |
| Educational system .....  | 138        |
| The Cultural Revolution .....                                     | 138        |
| Family background.....  | 139        |
| Family economic condition .....                                   | 139        |
| Parental educational attainment.....                              | 141        |
| Summary .....   | 143        |
| The Realization of Parental Expectations for their children ..... | 143        |
| Group One: Family 3 and Family 5.....                             | 144        |
| Background information .....                                      | 144        |
| Parental involvement in children’s education .....                | 145        |
| Group Two: Family 4 .....   | 150        |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| Background information .....   | 150        |
| Parental involvement in children’s education .....   | 151        |
| Group Three: Family 1 and Family 2 .....   | 153        |
| Background information .....   | 153        |
| Parental involvement in children’s education .....   | 154        |
| Summary .....  | 158        |
| <b>Chapter 5 Findings: Generation B.....</b>   | <b>160</b> |
| Introduction .....   | 160        |
| Sample and Background Information .....  | 161        |
| Parents changed their rural household registrations to urban ones through higher education ..... | 162        |
| Higher education enrolment during the Cultural Revolution .....                                  | 162        |
| The Restoration of the NCEE after the Cultural Revolution.....                                   | 164        |
| Inter-generational social mobility.....  | 165        |
| Inter-generational mobility of educational level .....   | 165        |
| Inter-generational mobility of socio-economic status.....  | 167        |
| Summary .....  | 168        |
| Parental Expectations for Their Children.....  | 169        |
| The level of parental educational expectations.....  | 169        |
| Detailed descriptions of parental educational expectation.....                                   | 170        |
| Summary .....  | 174        |
| Factors influencing parents’ educational expectations .....                                      | 174        |
| Social Context.....  | 174        |
| The labour market.....   | 175        |
| The devaluing of well-educated woman.....  | 177        |
| Family Context .....   | 179        |
| Parental gender bias .....   | 179        |
| Parental educational attainment.....   | 182        |
| Family’s economic condition .....  | 184        |
| Summary .....  | 184        |
| The Realization of Parental Expectations for Their Children .....                                | 185        |
| Pre-school period.....   | 185        |
| Communication.....   | 186        |
| Participation.....   | 187        |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| The school period.....   | 188        |
| Communication.....   | 188        |
| Participation.....   | 190        |
| College days .....   | 192        |
| Parent-child interaction in educational decision-making.....   | 193        |
| Summary.....   | 197        |
| <b>Chapter 6 Findings: Generation C.....</b>                   | <b>199</b> |
| Introduction .....   | 199        |
| Sample and Background Information .....                        | 200        |
| The rapid and large-scale expansion in higher education .....  | 201        |
| The tuition system in Chinese HEIs.....                        | 202        |
| Financial support in Chinese higher education.....             | 203        |
| Inequalities in educational opportunity.....                   | 206        |
| Inter-generational social mobility.....                        | 208        |
| Summary.....   | 209        |
| Parental Educational Expectations for Their Children .....     | 209        |
| The level of parental educational expectation .....            | 210        |
| Detailed descriptions of parental educational expectation..... | 211        |
| Summary.....   | 215        |
| Factors Influencing Parents' Educational Expectations .....    | 215        |
| The family's economic situation .....                          | 216        |
| Parental educational attainment.....                           | 216        |
| One-child policy .....   | 217        |
| Children's school performance .....                            | 218        |
| Gender bias.....   | 219        |
| The employment of children.....                                | 219        |
| Summary.....   | 220        |
| Parental Involvement in Children's Education.....              | 220        |
| Pre-school period.....   | 221        |
| Communication.....   | 221        |
| Participation.....   | 222        |
| The school period.....   | 223        |
| Communication.....   | 223        |
| Participation.....   | 227        |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| College days .....  | 229        |
| Communication.....  | 229        |
| Participation.....  | 230        |
| Summary .....   | 234        |
| <b>Chapter 7 A Comparative Analysis for the Three Generations .....</b>   | <b>235</b> |
| Introduction .....  | 235        |
| Level of parental educational expectation .....   | 235        |
| Factors shaping parents' educational expectations .....   | 238        |
| Rural-urban divide.....   | 238        |
| The family's economic condition .....   | 239        |
| Parental educational attainment .....   | 240        |
| Gender bias.....  | 240        |
| The employment of children.....   | 242        |
| The impact of parental educational expectations in children's educational achievements .....                                | 243        |
| Parental involvement in children's studies.....   | 244        |
| Children's agency .....   | 246        |
| The role of parental educational expectation in children's relative social mobility.....                                    | 248        |
| Summary .....   | 251        |
| <b>Chapter 8 Conclusion.....</b>  | <b>252</b> |
| Introduction .....  | 252        |
| Major research findings of this study .....   | 252        |
| Question 1: What educational expectations Chinese parents held for their children? .....                                    | 252        |
| Question 2: What were the factors influenced the construction of parental expectations for their children's education?..... | 254        |
| Question 3: How parental educational expectations influenced children's educational achievements? .....                     | 255        |
| Question 4: What was the mechanism of parental educational expectations in children's social mobility?.....                 | 256        |
| Original contributions and avenues for future studies.....  | 257        |
| Limitations of the current study .....  | 259        |
| Policy and practice recommendations.....  | 260        |
| Concluding remarks .....  | 262        |
| <b>Appendices .....</b>   | <b>263</b> |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <i>Appendix i: Informed Consent Form for Adults .....</i>  | 264        |
| <i>Appendix ii: Informed Consent Form for Juveniles .....</i>  | 268        |
| <i>Appendix iii: Informed Consent Form for Parents to Sign for Their Children under 18 ....</i>        | 271        |
| <i>Appendix iv: Invitation to Research Participants .....</i>  | 273        |
| <i>Appendix v: Interview Guide for the Researcher .....</i>  | 274        |
| <i>Appendix vi: Semi-structured Interview Questions for Adults without Children of Their own .....</i> | 278        |
| <i>Appendix vii: Semi-structured Interview Questions for Adults with Children of Their own .....</i>   | 279        |
| <i>Appendix viii: Semi-structured Interview Questions for Children who are Students.....</i>           | 281        |
| <i>Appendix ix: Research Ethics and Risk Assessment Form .....</i>                                     | 268        |
| <b>References.....</b>   | <b>279</b> |

## List of Tables

|           |   |     |
|-----------|---|-----|
| Table 1.1 | Occupational Prestige Scale   | 24  |
| Table 2.1 | Gross Agriculture and Industrial Output Value in Mainland China, 1949-1957  | 41  |
| Table 2.2 | Composition of Gross Output Value of Agriculture and Industry in Mainland China, 1956-1960                            | 43  |
| Table 2.3 | Number of New Students Enrolment, Students Enrolment and Graduates of Higher Education: 1952-1978                     | 60  |
| Table 2.4 | Industrial Growth and Structure   | 64  |
| Table 2.5 | Annual Per Capita Household Income ( <i>yuan</i> )  | 65  |
| Table 2.6 | Engel's Coefficient of Urban and Rural Households (%)   | 66  |
| Table 2.7 | The situation of compulsory education in China, 1952-2010   | 76  |
| Table 3.1 | A summary the key social economic and political contextual factors that underpinned the stratification of the sample. | 96  |
| Table 4.1 | The demographic information for the participants recruited to Generation A  | 120 |
| Table 4.2 | Socio-economic statuses of the participants recruited to Generation A   | 126 |
| Table 4.3 | Parental expectations of their children's life in Generation A  | 128 |
| Table 4.4 | Factors influencing parental expectations in Generation A   | 132 |
| Table 4.5 | The group classification of the five families recruited to GA   | 144 |
| Table 5.1 | The demographic information of the participants recruited for Generation B  | 161 |
| Table 5.2 | College Entrance Admission Rates: 1977-2009   | 167 |
| Table 5.3 | Socio-economic status for participants recruited to Generation B  | 168 |
| Table 5.4 | The level of parental educational expectation in Generation B   | 169 |
| Table 5.5 | Gross enrolment rate of Chinese higher education  | 170 |
| Table 5.6 | Factors influencing parental educational expectations Generation B  | 174 |
| Table 5.7 | Level of Educational Expectation (LEX) and Level of Educational Aspiration (LEA) in Generation C                      | 193 |
| Table 6.1 | The demographic information for the participants recruited to Generation C  | 200 |
| Table 6.2 | Major scholarship and grant programs in China.  | 204 |
| Table 6.3 | The level of parental educational expectation in  | 210 |

Generation C

|           |   |     |
|-----------|---|-----|
| Table 6.4 | The level of children’s educational aspiration (LEA) in Generation C                | 221 |
| Table 7.1 | Parental educational expectations for each generation and each family in this study | 236 |

## List of Figures

|            |   |     |
|------------|---|-----|
| Figure 2.1 | Gross agricultural and industrial output value in mainland China, 1961-1076 (1952=100)  | 46  |
| Figure 2.2 | The income gap between rural and urban residents in China, 1978-2008.   | 67  |
| Figure 2.3 | Social structure and social hierarchy in contemporary China   | 71  |
| Figure 2.4 | Number of new students enrolment in regular institutions of higher education and number of graduates from regular institutions of higher education (million): 1978-2011 | 78  |
| Figure 2.5 | Number of students enrolment in regular institutions of higher education (million): 1978-2011   | 78  |
| Figure 3.1 | Location of Hebi  | 98  |
| Figure 6.1 | Number of Students Studying Abroad: 2000-2011   | 214 |
| Figure8.1  | The continuum of parenting styles   | 258 |

## **List of Abbreviations**

|              |                                       |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|
| CCP          | Chinese Communist Party               |
| CR           | Cultural Revolution                   |
| F1           | Family 1                              |
| F2           | Family 2                              |
| F4           | Family 3                              |
| F6           | Family 6                              |
| F7           | Family 7                              |
| F8           | Family 8                              |
| F9           | Family 9                              |
| F10          | Family 10                             |
| GA           | Generation A                          |
| GB           | Generation B                          |
| GC           | Generation C                          |
| GLF          | Great Leap Forward Campaign           |
| GDP          | Gross Domestic Product                |
| HEIs         | Higher Educational Institutions       |
| LEX          | Level of Educational Expectation      |
| LEA          | Level of Educational Aspiration       |
| NCEE         | National College Entrance Examination |
| PRC or China | People's Republic of China            |
| SES          | Socio-economic Status                 |
| WTO          | World Trade Organization              |
| GER          | Gross Enrolment Rate                  |

## Glossary of Chinese Terms

|                        |       |  |
|------------------------|-------|--|
| <i>qiwang</i>          | 期望    | Expectation and Aspiration   |
| <i>hukou</i>           | 户口    | Household registration system  |
| <i>shehuizhuyi</i>     | 社会主义  | The primary stage of socialism   |
| <i>chujijieduan</i>    | 初级阶段  |  |
| <i>sandagaizao</i>     | 三大改造  | The socialist transformation in agriculture, handicrafts, and capitalist industry and commerce   |
| <i>jieji</i>           | 阶级    | Social class   |
| <i>jieceng</i>         | 阶层    | Social stratum/status  |
| <i>shenfen</i>         | 身份    | Identify   |
| <i>chengfen</i>        | 成分    | An individual's political origin   |
| <i>chengfen haode</i>  | 成分好的  | Good political origin  |
| <i>gongren</i>         | 工人    | Worker   |
| <i>ganbu</i>           | 干部    | Cadre  |
| <i>danwei</i>          | 单位    | Work-unit  |
| <i>youjiaowulei</i>    | 有教无类  | A Confucian philosophy indicating that there should be no class distinction in access to education                                       |
| <i>houmen</i>          | 后门    | Backdoor   |
| <i>nongmingong</i>     | 农民工   | Rural migrant workers or peasant-workers   |
| <i>hexieshehui</i>     | 和谐社会  | Harmonious society   |
| <i>zhongzhuan</i>      | 中专    | Technical secondary school   |
| <i>shangdaxue</i>      | 上大学   | Attend higher education  |
| <i>wanbanjiexiapin</i> | 万般皆下品 | A Confucian philosophy indicating that everything in one's life is under contempt except study   |
| <i>weiyoudushugao</i>  | 唯有读书高 |  |
| <i>xueeryouzeshi</i>   | 学而优则仕 | A Confucian philosophy indicating that good scholar will make an official  |
| <i>guan</i>            | 管     | It means to govern   |
| <i>haoxuexin</i>       | 好学心   | It represents an individual's desire to learn new knowledge  |
| <i>xiangfujiaozhi</i>  | 相夫教子  | It represents the vital value of women in traditional Chinese society: Serve the husband and educate the children                        |
| <i>wangzichenglong</i> | 望子成龙  | A metaphor of high parental wishes of the son to become a dragon and the daughter to become a phoenix                                    |
| <i>wangnvchengfeng</i> | 望女成凤  |  |
| <i>guanxi</i>          | 关系    | It represents the relationships that an individual maintains in social networks. It has been widely used by people to find jobs in China |
| <i>choulaojiu</i>      | 臭老九   | "The stinking Number Nine": a metaphor discriminating against intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution                               |
| <i>nvqiangren</i>      | 女强人   | It refers to well-educated or successful Chinese women in their late twenties or even older who are still single                         |

**Timeline of Key Social Events and Social Policies Relating to This Study (1949-present)**

| Chairman of the People’s Republic of China: |           |              | Primary Leader of the Communist Party of China: |           |             | Premier of the People’s Republic of China: |           |             | Key Social events and social policies: |  |
|---|-----------|--------------|---|-----------|-------------|--|-----------|-------------|--|--|
| Order                                       | Term      | Name         | Order   | Term      | Name        | Order                                      | Term      | Name        | Year                                   | Title  |
| 1 <sup>st</sup>                             | 1954-1959 | Mao Zengdong | 1 <sup>st</sup>                                 | 1943-1976 | Mao Zedong  | 1 <sup>st</sup>                            | 1949-1976 | Zhou Enlai  | 1850-1952                              | Land Reform Campaign   |
|   |           |              |   |           |             |  |           |             | 1951                                   | The household registration (or hukou) system was established in China's urban areas  |
|   |           |              |   |           |             |  |           |             | 1952                                   | The National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) was established   |
|   |           |              |   |           |             |  |           |             | 1953-1957                              | The First Five-Year Plan   |
|   |           |              |   |           |             |  |           |             | 1955                                   | The household registration (or hukou) system was extended to rural areas   |
|   |           |              |   |           |             |  |           |             | 1966-1976                              | The Cultural Revolution  |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup>                             | 1959-1968 | Liu Shaoqi   | 2 <sup>nd</sup>                                 | 1976-1981 | Hua Guofeng | 2 <sup>nd</sup>                            | 1976-1980 | Hua Guofeng | 1977                                   | The NCEE was restored after the Cultural Revolution  |
|   |           |              |   |           |             |  |           |             | 1978                                   | Economic Reform and Open Door Policy was announced in the Third Plenary Session of the 11 <sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) |
|   |           |              |   |           |             |  |           |             | 1979                                   | One-child per Family Policy was implemented  |

|                 |           |               |                 |           |               |                 |           |             |      |   |
|-----------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------|-----------|-------------|------|---|
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 1983-1988 | Li Xiannian   | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 1982-1987 | Deng Xiaoping | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 1980-1987 | Zhao Ziyang | 1985 | the Central Committee issued the <i>Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China Concerning the Reform of the Education System</i> , proclaiming the charge of tuition and fees to higher education students |
|                 |           |               |                 |           |               |                 |           |             | 1986 | The National People's Congress passed the <i>Law for Compulsory Education</i> , proclaiming the compulsory provision of nine-year basic education for all 6-year old children   |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> | 1988-1993 | Yang Shangkun | 4 <sup>th</sup> | 1987-1992 | Chen Yun      | 4 <sup>th</sup> | 1987-1998 | Li Peng     | 1992 | The State-council put forward <i>Measures on Reinforcing the Law for Compulsory Education</i> to guide the implementation of the policy in the field  |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> | 1993-2003 | Jiang Zemin   | 5 <sup>th</sup> | 1992-2002 | Jiang Zemin   | 5 <sup>th</sup> | 1998-2003 | Zhu Rongji  | 1993 | The State-council issued the <i>Program for China's education reform and development</i> to increase the proportion of fee-paying students to higher education institutions   |
|                 |           |               |                 |           |               |                 |           |             | 1997 | The State-Council promulgated the   |

|                 |           |            |                 |              |            |                 |           |            |      |  |
|-----------------|-----------|------------|-----------------|--------------|------------|-----------------|-----------|------------|------|--|
|                 |           |            |                 |              |            |                 |           |            |      | <i>Regulations for the Employment of Students in Regular Higher Educational Institutions</i> , clarifying the replacement of the state unified job-assignment system by the mutual employment selection system |
|                 |           |            |                 |              |            |                 |           |            | 1998 | The Ministry of Education issued the <i>21<sup>st</sup> Century Action Plan for Education Revitalization</i> , marking the start of higher education expansion in China  |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> | 2003-2013 | Hu Jintao  | 6 <sup>th</sup> | 2002-2012    | Hu Jintao  | 6 <sup>th</sup> | 2003-2013 | Wen Jiabao | 2010 | The Ministry of Education issued the <i>National Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)</i> , guiding the further educational development in China  |
| 7 <sup>th</sup> | Incumbent | Xi Jinping | 7 <sup>th</sup> | 2012-present | Xi Jinping | 7 <sup>th</sup> | Incumbent | Li Keqiang |      |  |

# **Chapter 1 Introduction: Research questions and aims of the thesis**

## **Introduction**

My primary motivation to conduct the current study is to address the research gap in Chinese scholarships about children's status attainment within the effects of parental expectations for their children. Moreover, due to a special consideration of the rapidly changing social, economic, political and cultural contexts in New China since its establishment in 1949, I designed this research to look at what educational expectations Chinese parents had, how Chinese parents constructed their educational expectations for children living in different socio-historical periods, as well as to explore how parents' educational expectations contributed to children's educational attainments and social mobility throughout the past decades. The current thesis is the first work (to my knowledge) that has applied the theoretical framework pertaining to the role of parental educational expectation in encouraging children's social mobility in a Chinese context.

The current chapter is an introduction to the thesis. In this chapter, I review the research background and stress the motivation for doing this research. After making clear the definitions of the major concepts pertaining to the research problem, I explain the core research questions. I also indicate the fundamental objectives of the study and introduce the structure of the thesis.

## **Research background and motivation for the research design**

"Social mobility" describes the movement of individuals or cohorts between different positions in the hierarchies of social stratification within society. "Intergenerational social mobility" refers to the position of an individual in the social hierarchy relative to the individual's parents (Deary, et al., 2005). It is argued that intergenerational social mobility is often taken as the most salient indicator of social equity, as it reflects the norm of an open or just society in which individuals are able to climb up the social ladder as far as their abilities and efforts take them with no fear of being held back by their family background or other unfair disadvantages (Heath, 1999). In this section, I shall review the literature regarding the relationship between social class/stratum and children's educational trajectory, in particular higher education. As well as this, I shall include a discussion based on the existing studies about the factors that are reinforcing or mediating the influence of family background on children's educational achievement. Moreover, I shall comment on

the reviewed literature in an attempt to raise issues including: the relationship between parental educational expectations and children's educational outcomes; what factors might mediate the relationship between educational expectations and outcomes; and whether higher parental expectations promote children's social attainment regardless of their family's socio-economic status.

### **The relationship between social class/stratum and educational attainment**

Education has always played an important role in ensuring the reproduction of either class privileges or disadvantages (Archer, 2005). The existing literature that is concerned about the relationship between social class/stratum and educational attainment have consistently shown that family socio-economic status (SES), which is often measured by the educational attainment of mother or father or their occupational status as well as family income (e.g. Blau and Duncan 1967, Marini and Greenberger, 1978, Teachman and Paasch, 1998, Bian, 2002a, Mueller and Parcel, 1981, Reardon, 2011), has long been one of the strongest predictors of children's academic achievement and educational attainment, especially in industrialized Western societies notably the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA), where educational inequalities have drawn significant attention from scholars and policy makers (Sammons, 1995, Ermisch et al., 2010, Haveman and Smeeding, 2006, Avery and Kane, 2004, Davies and Kandel, 1981, Stage and Hossler, 1989, Hossler and Stage, 1992).

Within educational research, Archer (2005) argues that issues of social class have been predominantly addressed in relation to the compulsory schooling context, where it has been noted that working-class children tend to experience persistently lower rates of attainment and are less likely to follow routes that lead on to post-compulsory education. For example, Bates and Riseborough (1993) argued that, at all stages within the educational journey, young working-class people experienced poorer conditions, received fewer resources, studied for less prestigious qualifications and followed lower-status trajectories. In the UK, it is also widely considered that children growing up in poorer families usually leave school with comparatively lower levels of educational attainment (Goodman et al., 2010). Nonetheless, a systematic search of the literature reveals that concerns around class inequalities in access to higher education have gained in importance and attention from scholars in recent years. Further, it has been widely acknowledged that mass participation in higher education is crucial to the promotion of social justice and social mobility within modern societies (OECD, 2008).

In terms of fair access to higher education, Connor and her co-authors (2001) argue that the expansion in higher education in the UK, together with policies to widen access to under-represented groups, have brought improvements in some areas, especially female and ethnic minority representation, but there is still significant under-representation in higher education of people from lower socio-economic groups. In the same vein, Callender (2006) has indicated that parental income and social class still impact strongly on students' access to higher education, although nowadays young people generally are more likely than before to go to university in spite of class of origin in Britain. Likewise, Boliver (2011) argues that, although in Britain higher education has expanded dramatically over the course of the post-war period, class-based inequalities in British higher education institutions still existed. Specifically, Boliver (2011) indicates that the quantitative inequalities between social classes in higher education enrolment persisted for much of the period between the 1960s and 1995 and began to decline only during the early 1990s when the enrolment rate for the most advantaged socio-economic groups had reached saturation point; through the same period, qualitative inequalities between social classes for enrolment in the more prestigious UK universities remained fundamentally unchanged. More recently, UK universities have increased their tuition fees to £9000 a year, and this is likely to disadvantage young people from lower income groups. Boliver (2013) examines the extent of fair access to UK higher education, particularly among the prestigious Russell Group universities. Her empirical findings show that access to Russell Group universities is far from "fair", which is defined as equal rates of making applications to and receiving offers of admission from these universities on the part of those who are equally qualified to enter them.

In the USA, almost fifty years ago in 1966, Coleman et al. (1966) highlighted the relationship between a family's SES and students' educational achievement. More recently, accounting studies have also found that differences in family SES explain about half a standard deviation of the initial achievement gaps between black and Hispanic children and those of whites (Duncan and Magnuson, 2005). Moreover, Reardon (2011) argues that the income achievement gap appears to have widened substantially for at least fifty years in America, while the achievement gap as a result of parental education has remained relatively stable throughout the same period. Thus, family income is nearly as strong as parental education in predicting children's achievement in the USA nowadays. In addition, from the comparative macro-sociological perspective, Ishida et al. (1995) examine the differential access to education for different class origins in ten industrial nations, including

nine European countries<sup>1</sup> and Japan, the research findings reveal that sons from the working class and agricultural working class faced disadvantages in educational achievement in all these nations.

The People's Republic of China (China), as a transitional society, differs from Western or industrial societies along a variety of cultural and social dimensions (Chi and Rao, 2003). Recent studies that have investigated children's status attainment process have also confirmed that family socio-economic class status strongly connects to children's higher educational achievement (Bian, 2002a, Tang and Jiang, 2010, Liu et al., 2007). For example, Wen (2005a) argued that students from higher SES families formed the largest proportion among all university students. Moreover, it is worth noting that the rural-urban dichotomy has been an informative way to understand achievement differences between students in mainland China. Many scholars have examined the educational achievement differences between students who are rural residents and those who are urban residents. For instance, Jiang and Yan (2006) indicate that there is a significant school achievement gap between rural students and urban students mainly due to the large gap within the degree of family capital occupied by rural households and urban households. In addition, Fan (2008) notes that the rural-urban difference in terms of the access to higher education was still very significant in modern China. Students of rural origin also have inferior access to good basic education (Fu and Ren, 2010), which is largely caused by China's current policies which favour urban human capital investment over rural human capital investment (Heckman, 2005). For example, in 2001, only 20.3% of primary school teachers in rural areas had finished at least specialized secondary education while 40.9% of their urban colleagues had done so; while 23.5% of urban junior secondary schools teachers had at least graduated from tertiary schools, only 9.4% of their counterparts in rural areas had achieved that educational level (Wang, 2003). As for schools beyond compulsory education, Hannum (1999) said that they were generally located in urban areas in the context of China's rural-urban divide. In face of such a disadvantaged status of rural students for a good primary and secondary education, there is no wonder that those students become less competitive than their urban counterparts in getting access to better tertiary education through the state-unified National College Entrance Examination (NCEE). To take Tsinghua University- one of China's best universities- as an example, students from rural areas only formed 15.9-20.1% of the new enrolments from 1991 to 2000, while the majority of them enrolled in

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<sup>1</sup> England and Wales, France, Hungary, the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Poland, Scotland, Sweden and (the former) West Germany.

non-prestigious local universities even after the expansion of higher education embarked from 1999 (Yang, 2006).

However, in the West, the rural and urban differences in student achievement are still open to question according to Young (1998). In the state of New York, Monk and Haller (1986) found that students from smaller schools located in rural areas achieved as highly as students from larger urban schools. In Britain, rural students scored even higher than urban students in mathematics (Williams, 2005). Thus, my research will pay particular attention to the differences and similarities between rural households and urban households in terms of their parental educational expectations and children's social mobility.

### **The relationship between educational attainment and class destination**

There is a great deal of consensus in the existing literature that educational attainment largely and continuously decides an individual's social class destination. Moreover, given class of origin is seen as an ascribed factor, educational attainment is always perceived as an induced factor that would mediate the origin-destination link of social class, thereby leading to greater social mobility (Nunn and Britain, 2007).

In developed industrialized countries, the social-structural function of formal schooling, especially higher education, has always been seen a necessary prerequisite for better positional allocation and upward social mobility (Deary et al., 2005, Neelsen, 1975, Cremer et al., 2010, Haveman and Smeeding, 2006). Boudon (1974) indicated that the status achieved for an individual in industrial society is a two-stage process in that one should firstly achieve a certain level of education given his/her social background, and then obtain a position in the social hierarchy corresponding to his/her educational attainment. In the mid-1960s, Blau and Duncan (1967) conducted ground-breaking research into the American occupational structure and individual occupational status attainment. One of their influential contributions was to create a recursive model presenting the effects of two antecedent structural variables, the father's education and occupation (class of origin), and two intervening behavioural variables (induced factors), the respondent's education and first job, on the occupational status attainment of American men. The research results revealed that the effects of the two antecedent variables were not as significant as the effects of the induced variables, educational attainment in particular, in determining an American men's status attainment. In the UK as well, there continuous to be substantial evidence showing that educational attainment is one of the most important variables influencing inter-generational social mobility. For instance, it argues that educational

attainment is closely connected to income mobility (Blanden et al., 2007, Blanden et al., 2006).

However, it is interesting to find that increased access to education has not increased the overall level of social mobility in the UK, although education is perceived as helping individuals to achieve social mobility (Blanden and Machin, 2004). This might be because educational attainment itself is strongly linked to social class origins, as I have indicated in the previous section. Likewise, given that family income has become more predictive of children's educational outcomes, which in turn become more predictive of adults' salary, Reardon (2011) noticed that: "the combination of these trends creates a feedback mechanism that may decrease intergenerational mobility (p.27)". But Nunn and Britain (2007) insist on the key role of higher educational in promoting both absolute and relative social mobility, in spite of the impact of social class background.

As for the role of education among the Chinese population in modern China, research results have revealed that education, higher education in particular, is even more necessary for a young person from lower social class of origins to succeed (e.g. Liu, 2001, Qian, 2004), especially for students from rural families (Law and Gu, 2008). Yu Li (2007) also indicates that education has always been the most important factor in determining a person's occupation status, particularly their first job, along with the progress of industrialization and the emergency of knowledge economy in modern China. Likewise, Lu (2004) argued that educational level was a factor constantly intervening people's status attainment process since 1949 in mainland China, in spite of the fact that the specific extent of its effect varied over historical time for different socio-institutions. For instance, the research results revealed that, a person's tertiary education degree (including the technical secondary school) explained approximately 31 per cent, 45 per cent, 24 per cent, 42 per cent, 24 per cent of his/her first job attainment in 1949-1956, 1957-1965, 1966-1977, 1978-1991, and 1992-2001 respectively (Lu, 2004: 187). More recently, Pang (2012) examined the status attainment process in China drawing on the data from the *2008 Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS)* conducted by the National Survey Research Centre at Renmin University of China, Pang argued that education is the only significant variable influencing a person's first job attainment directly, and the variation it accounts for is about 45 per cent. All these data are provided as evidence confirming the significant link between education and class destination of different generations within the population in mainland China.

## **Parental educational expectation and its role in children's educational attainment**

Following the studies exploring children's educational attainment from the perspective of family resource inheritance, subsequent studies that have examined the role of educational expectation in students' educational attainments are not rare (e.g. Falk and Salter, 1978, Mullen et al., 2003, Seginer, 1983, Kao and Tienda, 1998, Davies and Kandel, 1981, Davis-Kean, 2005). In the sub-sections below, based on the existing literature, I will firstly state the factors influencing parental educational expectations for their children; I will then discuss the impact of parental educational expectations on children's educational outcome; finally I will present the factors which may mediate the relationship between educational expectations and outcomes.

### ***Factors influencing parental educational expectations***

On the one hand, existing studies have explored how parents' educational expectations for higher education varied as a function of family socio-economic status. Research results have indicated that family socio-economic status has significant positive impact on both parents' educational expectations for their children and children's own educational aspirations (Stage and Hossler, 1989, Wendling and Elliott, 1968, Harrison, 1969, Sewell and Hauser, 1992, Schoon and Parsons, 2002, Kao and Tienda, 1998, Mullen et al., 2003, Teachman and Paasch, 1998). For Chinese parents, Yang (2006) argues that parents' educational level and occupational status alter their educational expectations for children. Yang (2006) also argues that parents with higher educational levels had higher educational expectations for their children.

Nonetheless, Yang (2006) indicates that almost all the parents in her study expected their children to achieve tertiary education no matter what their occupational status was. However, parents from upper middle social classes were more likely to expect their children to obtain postgraduate education. Furthermore, Yang (2006) examines the educational expectations of parents who were rural migrant workers and argues that a family's economic situation has no relation to parental educational expectations. In the same vein, Gu (2006) claims that almost all Chinese parents emphasized their children's education and they predominantly hoped that their children could study as long as possible in order to learn more. Such attitude towards education on the part of Chinese parents is to a large extent derived from their cultural values which are shaped by Confucian philosophy. This means that their educational expectations are not only simply determined by their family's socio-economic status but also by their deep-rooted Chinese cultural

values. Li (2001) explores the expectations of a group of Chinese parents who had immigrated to Canada. Primarily, Li (2001) found that these parents grounded their expectations for their children in the Chinese tradition as they regarded education as their top priority and viewed academic achievement as one of hallmarks of Chinese civilization. My research results have shown this as well. For instance, one mother who was a peasant said that she hoped her son to go as further as possible in education. Furthermore, she emphasized that she could sell everything her family owned, even her blood, to support her child's study. A more comprehensive analysis and discussion in this regard is provided in the following analysis chapters of the present thesis.

In addition to Chinese cultural norms, Hannum and Adams (2007) argued that children's gender, parental education, household wealth and children's school performance shaped parents' educational expectations. Li (2001) notes that Chinese parents' educational expectations are influenced by their past encounters, especially their childhood experiences with their own parents. For example, an interviewee who had secondary education held high educational expectations for her child due to the discrimination she had experienced in Chinese society. In short, with regard to the educational expectations of Chinese parents, their education, occupation, family wealth, child's school performance and gender and cultural inheritance matter. But the above studies only explored parents who bore their first child after the 1980s. Research about educational expectations of Chinese parents who bore their first child before the 1980s is very rare in the existing literature. Thus, my study attempts to fill this research gap. In doing this, I hope to find out whether parents of subsequent generations formed their educational expectations according to different factors.

### ***The relationship between parental educational expectations and children's educational attainment***

A number of studies have looked at the impact of educational expectations on children's educational achievements. These studies indicate that there is a positive link between parental educational expectations and children's educational outcomes (Sewell and Hauser, 1992, Looker and Pineo, 1983, Stage and Hossler, 1989, Gofen, 2009, Ritchie et al., 2005, Teachman and Paasch, 1998, Flouri and Hawkes, 2008). For example, Mistry et al. (2009) argue that children seem to perform better at school when their mothers expect them to. In China, systematic studies about educational expectations only began to draw attention from social scientists in the 1990s (Hong and Qian, 2008). As an example, Jiang and Yan (2006) saw the level of parents' expectations for children's education as a form of social

capital offered by parents to children, and they argued that it explains about half of children's educational achievement.

However, based on their own literature review, Goodman and Gregg (2010) argue that expectations themselves are unlikely to be a determinant of higher education (HE) participation. Specifically, they suggest that, although parental expectations have a role to play in their child's educational attainment, it is not low expectations that are generally to blame for the stratified intakes to higher education as some children with high expectations still do not succeed. Likewise, Englund et al. (2004) found that there was no association between parents' expectations and children's school performance in first and third grade. This implied that parental expectations do not influence children's educational outcomes constantly. Thus, children's ages should be controlled when analyzing the impact of parental educational expectations on children's educational outcomes. In consideration of this issue, I have decided to adopt life-history research strategy because I believe that this could help me thoroughly understand the role of parental educational expectations in children's educational attainments in different life-stage of these children.

Moreover, some other scholars have argued that, rather than parental expectations, it is a child's individual educational aspiration that is linked to their educational achievements. In this regard, Gorard et al. (2012: 40) said that:

“Individual aspirations and expectations are considered important because they might influence key choices, and outcomes such as educational achievement and occupational attainment.”

Likewise, Goodman and Gregg (2010) point out that young people's individual aspirations play an important role in explaining why children from poor backgrounds do worse at school than children from rich backgrounds. Many other studies also suggest that children with higher educational aspirations have higher educational attainment than their peers (e.g., Flouri, 2006; Jacob and Wilder, 2010; Skokut, 2010). However, several reports have shown that young people from different social groups, such as rich and poor pupils, hold similar patterns of educational aspirations but their school performance is different (Calder and Cope, 2005; Turok et al., 2008). Similarly, Strand (2007) argues that educational aspirations do not predict high attainment for all ethnic groups, and thus that individual aspiration cannot be seen as a general cause of attainment. On the other hand, Bui (2007)

claims that the predictive effect of academic achievement to educational expectations is stronger than the reverse path.

The foregoing theoretical discussion has revealed that the relationship between educational outcomes and parental/individual expectations/aspirations seems to be a complex one. There is not enough evidence to demonstrate a causal link between aspirations/expectations and educational outcomes, although a causal relationship between aspirations/expectations and achievements is quite widely accepted in the sociology of education (Gorard et al., 2012). This relationship is complex not only because expectations/aspirations can be influenced by a variety of factors, but also because expectations/aspirations can change over time. For example, Gottfredson (2002) indicates that young people's aspirations change rapidly during their school years. So this is perhaps why the existing studies do not provide a consensus about expectations/aspirations and school outcomes. What is more, it is worth stressing that these studies looked separately at either the impact of parental educational expectations or children's educational aspirations on children's educational outcomes. In other words, they did not pay enough attention to the interacted dynamic interacted between parents and children. While, since my research focused on both parents and children, it reveals that children's educational outcome, higher educational attainment in particular, is the outcome of the negotiated interaction between parents' agency and children's agency. The significant role of the negotiated interaction between parents and children highlight the importance of parenting style, which could in turn alter the nature of parent-child interaction (Darling and Steinberg, 1993). Thus, in my thesis, I have paid significant attention and given substantial discussion around the issues of parenting style. This will be presented later in the introductory chapter and also in the concluding chapter. Fundamentally, parenting styles also have been linked to data analysis.

Gorard et al. (2012) summarised three mechanisms through which parents' educational expectations impact on children's educational outcomes. First of all, parents' expectations might affect the resources, such as the time and money, which they would like to devote to supporting their child's education. Second, parents' expectations might shape their children's own expectations for themselves. Third, parents' expectations may guide the way in which they respond to opportunities and problems which their children encounter in school. Nevertheless, to my knowledge, apart from the research focusing on Chinese parents who have already emigrated to Western countries to explore the decisive role of

these parents' high educational expectations in their children's better school performance than native students (Stevenson et al., 1990, Hao and Bonstead-Bruns, 1998), there have been few if any systematic studies exploring the mechanisms through which parental educational expectations impact upon children's educational achievements based on the population in mainland China. Thus, I conducted my research in an attempt to shed light on this issue and to contribute towards this research gap in Chinese sociological studies.

### ***Parental involvement and educational outcome***

The aforementioned three mechanisms through which parents' expectations might affect children's educational attainment (Gorard et al., 2012) reveal that parental involvement (such as homework help, talking with children and discussing school matters), might be a factor that mediates the relationship between educational expectations and outcomes. Basically, parental involvement affects children's educational outcomes by implementing a variety of home-based and school-based activities. In the following sections, I shall refer to existing studies to illustrate patterns of parental involvement, and then I shall discuss the link between parental involvement and educational outcome.

Involvement activities of parents in children's education have been classified into home-based behaviours and school-based behaviours (Seginer, 2006). Parents' home-based activities have been assessed with regard to their relationship to either intellectual or non-intellectual outcomes of their children. A variety of home-based involvement has been examined from this perspective, for example, teaching reading and writing at home (Sénéchal and LeFevre, 2002), help with and check children's homework (Russell and Elder, 1997; Gutman and Midgley, 2000; Shumow and Miller, 2001), talk to child about problems (Grolnick, Ryan et al. 1991), keeping a close track of child's school progress (Fehrmann, Keith *et al.*, 1987), and discussing school matters (Hao and Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Keith, Keith *et al.*, 1998). In addition to this, such variation exists in school-based behaviours. However, the most commonly used variables in the literature are initiating contact with a teacher (Hill, 2001), attending parent-teacher conferences (Stevenson and Baker, 1987; Russel and Elder, 1997) and participating in school events or programs (Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994; Bogenschneider, 1997). This suggests that parental involvement involves work parents do with their children and that they do with the school, in an attempt to promote their children's academic achievement or comprehensive development (Ji and Koblinsky, 2009). Nevertheless, the extent and form of parental involvement is strongly influenced by family social class, the mother's educational level and psycho-social health, single parental status, material deprivation and family ethnicity; moreover, the extent of

parental involvement diminishes as the child grows up or gets older (Desforges and Aboucher, 2003).

As for the relationship between parental involvement and children's school outcomes, early research in this field showed a variety of inconsistent and conflicting findings (Desforges and Aboucher, 2003; Mau, 1997). Predominantly, systematic studies have found significant positive effects between parental involvement and children's school outcome. For instance, Feinstein and Symons (1999) indicated that early parental interest in their child's education was strongly related to school progress. Cooper et al. (2010) report that the availability of resources for learning (such as books) in the home and the frequency of the child's participation in learning activities within and beyond the home mediate the association between family poverty and children's early school outcomes. Topor et al. (2010) also report that there was a correlation between parental involvement and child's academic performance over and above the impact of cognitive ability. Moreover, Sylva et al. (2008) suggest that parental involvement and their interest in children's learning from an early age and throughout their schooling were related to successful outcomes. Nevertheless, some studies found that parental involvement had no effect on young people's achievement, whilst there were also some studies found a striking negative relationship between them. This can be attributed to the multidimensional construction: different researchers used different definitions of parental involvement in their own research (Epstein, 1995; Fan, 2001). What is more, Desforges and Aboucher (2003) claim that there are important differences between ethnic minority parents in how they express their support and involvement. Thus, studies exploring the causal link between parental involvement and children's school performance should make clear the patterns of parental involvement they analyze and should pay substantial attention to the cultural context of the people they intend to study. In my study, based on the empirical data collected from the 15 Chinese families in my study, two patterns of parental involvement have been revealed, and they are categorised as: communication and participation. Under each of the two categories are different types of parenting activities such as teaching children after class, responding to the child's exam results, attending parent-teacher conference, setting up a role model to the child, sending children to good secondary schools, and, most importantly, making decisions for the child. A more comprehensive analysis and discussion of these parental involvement activities is presented in chapter 4, 5, and 6. In overall, my study found that parental involvement has a positive effect on children's educational

achievement. What is more, it reveals that parental involvement varied in accordance with the specific social, political, cultural contexts and family backgrounds.

### ***Parenting style and educational outcome***

Parenting style is an emotional climate created by a constellation of parental attitudes toward the child and includes their expectations about how the child should behave within the family, the school setting and society more generally. The notion of parenting style is different from parental involvement; rather, it is the context of specific involvement behaviours parents use to realize their socialization goals for their children. These specific parental involvement behaviours are referred to as parenting practices (Darling and Steinberg, 1993). Parenting styles are different from parenting practices. Many writers have noted that the broad pattern of parenting is more important in predicting child well-being than specific parenting practices (Darling, 1999). In other words, the influence of parenting practices on children's developmental outcomes could be moderated by parenting styles, either through altering the nature of parent-child interaction or through impacting on children's openness to parent influence (Darling and Steinberg, 1993).

So far, there are four broad parenting styles have been formulated from the Western literature, they are: authoritative parenting, authoritarian parenting, permissive parenting and neglectful parenting. In this section I will discuss the relationship between the four parenting styles and children's school outcome. I will describe the four Western-based parenting styles in greater detail later in the thesis, on pages 27-29, following which I will raise the issue of parenting style with reference to Chinese cultural context, and then I argue that the Western-based parenting styles are not appropriate in analyzing Chinese parenting practices.

### ***The relationship between parenting style and children's school outcome***

Generally speaking, children and adolescents whose parents are authoritative perceived themselves and are rated by objective measures as more socially and instrumentally competent than those whose parents are not authoritative (cited in Darling, 1999). Specifically, with regards to the link between parenting style and children's school outcome, a few studies have shown that the authoritative style was associated with the most success (Terry, 2008; Sektnan et al. 2010; Brown and Lyengar, 2008). For example, Blondal and Adalbjarnardottir (2009) report that adolescents aged 14 who perceived their parents as authoritative were more likely to have completed upper secondary school by age 22 than adolescents from non-authoritative families. In the same study, even after controlling for previous academic achievement, adolescents from authoritative families were less likely to

drop out than adolescents from authoritarian or neglectful families. On the other hand, Darling (1999) indicates that children from authoritarian families tend to perform moderately well in school. Moreover, based on UK Birth Cohort Study 1970 data, Flouri (2007) found that mothers' authoritarian parenting was negatively associated with educational outcomes when the child was aged 26. On the other hand, children and adolescents from permissive families perform less well in school, but they have higher self-esteem, better social skills and lower levels of depression (Darling, 1999). Similarly, Dornbusch et al. (1987) found that both authoritarian and permissive parenting styles were negatively associated with grades, and authoritative parenting was positively associated with grades. In a word, many writers have noted that authoritative parenting is most productive in terms of children's school outcomes in Western cultures.

However, Chao (2000) claims that the beneficial effects of authoritative style does not always apply to all ethnic groups. Notably, Chinese parents are recognized as being highly controlling and authoritarian compared with Western parents due to the emphasis on parental authority and the child's obedience in traditional Chinese culture (Dornbusch et al., 1987). Thus, some authors such as Chiu (1987) and Ekblad (1986) argue that controlling and authoritarian may be positively associated with adaptive outcomes in Chinese children since it may be positively valued in the hierarchical collectivistic Chinese society. For instance, Chao (1994) argues that Chinese pupils from authoritarian families perform quite well in school, although controlling or authoritarian parenting has been found to be predictive of poor school achievement among European-Americans. But this finding is not consistent within all relevant studies in mainland China. For example, Chen et al. (1997) conducted a study in Beijing, the capital of China, with children aged eight years. They found that authoritarian parenting of both mothers and fathers was negatively associated with children's school academic achievement. They also found that parental authoritative style was associated positively with children's school achievement. Thus, Chen et al. (1997) suggest that authoritarian and authoritative parenting practices in Chinese culture play the same role in child rearing that are similar to those found in Western cultures (e.g. Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Nonetheless, regardless of the small sample, my own research suggests that it is problematic to say which parenting style is the best to enable children to succeed educationally as it depends on interactions between parents and children.

### **The role of Confucian thought in educational beliefs of Chinese**

Culture is a collective programming of people's mind in an environment that differentiates one group or category of people from another (Hofstede, 1980). Predominantly, the cultural values of Chinese people have been shaped by Confucian philosophy, which constituted the most influential thought from the Han era (206BC-AD220) onward (Gao, Herbig and Jacobs, 1995). Having been deeply influenced by Confucian thoughts through generations, Chinese people show a persistent belief in the irreplaceable importance of education to both nations and individuals. They also persistently believe that education promotes an individual's capacity to achieve social mobility.

The Confucian culture devoted much attention to the educational foundations of a nation (Gu, 2006). Study is highly praised by Confucian philosophy and it provides a unique cultural belief that everything in one's life is under contempt except for study (*wan ban jie xia pin, wei you du shu gao*) (Li, 2001). Similarly, Li and Wang (2004: 416) note that:

“Confucian thought strongly emphasizes intellectual development, skill acquisition and love for learning.”

Due to such a significant emphasis on education, academic success is almost the ultimate goal of Chinese people, and for many Chinese, academic success provides the fuel for upward social mobility (Guo, 2013). During the Sui and Tang dynasties, after the imperial civil service examination was established to select scholars for public office, common people could also change their status and social position by working hard on their learning and outperforming others in the examination. Moreover, the imperial civil service examination was open to all in practice because Confucius suggested that there should be no class distinction for education (*you jiao wu lei*) (Gu, 2006). Thus, education was considered the primary route allowing people from the lower classes to become part of the elites in traditional China (Guo, 2013). However, gender discrimination against women in those days was also embodied in the educational system. Concretely, women in traditional China were unable to receive the same formal schooling as men; they were also excluded from attending the imperial civil service examination. Parents had little expectation for women in education. They would not even teach their daughters to read and write for fear that they might become over-ambitious and not accept to a man's control, and thereby fail to become a dutiful wife or mother. Such attitudes were promoted largely by Confucian thought which placed women in an inferior position to men. However, Confucian thought has begun to lose some of its potency given that it was criticised for encouraging gender

inequality following the Chinese Communist Revolution. This indicates that culture is not static, but constantly changing (Zhai, 2011). However, Zhai (2011) also points out that the continuous alteration of a culture cannot be disjointed from its original tenets, but based on it. Thus, the Confucian system still influences many facets of Chinese cultural and ideological factors.

Confucian thought also proposed that people could be excluded from the drudgery of being a physical labourer or enduring the hardship of peasant life through study (Fouts and Chan 1995). Although the civil service examination system was abolished during the late Qing Dynasty, it had already formed a strong belief that a good scholar will become an official (*xue er you ze shi*) and thus acquire a higher social status (Li, 2001). Thus, Confucian thought and the Imperial civil service examination enormously stimulated the desire of the population to pursue education.

Even today, the educational values contained within Confucian philosophy have a strong impact on people's educational beliefs. Education has always been perceived as an extremely important means of personal advancement in China (Chen and Uttal, 1988). Concretely, Gu (2006:171) claims that:

“...valuing education remained to be a tradition of the Chinese people; each and every family, whether rich or poor, would send their children to school as long as they could afford it, even if it was by the means of saving on food or clothing.”

Due to this cultural belief in education, Chinese parents have emphasized their children's education and they have all hoped that their children could study as long as possible in order to learn more (Gu, 2006). Chen and Uttal (1988) referred to such traditional Chinese cultural values regarding educational achievement in explaining the superior performance of Chinese children in cross-national comparisons of mathematics achievement. The authors found that Chinese parents usually set higher standards and work more often with their children on homework than American parents. In other words, Chinese parents usually held high educational expectations (Li, 2001) and are more involved in their children's study (Ng, Pomerantz and Lam, 2007). Such extensive involvement of Chinese parents in their child's study is probably because examinations remain the primary path of upward social mobility in contemporary China (Chen and Uttal, 1988). For example, due to the huge urban-rural economic differences and the strict control of migration, the only way

the younger generation of farmers can move to the cities is to the annual National College Entrance Examination (NCEE).

However, this does not necessarily imply that access to Higher Education is fair in China. Wang (2011) points out that the gaps in access opportunities exist in terms of geographical region, rural and urban environment, and social class, type of school, gender and ethnicity. Although these inequalities in access opportunities have generally diminished since 1999, when large scale expansion in Higher Education took place, the gap in university admission between different social classes remain prominent. In other words, children from more advantaged backgrounds still have more chances to access Higher Education or to study at key universities. Moreover, Wang (2011) argues that social class polarization also exists in secondary schools. This led directly to the accumulation and continuation of a gap in opportunities to access higher education.

The unfair access to higher education among children from different social class groups in China and Chinese parents' significantly high educational expectations motivated me to find out to what extent parental expectation could reduce the impact of family background on children's educational attainment process with a consideration of other factors such as parenting style. In doing this, I attempted to find out whether parents' high educational expectation could promote children to achieve upward social mobility, as this issue had already attracted extensive interest elsewhere, particularly in the UK.

### **The mediating role of educational expectation/aspiration in social mobility**

Notably in the UK in recent years, the effects of parents' educational expectations has already drawn extensive interests from politicians, policy-makers and practitioners who note that high aspirations and motivations of parents and children for advanced education not only transmit the effects of family background, but also have a value of their own in leading to better educational attainment, regardless of the young person's social class of origin. Driven by a concern of with improving the education of the population and tackling socio-economic inequalities, they have seen raising parents' hope or children's desire for better educational achievement, such as advanced study, would help narrow the attainment gap resulting from a family's socio-economic status, which usually represents a barrier for social mobility (Goodman et al., 2010, Kintrea et al., 2011, Gorard et al., 2012). These results might be relevant to the experiences of those on the other side of the world in China, but it would be helpful to see more of this kind of work concerning both

educational aspiration and educational attainment being carried out specifically based on the population in mainland China, and reflecting the country's specific context and culture.

Given the above inference and the current social class inequalities in access to Higher Education in China, the first question I want to approach is that of what has caused the social class polarization in access to Higher Education: is it because children from disadvantaged social class groups are less motivated by their parents to achieve higher education than that of their counterparts? Or is it because children from disadvantaged social class groups can inherit less social, cultural and economic resources from their parents than that of children from advantaged social class groups even if they are both strongly expected to attend Higher Education? In short, the primary issue I want to explore in my research is the question: what is the role of parental educational expectation in children's educational attainment in mainland China? Moreover, I intend to shed light on the rationales behind Chinese parents' educational expectations for their children and examine the effects of parental educational expectations on children's educational attainments, based on a population that has always lived in mainland China. Also, I will explore the possible mechanisms of parental educational expectations for encouraging children's social mobility to find out whether high parental expectations can narrow the existing achievement gap between children from different socio-economic family-origin, especially between urban and rural residents in mainland China.

The theoretical framework illustrated in this chapter suggests that social scientists have already made a thorough investigation in the decisive role of education for an individual's status attainment as well as the possible mediating effects of parents' educational expectations and aspirations in relative social mobility. But they are overwhelmingly concerned with measuring effects and abstracting linking mechanisms, and rarely place these in the broader shifts in social, economic and political contexts. In other words, they have been overemphasizing positivist analyses that are usually based on survey data recording, for example, parental occupations, education and educational expectation/aspiration. However, I do not doubt the validity or reliability of statistical research. But what I want to stress is that the meanings that parents and children themselves give to the impact of parental educational expectations on children's social mobility thus remain unexplored, particularly in China.

Another critique to the theoretical framework is that, the extant literature has not given sufficient attention to parents' gender attitudes and how these attitudes influence family

decision on children's education (Yuping Zhang et al., 2007). I decided to take gender issues into consideration in the current research design. To accomplish this goal, basically, I have recruited fathers, mothers, girl children and boy children to my research.

### **Definition of Terms**

Since the present study looks at particular parental cohorts in the population in a Chinese context that is different from Western societies on various cultural and social dimensions, I think it is appropriate to illustrate what I mean by those terms relevant to this specific research before going into greater detail.

### **Expectation and Aspiration**

Within the status-attainment research tradition, there is a distinction between the definitions of aspiration and expectation among the related literature, aside from those who have ignored the difference between the two words and used them interchangeably (e.g. Teachman and Paasch, 1998).

Specifically speaking, the notion of aspiration and expectation is distinguished according to whether it is a personal view or interpersonal influence. According to Haller et al. (1974) for instance, expectation is communicated by a person's significant others such as parents, so that level of educational expectation for the person is a variable which describes the level of educational hierarchy his/her educational definers deem appropriate for him/her. While, a person's level of educational aspiration is a limited range of points on the educational hierarchy which he/she views desirable or possible for him/herself.

In the present thesis, educational expectation represents the position in the educational hierarchy a child was expected to achieve by his/her parents; while educational aspiration indicates the educational level the child him/herself would like to obtain. I make the above distinction in my thesis in order to clearly distinguish the educational achievement children expected for themselves from that in which their parents' felt satisfied, since there is often a gap between these two according to the extant studies in this regard (e.g., Hao and Bonstead-Bruns, 1998).

### **Educational attainment**

Educational attainment is not only an indicator of an individual's social status itself, it is also linked to one's employment opportunities and occupational status (Bauer et al., 1992). For the purpose of this study, I use various educational levels derived from the educational

hierarchy in contemporary China, as defined by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, to identify a participant's educational attainment,

According to the record in the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, education in contemporary China has been classified as: a) Higher Education b) Secondary Education c) Primary education d) Correctional Work-Study Schools e) Special Education Schools f) Pre-school Education Institutions. Specifically speaking, higher education includes both undergraduate and postgraduate study. Under this category, there are four educational levels including College Diploma<sup>2</sup>, Bachelor's degree, Master's degree and Doctoral degree. Secondary education has been divided into senior secondary education and junior secondary education. Furthermore, individuals who have attended either senior secondary schools or secondary vocational schools will be defined as having received senior secondary education. That is to say, the educational levels of these individuals will be considered as the same in this research. Therefore, the educational achievement scale adopted in this study is stratified from low to high into nine levels including: (1) no schooling (2) below primary education (3) primary education (4) junior secondary education (5) senior secondary education (6) College Diploma (7) Bachelor's degree (8) Master's degree (9) Doctoral degree.

I also use this educational achievement scale to identify educational expectation/aspiration or relative social mobility in this research. Within the same generation, for example, I identified that parents who expected the child to achieve a Bachelor's degree had lower educational expectation than parents who expected a Master's degree for the child. As for social mobility, if the child obtained a Bachelor's degree while his/her parents had only got a college diploma, I would say that the child had achieved upward intergenerational social mobility in education, and vice versa.

### **Occupational attainment**

Ganzeboom, et al. (1992) said that:

“In sociological research the positions of occupations in the stratification system have mainly been measured in three ways: (a) by prestige ratings, (b) by sociologically derived class categories, and (c) by socio-economic status scores (p. 2).”

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<sup>2</sup> Students who have graduated from colleges will be awarded a College Diploma. The educational level of a College Diploma is lower than a Bachelor's degree. It costs 2-3 years to get a College Diploma but 4-5 years to get a Bachelor's degree.

In the present study, I adopted occupational prestige ratings to indicate the occupational attainment of research participants and thereby assess their social status and relative social mobility. Treiman and Yip (1989: p. 380) indicated that “prestige might be the best summary measure of occupational status understood in its classical, Weberian, sense.” Reiss (1961) also argued that:

“Whenever subjects are asked to evaluate or judge the rank, position, or standing of occupations, most investigators refer to the ‘prestige status’ of the occupation in a large social system so that the occupations may be rank-ordered by differences in their prestige status (p. 1).”

In terms of the measure of occupational prestige, Duncan (1961) constructed the Socioeconomic Status index (SEI) for the American society using 1950 census information on detailed occupational characteristics in relation to incomes and educational levels. The construction of the SEI bears a high relationship with the materials on occupational prestige which were derived from a 1947 NORC (National Opinion Research Centre) survey. Treiman (1977) constructed the Standard International Occupational Prestige Scale (SIOPS), which supported the gathering and comparing of data from many different cultures and societies (Lin and Xie, 1988). This scale has been employed to measure the occupational status in a cross national (21 countries) research conducted by Treiman and Yip (1989). Even more recently, the SIOPS is still acknowledged as an internationally comparable measure of occupational prestige and being widely used in scientific studies (e.g. Corneo and Grüner, 2002, Magnusson, 2009).

The research on Chinese occupational prestige fell behind the Western societies. Lin and Xie (1988) considered their study conducted in 1983 as the first effort at measuring and analysing occupational prestige in mainland China. After Lin and Xie’s study conducted in Beijing was Bian’s (1996) comparative analysis of Chinese occupational prestige based in Tianjin, a large industrial city in China.

Since the current study focuses on Chinese population in mainland China, the Lin-Xie prestige scale (Lin and Xie, 1988) is adopted to measure occupational status of the research participants. The occupational prestige scores in this scale was rated by a representative sample of urban residents (N=1774) in Beijing. Fifty occupations were selected after an examination of the Occupational System of Census of China (1982). When attention was

paid to the representativeness of this scale, the authors compared this scale with others in the Western societies and then concluded that:

“... (1) that there is indeed a general invariant pattern of occupational prestige ratings that seems to transcend cultural and political boundaries and (2) that within the general invariant pattern of ratings there are significant rating differences assigned to jobs in each society... This universal pattern seems largely undisturbed, even after a society has experienced recent revolutionary movements specifically aimed at revamping stratification and mobility patterns, which has been illustrated by the recent history of China (p. 824).”

Moreover, Bian (1996) confirmed consistence between the Tianjin rating scale and the Lin-Xie prestige scale, despite the latter being formulated from a sample selected in Beijing, a city that is different from Tianjin in several aspects including social and political functions and occupational structures. This evidence suggests the validity of the Lin-Xie prestige scale for use in the present research.

However, one problem with this scale is that the farm category was excluded when occupations were selected. Therefore, the prestige score of the peasant is not shown in the Lin-Xie prestige scale. As there were parents of peasant origins in my study, I expanded the Lin-Xie scale to compensate for this lack. It was not difficult to calculate the prestige score for peasants to assess their specific social status. Lin and Xie (1988: 830) provided an estimation equation to calculate the prestige score for any occupation, especially those not in the scale they constructed. There are two predictors in this equation, income and education. The education variable is measured with the levels of education in the national census: (1) no school, (2) elementary school, (3) junior high (middle) school, (4) high school, (5) vocational college, and (6) college and higher. Income is measured by the actual Chinese *yuan* earned as basic monthly salary at the time of the 1983 survey. The resulting equation for this education-income index (EII) is:

$$EII = -5.188 + 13.874 (\text{education}) + .262 (\text{income}).$$

The average level of education among peasants in 1983 was 5.26 years (Zhang and Bai, 2003), so the rating is “2” approximately, and the average monthly per capita income in 1983 of peasants was 25.81 *yuan* (China Statistical Yearbook, 1987), thus, the prestige score for agricultural labour is 29.3.

Table 1.1 shows the occupation prestige scale I used in my research. It is adapted from the original Lin-Xie's Prestige Scale and the only adaptation I made is that I placed the calculated prestige score for peasants in it.

Table 1.1 Occupational Prestige Scale

Respondents' Occupational Prestige Scores

| Occupation                                    | Prestige Score | Occupation   | Prestige Score |
|---|----------------|--|----------------|
| Physicians                                    | 86.2           | Nurses   | 55.3           |
| Electrical and electronics engineers          | 84.9           | Clerical workers   | 53.5           |
| Teachers, university                          | 83.8           | Installers of electrical equipment                       | 51.3           |
| Natural scientists                            | 83.8           | Pressmen   | 50.0           |
| Social scientists                             | 82.7           | Textile operatives                                       | 49.9           |
| Writers                                       | 81.7           | Purchasers   | 48.2           |
| Reporters                                     | 81.1           | Mail carriers  | 46.3           |
| Civil engineers                               | 79.4           | Sewers and stitchers—manufacturing                       | 46.0           |
| Teachers, secondary school                    | 72.9           | Operatives and kindred workers—food and kindred products | 44.6           |
| High-ranking officials                        | 69.1           | Ticket, station, and express agents                      | 43.8           |
| Librarians                                    | 67.4           | Police officers  | 43.8           |
| Middle-ranking officials                      | 67.1           | Cooks  | 43.5           |
| Electricians                                  | 66.7           | Plumbers   | 43.4           |
| Accountants                                   | 66.4           | Painters   | 42.2           |
| Secretaries, administrative                   | 66.4           | Sales clerks   | 42.1           |
| Drivers                                       | 63.2           | Operatives and kindred workers—chemical products         | 40.5           |
| Low-ranking officials                         | 63.0           | Construction workers                                     | 39.4           |
| Athletes                                      | 62.8           | Waiters and attendants                                   | 39.0           |
| Mechanics                                     | 61.4           | Furnacemen, smeltermen, and pourers                      | 35.1           |
| Jewellers, gold-and silversmiths              | 60.1           | Barbers  | 32.4           |
| Teachers, elementary school                   | 59.8           | Miners   | 31.6           |
|   |                | Peasants   | 29.3           |
| Actors  | 57.7           | Loaders  | 26.0           |
| Checkers, examiners, inspectors—manufacturing | 57.4           | Cleaners and garbage collector                           | 25.9           |
| Machinists                                    | 56.9           | Pedicab pullers and drivers                              | 22.2           |
| Typists                                       | 56.2           | Housemaid  | 18.9           |

\*Note: the table is adapted from Lin-Xie's occupational prestige scale presented in (Lin and Xie, 1988: 804-805).

Additionally, Lin and Xie (1988) compared the mean prestige ratings of the selected fifty occupations by men and women respondents (the sampled respondents were 63.2% men and 36.8% women). They stressed that although the general rankings of occupational prestige were similar for men and women respondents, women tended to give typist, nurse, elementary school teacher, and librarian higher prestige scores than did men; while, men tended to rate natural scientist, athlete, driver, and mechanic more higher in prestige than did women. Furthermore, Lin and Xie pointed out two basic factors that might have caused the above differences in rankings between men and women. One factor may be the gendered occupational opportunity in China and the other factor may be the traditional normative view of occupational aspirations for men and women. I will explain them below.

### ***Occupational gender segregation***

There has always been occupational segregation by gender in contemporary China. But the extent of this occupational gender segregation under the communist rule appeared to be different from that under economic reforms which were embarked on in urban China from the end of 1970s. Specifically speaking, the observed degree of occupational gender segregation was relatively low in urban China before economic reforms, in other words during the pre-reform era. This was at least partially because Mao claimed that “women hold up half the sky” and the communist government introduced a series of policies to protect and improve the social and economic position of Chinese women (Ngo, 2002, Wu and Wu, 2008). However, the economic development along with the labour market marketization in urban China have placed women at an inferior status in the economy and reduced their occupational status (Liu, 1997). Thus, both Ngo (2002) and Wu and Wu (2008) argue that economic reforms in China have brought about an increased degree of occupational gender segregation in the urban labour markets during the 1980s.

Primarily, occupational patterns of women and men were differed dramatically in urban China by the end of 1980s (Bauer et al., 1992). During the time, women were highly concentrated in occupations like accountants, clerks, secretaries and primary school teachers. The Lin-Xie Occupational Prestige Scale shows that the prestige score of these jobs are between 66.4 and 53.5. In contrast, men were much more likely than women to become engineers, scientists or other technical staff, which were ranked much higher on this scale. And even in the group of teaching, men were more likely than women to teach in secondary schools or universities which obviously were assigned higher prestige scores than primary school teacher according to the Lin-Xie Occupational Prestige Scale. What is more, women experienced severe underrepresentation in the more powerful, political

positions such as heads of government/party organizations and enterprises. Bauer et al. (1992) indicated that only 14% of organization/enterprise heads were women during 1980s in urban China based on the data from the 1987 One Percent Population Survey<sup>3</sup>. Also, it is worth noting that housemaid was ranked last with a prestige score 18.9 on the Lin-Xie Occupational Prestige Scale. In China, housemaid or domestic maid market is almost entirely dominated by women (Zhou and Zhou, 2007, Wu and Zhou, 1996). To explain such a significant concentration of women in this occupation, Zhou and Zhou (2007) argue that this is basically because housemaid's work which includes looking after children and older people, cooking, doing the laundry and cleaning is usually considered women's work in accordance with the traditional gender labour division. Housemaid is actually an extension of women's familial roles.

In sum, the occupations that men concentrated in usually offer a higher pay and better employment prospects while women were often subordinated to men or play a supportive role in the workplace throughout the 1980s (Ngo, 2002). However, Wu and Wu (2008) argued that such significant occupational gender segregation in urban China declined between 1990 and 2000. And it continued to decline by 2005 (Li, 2009). This was basically due to the changing perceptions about gender in China along with the modernization and globalization process, and the development of gender equality in access to education.

### ***Gendered occupational aspiration***

Lin and Xie (1988) indicated that Chinese men seemed to aspire more to be natural scientists, athletes, mechanics, and drivers while Chinese women were more likely to aspire to be nurses, elementary school teachers and librarians. It is not difficult to find that the aspired occupations of women and men were not so much different from the occupations women and men concentrated in respectively. Thus, gendered occupational aspiration was deemed another factor resulting in men and women's different rankings of occupational prestige.

Along with the process of marketization and economic development in modern China, profound changes have been brought about to women's employment. The aforementioned declined gender occupational segregation in Chinese labour force provided an evidence of the changes in women's job opportunities. However, recent study has revealed that

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<sup>3</sup> China's 1987 One Percent Population Survey was a nationwide survey designed to provide demographic information since the 1982 Population Census. The 1987 survey sampled 1% of China's total population during the time, resulting in a sample size of appropriately ten million. Basically, the analysis of Bauer and colleagues (1992) were based on the data of this survey.

Chinese women and men still have significantly different occupational aspirations. For instance, Min (2004) indicate that women are more likely to engage in high stability, low risk and middle income jobs. In contrast, men prefer to take high income and high risk occupations. As a factor of this gendered occupational aspiration, it has been suggested that, based on women in a large industrial Midwestern city in Michigan though, women prefer to choose occupations that allow them to combine work and family roles more easily (Frome et al., 2006).

All in all, I adopt Lin-Xie Occupational Prestige Scale (see Table 1.1) in the thesis to measure my research participants' occupational attainment.

### **Parenting style**

Four broad parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful) have been formulated from the Western literature on two dimensions (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby and Martin, 1983): parental demandingness and parental responsiveness. Parental demandingness indicates the extent to which parents show control, maturity demands and supervision in their parenting. Parental responsiveness refers to the extent to which parents show emotional warmth, acceptance and involvement in their parenting. I describe these four parenting styles below.

#### ***The Western-based conceptualisation of parenting styles***

##### Authoritative parenting

Authoritative parents are both demanding and responsive. This means that they are controlling but not restrictive (Aunola et al., 2000). They typically are highly involved in their children's life and tend to communicate with their children actively and openly. At the same time, they have relatively high levels of behavioural control and monitoring. But they like to use "positive" and "gentle" reason-based strategies in disciplining and managing children's behaviours (Gray and Steinberg, 1999), rather than use punitive discipline methods (Baumrind, 1991). They also encourage psychological autonomy which indicates the extent to which parents employ non-coercive, democratic discipline and encourage their children to express individuality in the family (Steinberg *et al.*, 1992) and display acceptance. Moreover, they tend to have firm and clear expectations of their children (Hackett, 2003).

##### Authoritarian parenting

Authoritarian parents are demanding but not responsive toward their children. They tend to place a high level of control upon their children, but are generally less trusting and less engaged with their children than authoritative parents (Hackett, 2003). Authoritarian parents are obedience-oriented and adult-centred, so that they tend to ask children to follow their orders without explanation rather than listening to children's point of view (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Moreover, authoritarian parenting tend to be high in psychological control and low in autonomy granting (Silk *et al.*, 2003). Psychological control indicates the relative degree of emotional autonomy that parents assign to their children (Gray and Steinberg, 1999). Lack of psychological autonomy is described by adolescents as a feeling of being controlled, devalued and criticized (Barber, 1996).

#### Permissive parenting

Permissive parents are responsive but less demanding than authoritative or authoritarian parents. They tend to have warm accepting and child-centred attitudes toward their children (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Thus, there is generally a lack of strict parental control in permissive families (Hackett, 2003). Parents labelled as permissive use little punishment and always avoid asserting authority or imposing restrictions. Whenever possible, permissive parents would allow and encourage children to make decisions independently (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Moreover, it has been revealed that adolescents from permissive families felt more trusted by parents than those from authoritarian families but less trusted than those from authoritative families (Aunola *et al.*, 2000).

#### Neglectful parenting

Neglectful parents are neither responsive nor demanding. They are characterized by a general lack of monitoring or supervision over the child's behaviour and a non-controlling attitude combined with overall under-involvement in their children's lives. In a word, such parents are often absent when children need them and may be actively rejecting their childrearing activities altogether (Hackett, 2003; Baumrind, 1991).

The four Western-based categorizations of parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful) have also been widely used in studies on Chinese parents and children (see Xu *et al.*, 2005, Chen *et al.*, 1997). However, in spite of the small sample of my study, I found from my research data that the often-cited Western-based parenting styles

(i.e., authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful) were not appropriate in analyzing parenting practices of Chinese parents mainly because they do not consider specific Chinese cultural values and they do not pay enough attention to parent-child power negotiations. This suggests that I ought to examine whether the Western-based conceptualisation of parenting styles can be generalised to Chinese culture as parenting styles are also influenced by wider ideological and cultural factors. In China, a key one of these is Confucian thought. Based on these factors, I have attempted to adapt the conceptualization of parenting style that is typically found in the Western literature to help me analyse my data<sup>4</sup>.

### ***Critiques to Western-based parenting styles using a Chinese perspective***

First and foremost, “permissive” parenting is not applicable to analyze Chinese parents’ child-centred attitudes to their children. In the Western-based conceptualization, parents who are labelled as permissive tend to avoid asserting authority or imposing restrictions (Hackett, 2003). They also tend to have warm accepting attitudes toward their children (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). But this is not exactly relevant in China. It has been widely recognized that Chinese parents are highly controlling and authoritarian due to the emphasis of traditional Chinese culture on filial piety (Kelley and Tseng, 1992, Lin and Fu, 1990). Confucian filial piety justifies absolute parental authority over children and it demands that children unconditionally obey their parents. For centuries, Confucian filial piety has served as a guiding principle governing Chinese patterns of socialization (Ho and Kang, 1984). Ho (1994) examines the role that filial piety plays in parental attitudes and child training, the research results revealed that filial piety underlies parental attitudes and child training characterised by an accent on obedience and indebtedness to one’s parents, not self-fulfilment. Due to this cultural context underlying Chinese families, children in permissive families are identified as those who are being well-sheltered by their parents, and who always turn to their parents for help rather than try to solve problems by themselves (Gong, 2007). Thus, permissive parenting is not about parents tending to avoid asserting authority or imposing restrictions in Chinese families. In contrast, Chinese parents would feel responsible to govern their children’s behaviours through asserting authority or imposing restrictions (Chao, 1994). And if parents did not do so, their children would feel

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<sup>4</sup> The adaptation of the meanings of the Western parenting styles for a Chinese context were produced after many discussions with my supervisor, Professor Lena Dominelli.

that they were not concerned about them, because parental strictness maybe the synonymous with parental concern, caring or involvement for Asians (Chao, 1994). This means that the Western model of permissive parenting is not adequate for analyzing the parenting behaviours of Chinese parents. This could probably explain why I did not find any permissive parents in my research sample. Thus, I do not include the Western-based notion of “permissive” parenting in my analysis. Instead, I have proposed the notion of “child-centred” parenting in my study.

I do not include “neglectful” parenting in my study either. Despite the small research sample, I found no neglectful parents among the 27 parents recruited for the present study. This is partially because parents tend to feel responsible for their child as parents like I said in the paragraph above. Also, Chinese law on the protection of minors, clearly states that parents are obliged to raise, protect and educate their children. It is difficult to avoid this prescription.

Finally, I critique some of the Western models of parenting styles for not paying adequate attention to the negotiated power relations between parents and children, and not recognizing parent-child interactions and negotiations when their authors analyse parental behaviours. During the 20th-century, theorists such as Smith (1978), Lukes (1974) and Foucault (1977) provided theories and understandings of power which have fundamentally impacted on Western sociological theory. Another key theorist, Talcott Parsons (1957), remained firmly rooted in a “power over” framework or assumed that power, as a finite resource, is operating within a “zero-sum” paradigm, in which one party holds power at the expense of the other. This stance was extensively critiqued for its short-comings by Dominelli and Gollins (1997). “Power over” indicates the power of an individual or group over another individual or group to direct their actions or behaviours. In the family domain, parental power over children is defined as the potential or actual ability of parents to change the behaviours of their children (Henry et al., 1989). Arguably, parents have a great deal of power over their child by virtue of their total control over the child’s material and emotional supplies and the child’s limited access to information which they also largely control (Hoffman, 1975, Dominelli, 1989). Moreover, Dominelli (1989) argues that both men and women can assert their will over that of their children and invents a terms, “adulthood”, to define the abuse of power by women and men over children.

Dominelli and Gollins (1997) also reject the notion that power is simply a matter of the exercise of control over others. Instead, they argue that power needs to be theorised as a

negotiated entity rather than seeing it as a static entity or a “zero-sum” phenomenon. Specifically, they indicate that, power is a complex phenomenon which is constantly negotiated and renegotiated between social actors. In other words, no one party to an interaction is either all powerful or powerless. Drawing on this contention, parental power over children is also dynamic and the relation of power between parents and children rests on a continuous negotiation of their individual agency (McDonald, 1980). For instance, Maccoby (2000) argues that when a child is very young, parents usually play the primary role in the child’s development. But when a child reaches adulthood, parents’ influence tends to wane while the influences of those beyond family boundaries become more significant. From the families recruited for my study, I found that even authoritarian parents did not have absolute power over their children all the time. Sometimes the parent was authoritarian but the child rejected this approach to become self-determined. Thus, this parent might become authoritative or eventually even child-centred as a result of negotiated power relations between them. Take the mother of F14 in my study as an example. The mother was authoritarian at first when her son attempted to drop out of school, but she did not insist on her demand because the child was determined not to go to school despite her objection. At last, the mother allowed her child to make the decision. In this case, the parent turned to become child-centred rather than authoritarian.

The above adaptation of Western concepts through a critique based on understanding Chinese culture and redefining them for a Chinese context has made them useful for Chinese academics, researchers and practitioners. This adaptation, I argue, constitutes one original contribution that my research makes to the development of theory around parenting styles in China. In the next section, I will present the conceptualization of parenting styles used in my thesis.

### ***The conceptualization of parenting styles in my thesis***

Generally speaking, my research suggests that parenting style is determined by three factors: the extent to which parents acknowledge their child’s autonomy or persists in setting the boundaries they set for their child; the amount of autonomy they give their child in decision-making; and the extent to which they carry out parent-child negotiations. These factors have generated three types of parenting styles from my research data: authoritarian parenting, authoritative parenting and child-centred parenting.

Authoritarian parenting

Authoritarian parents usually see their children as being obedient children. They often set clear boundaries to their children's behaviours and tend to ask their children to do what they want without caring about children's opinions. They leave their children little autonomy in making decisions about the children's life. They tend to give no space for being disappointed or disobeyed by their children. Authoritarian parents do not encourage parent-child negotiation. They seek unquestioning obedience from their children. In order to ensure that they are in control of their children's behaviours, authoritarian parents are more likely to use physical disciplines or punishment.

#### Authoritative parenting

The same as authoritarian parents, authoritative parents also have clear expectations and set boundaries to their children's behaviours. But authoritative parents tend to acknowledge their children's autonomy and allow parent-child negotiations in decision-making. Nevertheless, authoritative parents still see their children as being obedient children. That is to say, although authoritative parents encourage parent-child negotiation and leave child with some autonomy, they tend to persuade their child to follow their advice and guidance. In other words, when authoritative parents have different opinions from that of their child, it is the parents who make the final decision for their child's life.

#### Child-centred parenting

Child-centred parents tend to understand their children's decisions or opinions. They give their children a lot of autonomy in decision-making and engage in many negotiations with them. Child-centred parenting is not about being permissive in an un-structured way. Parents who are child-centred will still use their authority to guide their child's behaviours, as they think they have obligations in this regard as parents, but they will not simply impose their wishes upon them. They would engage in negotiations with their children to encourage them to make good decisions based on carefully considering their opinions including those favoured by the parents. But the decision would in the end be the child's. They will support their child even when they do not agree. This means that, after indicating their opinions, child-centred parents will allow their children the space and right to make their own decisions independently rather than forcing them to be obedient.

### **Statement of the Research Question**

Chinese society places a high value on education historically and culturally (Tsang, 2003). Thus, Chinese parents are willing to make great efforts in order to improve the educational

opportunities for their children as learning has been considered as a source of esteemed social status (Chao, 1996). Irrespective of the large amount of studies in Western countries that indicate the significant positive effects of parental educational expectation on children's educational attainment and the potential dynamic of high parental educational expectation in promoting children's upward social mobility, the relative scarcity of research on this issue in mainland China leaves the following questions still unclear. First of all, what factors have shaped Chinese parents' educational expectations for their children? Secondly, what are the mechanisms through which high/low parental educational expectations contribute to/hinder children's educational attainment? Thirdly, how parental educational expectations impact on their children's relative social mobility.

Before examining the aforementioned three questions, one issue to be stressed is that the inter-generational inheritance of family resources and social inequalities in a country is largely determined by specific social systems and elements of the social stratification system prevailing during a certain socio-historical period in that country (Li, 2006). China as a state socialist country has differed significantly from capitalist societies in this regard (Parkin, 1969). Significantly, a theme worth noting in studying intergenerational social mobility in state socialist China is the impact of social-institutional structural changes on an individual's status attainment process (Cheung, 1998). Since its establishment in 1949, China has witnessed a dramatic institutional transformation from a state-socialist redistributive economy to a market economy. Along with the changes within the economic system, the mechanisms of social stratification and patterns of social mobility have experienced fundamental changes simultaneously (more detailed discussions are presented in Chapter 2). Throughout this period, along with the rapid industrialization, urbanization and marketization in the presence of the economic globalization, a more diversified social structure has formed in China. At the same time, educational systems in contemporary China have had several reforms, from the radical egalitarianism in basic education during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) to the restoration of the National College Entrance Examination (from 1977) and then to the recent expansion and marketization in higher education. The changing socio-institutional contexts and the diversified social hierarchies as well as the constant rural-urban divide resulting from the household registration system (*hukou*) make the study of social mobility in China unique from in most industrialized countries, across which the pattern of class inequalities is much the same (Schoon and Parsons, 2002). Thus, I argue that studies looking at children's educational attainment from the perspective of social class origin and the mediating role of

parental educational expectation in social mobility should identify the changing socio-institutional contexts, whereby we can grasp the real process of social status attainment in different socio-historical periods.

Therefore, this study sets out to describe and analyse the factors influencing parents' educational expectations and to explore and discuss the impact of parental educational expectations on their children's educational attainment as well as its role in influencing children's inter-generational social mobility, from the perspective of Chinese residents born in and growing up during different socio-historical periods.

### **Fundamental objectives of this thesis**

The thesis will seek to fulfil the aims and objectives stated in below:

1. Identify the types and levels of educational expectations that parents had for their children during different historical periods.
2. Explore, describe and analyse what factors have shaped parents' expectations for their children's education during different historical periods.
3. Investigate, assess and describe how parents' educational expectations have contributed to or hindered children's improved educational outcomes during different historical periods.
4. Explore, discuss and compare the role of parents' high educational expectations in the social mobility of their children during different socio-historical periods.

In view of the exploratory nature of the present study, a qualitative approach focusing on 3 parental cohorts was adopted in the research design. Particularly, the data were collected through semi-structured life history interviews. Research participants were selected from my home city, Hebi, located in the north of Henan province, China. My sample only covers Han ethnicity, which is the major ethnic group in mainland China. Han Chinese constitutes approximately 93% of the population of China (Fong and Spickard, 1994). Sampling criterion is adapted from the classification of Chinese generations in modern China according to age cohort (Sun and Wang, 2010, Erickson, 2009). Thus, the three Generations in my study represent parents whose first child was born in 1960-1979, 1980-1989, and 1990 -2000. A disadvantage of this sampling criterion is that, it does not cover all the age cohorts within those years, but it includes almost all the influential economic, political or educational shifts or social events that occurred during the past decades. So I considered it adequate to achieve the goal of this study. My sample consists of fifteen families in all, with

five families for each Generation. Within each family, parents (two or just one) and one of their children (usually the eldest child if the child is not the only one in the family) have participated in the study. More details regarding the research sample and methodology will be presented in the methodology chapter of this thesis.

## **Chapter Summaries**

The knowledge and insights gained from the predominantly Western-based literature supported the research design and development of the current thesis. Nonetheless, the theoretical gaps in status attainment processes and the scarcity of attention paid to a context of socio-institutional changes among studies of intergenerational social mobility underlined the innovative contribution of this study.

The next chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of the changing social, economic, political structure in contemporary China, in order to establish the main features of China in relation to the dynamics of social stratification and mechanisms of social mobility as well as the development of education system.

## **Organization of the Thesis**

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis is comprised of another seven chapters, these are:

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the changing socio-historical contexts of the People's Republic of China (China) founded in 1949. It underlines the predominant social, political and economic events and reforms that have significantly impacted on the development of the national economy and education system, and that have determined the outcome of its social structures. The chapter identifies and analyses the changing mechanisms of social stratification and dynamics of social mobility in modern China, with particular attention given to the transformation of the economic systems and innovations in government policies. Fundamentally, the comprehensive background information in this chapter helps understand the rationale of the research design and provides context information for the analysis of the research results.

Chapter 3 illustrates the methodology and research methods used in this study. It contains a review of the research design including the sampling criteria, the data collection procedures, the ethical issues, the pilot study and the analytical techniques used. It also stresses the researcher's role during the fieldwork and its implications for the thesis.

For the research participants recruited for each group in the sample, Chapter 4, 5, 6 present the findings concerning the characteristics of the sampled families, and the forms or levels of parents' educational expectation, analyse the factors influencing these expectations, and then explore how parental expectations would impact on children's educational outcomes or attainments, and examine the mediating role of parental expectations in relative social mobility. Detailed and systematic discussions are provided in each chapter. Moreover, where theoretical innovation occurs is developed in the three chapters.

Chapter 7 is another chapter presenting research findings. This chapter is an inter-cohort comparative analysis explaining the findings detailed in the preceding 3 chapters. It addresses several issues including the differences and similarities of parents' educational expectations for their children, the factors shaping parents' educational expectations along with socio-economic changes and parents' involvement in their child's education in different generation. From these comparisons, I stress the impact of parental educational expectations in children's educational attainments and relative social mobility.

I draw my conclusions in Chapter 8, which answers the research questions, illustrates the study strengths and limitations, and suggests the directions for future research. It ends with a discussion about the areas where policy might help reduce educational inequalities and enhance social fluidity.

## **Chapter 2 People's Republic of China: An overview**

### **Introduction**

On 1<sup>st</sup> October 1949, Chairman Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC or China) from Tiananmen Square in the heart of Beijing. A century of foreign aggression and civil war came to the end with Mao's declaration: "The Chinese people have stood up!"

The new leaders of China who came to power in 1949 were committed to building socialism in China. Before the revolutionary success, China was a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. However, the New China founded in 1949 began the New Democracy Society, which was a transitional phase to a Socialist Society. A few years later when the socialist transformation was completed in 1956, socialist institutions were established in China and from then on China officially stepped into "the primary stage of socialism (*shehuizhuyi chujijieduan*)". "The primary stage of socialism" does not necessarily refer to a phase that every country needs to experience before it successfully becomes a socialist country, it particularly represents the stage on the path of China's socialist construction.

Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping are two of the most influential leaders in Chinese history and both of them have launched several social movements and instituted social policies that aimed to break ties with the past and pave the way for China's future. In this chapter, I will discuss the modern Chinese history in relation to the Maoist era and the Post-Maoist era respectively. My goal of writing this chapter is to provide an overview of the major social, political and economic reforms that have significantly impacted on the development of Chinese social economy, improved people's life quality, varied the standard of education and reshaped the social structure of China. I hope to provide background information that will help readers to understand the rationale of the research design and the interpretation of the research results.

### **Maoist Era: 1949-1976**

Chinese history from 1949 is often divided distinctly into the "Maoist era" and the "Post-Maoist era" (e.g., Coble, 2007, Mulvenon and Yang, 2001). The Maoist era lasted from the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC or China) in 1949 to Mao's death in 1976. He governed the country as Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China from June 1945 until his death in September 1976. Moreover, in the first plenary session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference held on the 21st

September, 1949, Mao was elected as the Chairman of the Central People's Government. Later in the first plenary session of the First National People's Congress held in 1954, Mao was selected as the Chairman of China. He was clearly the unchallenged leader of the Chinese Communist Party throughout the 1949-57 periods (Meisner, 1993). Even though during the Sixth Plenum of the Central Committee held in Wuhan in 1958, Mao was announced as no longer holding the office of PRC Chairman, he did not really "lose power" in the early 1960s and "regained" it by the Cultural Revolution (Terrill, 1999).

### **The socio-economic situation**

In 1949, the total population in China was 541.67 million, among which 484.02 million formed the rural population and the others the urban making, 89.4 per cent of the total population in the New China rural people. This made it a less developed agricultural country. Under this situation, the Central People's Government with Mao Zedong as its leader implemented a series of reforms and launched policies, among which the most influential ones were Land Reform, the First Five-Year Plan, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, to promote the development of Chinese social economy, reshape the social structure in Modern China and improve the quality of life of Chinese people.

From 1949 till the completion of the Land Reform (1950-1952) and the First Five-Year plan (1953-1957), the economic system in Chinese society was transformed from a mixed economy with a dominant public sector into a highly centralized planned economy. This centrally planned economy was prevalent throughout the Maoist era and it was not replaced by a market-oriented economic system until the reform and opening-up policy initiated by Deng Xiaoping from 1978. Although the economic situation developed dramatically over the period between 1949 and 1978, it did not perform as well as expected due to the three-year great famine (1959-1961) resulting from the Great Leap Forward campaign (1958-1960) and the severe political struggles launched during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) (Yao, 1999).

### ***Economic recovery***

When the People's Republic of China (PRC or China) was founded in 1949, the primary work in front of the Communist government was to restore the undeveloped Chinese economy resulting from years of war and political conflicts. To achieve this goal, the Land Reform Campaign and the subsequent First Five-Year Plan were launched.

### The Land Reform Campaign (1950-1952)

The Land Reform Campaign launched during 1950-1952 in rural China restored the national economy to the highest level in history up to that point (Wu, 2002). This revolution was launched mainly by expropriating the landlords and redistributing the land among the peasantry. But achieving “land to the tiller” is not the fundamental starting point of this land revolution; instead, the foothold lies in liberating and developing the rural productive forces in order to pave the way for national industrialization (Tao, 2011). Eventually, the land reform policy fully stimulated the enthusiasm of people of every class in rural China due to the private possession of land, speeded up the development of agricultural productivity and simultaneously promoted a rapid economic recovery. The land reform had substantially been completed by the end of 1952 with a successful basic economic rehabilitation, which in turn enabled CCP leadership to set the step on the road to socialism (Meisner, 1999).

### The First Five-Year Plan (1953-1957)

Followed by the completion of the Land Reform Campaign, the five years from 1953 through 1957 are described as the period of the First Five-Year Plan. The procedures under this nationwide plan were subject to massive influence from the Soviet Union (Naughton, 2007), because the CCP took the Soviet Union as a model and followed the instruction of Marxism-Leninism in almost every aspect (Rodziński, 1988). The major task under the First Five-Year Plan was realizing the socialist transformation in agriculture, handicrafts, capitalist industry and commerce (*san da gai zao*).

The initial step of the First Five-Year Plan was agricultural collectivization, the basic form of which was building agricultural co-operatives throughout the countryside. In doing so, the Chinese communist leaders attempted largely to increase the agricultural production and simultaneously make it easier for them to be in charge of the entire agricultural sector (Rodziński, 1988). By the end of 1956, 96.3 per cent of all Chinese peasants had been organized into agricultural co-operatives (Liu and Cheng 2009), an act that eliminated individual farming in China (Meisner, 1999).

Attention then turned to the cities. The nationalization of industry and commerce was completed during early 1956 with entire branches of industry and commerce being operated on a joint state-private basis (Rodziński, 1988). This means that, private ownership was virtually extinguished during this time. Thus, Naughton (2007) argued that

the year 1956 was the first year that China operated a fully “socialist” economy. That year also marked the passing of the bourgeois-democratic phase of the revolution and the beginning of socialist phase.

Chinese economy achieved an impressive rate of growth due to the three-year convalescence (1950-1952, Land Reform Campaign) and subsequent further economic development (1953-1957, the First Five-Year Plan). The total gross agricultural and industrial output value increased dramatically from 1949 to 1957. See Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Gross Agriculture and Industrial Output Value in Mainland China, 1949-1957  
(1952=100)

| Year  | Agriculture Index | Industry Index | Light Industry | Heavy Industry |
|-------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1949  | 67.4              | 40.8           | 46.6           | 30.3           |
| 1950  | 79.3              | 55.7           | 60.6           | 46.7           |
| 1951  | 86.6              | 77.0           | 81.0           | 69.7           |
| 1952  | 100.0             | 100.0          | 100.0          | 100.0          |
| 1953  | 103.1             | 130.3          | 126.7          | 136.9          |
| 1954  | 106.6             | 151.6          | 144.8          | 163.9          |
| 1955  | 114.7             | 160.0          | 144.8          | 187.7          |
| 1956  | 120.5             | 204.9          | 173.3          | 262.3          |
| 1957  | 124.8             | 228.6          | 183.3          | 310.7          |
| 1958  | 127.8             | 353.9          | 245.1          | 555.5          |
| 1959  | 110.4             | 481.7          | 299.0          | 822.7          |
| 1960  | 96.4              | 535.7          | 269.7          | 1035.8         |
| 1961  | 94.1              | 331.1          | 211.4          | 554.2          |
| 1962  | 99.9              | 276.1          | 193.6          | 429.0          |
| 1963  | 111.6             | 299.6          | 198.1          | 488.2          |
| 1964  | 126.7             | 358.3          | 233.4          | 590.7          |
| 1965  | 137.1             | 452.9          | 344.7          | 651.0          |
| 1966  | 149.0             | 547.6          | 394.7          | 830.0          |
| 1967  | 151.2             | 472.0          | 366.7          | 664.0          |
| 1968  | 147.5             | 448.4          | 348.7          | 630.1          |
| 1969  | 149.2             | 602.2          | 436.6          | 906.7          |
| 1970  | 166.3             | 787.1          | 515.6          | 1290.3         |
| 1971  | 171.4             | 904.4          | 549.1          | 1566.3         |
| 1972  | 171.1             | 964.1          | 583.1          | 1675.9         |
| 1973  | 185.5             | 1055.7         | 644.9          | 1821.7         |
| 1974  | 193.2             | 1058.9         | 662.3          | 1792.6         |
| 1975  | 202.1             | 1218.8         | 748.4          | 2093.8         |
| 1976  | 207.1             | 1234.6         | 766.4          | 2104.3         |
| 1977  | 210.6             | 1411.1         | 876.0          | 2405.2         |
| 1978  | 229.6             | 1601.6         | 970.6          | 2780.4         |
| ..... |                   |                |                |                |
| 1985  | 451.5             | 3147.5         | 2220.3         | 4808.8         |

Sources: China Statistical Yearbook 1985, p.25; and China: A Statistical Survey in 1986, p. 9.

The table is cited in Rabushka (1987): 208.

### ***Interruptions to economic growth***

The impressive economic growth and the moderate base for industrialization created by the Land Reform Campaign and the First Five-Year Plan were seriously terminated by the Great Leap Forward (GLF) Campaign launched in the spring of 1958.

The Great Leap Forward Campaign (GLF)

The Great Leap Forward Campaign was actually a disaster characterized by a collapse in grain production and a widespread famine (Yang, 1999). As it shows in Table 2.1, in the three successive years between 1959 and 1961, food grain production declined considerably and industrial output fell subsequently. Yang (1999) argues that, even though the bad weather in China between 1959 and 1961 was a contributing factor to the widespread famine, 61 per cent of such output decline was attributable to the policies of resource diversion and excessive procurement implemented under a central planning system. Therefore, this famine was caused by both natural disaster and policy mistakes made through the Great Leap Forward Campaign launched in 1958 (Kung and Lin, 2003).

The Great Leap Forward Campaign attempted to leap ahead in production by reorganizing the peasantry into large-scale communes and mobilizing society to bring about a technological revolution in agriculture. Rural communes were created during 1958 by restructuring the existing production co-operatives once organized under the direction of the First Five-Year Plan. Through the course of collectivization, co-operatives' land, equipment, most of the property and cash were compulsorily handed over to communes (Hudson et al. , 1959). At the peak of their development, there were 50,000 communes that were differing in size (Dominelli, 1991: 107).

As the Great Leap Forward Campaign proceeded, production targets were revised upward several times until they reached unrealistic levels (Peng, 1987). Heavy industry, especially steel production, was overly prioritized at the expense of agriculture and light industry. See Table 2.2. Around 90 million people, old and young, in rural and urban areas, all over the country, were engaged in local, small-scale steel-smelting operations. The goal of this campaign was to double the steel production, raising it to 10.7 million tons in less than a year. Unfortunately, in contrast to Mao's prediction that the production would increase to 30 million tons in 1959 and 60 million tons in 1960, the steel campaign resulted in a disorganization of industrial production eventually (Rodziński, 1988).

Table 2.2 Composition of Gross Output Value of Agriculture and Industry in Mainland China, 1956-1960

| Year | Proportion of Agriculture and Industry (%) |          | Proportion of Industry (%) |                |
|------|--|----------|----------------------------|----------------|
|      | Agriculture                                | Industry | Light Industry             | Heavy Industry |
| 1956 | 48.7                                       | 51.3     | 57.6                       | 42.4           |
| 1957 | 43.3                                       | 56.7     | 55.0                       | 45.0           |
| 1958 | 34.3                                       | 65.7     | 46.5                       | 53.5           |
| 1959 | 25.1                                       | 74.9     | 41.5                       | 58.5           |
| 1960 | 21.8                                       | 78.2     | 33.4                       | 66.6           |

Source: the same as Table 2.1.

The year of 1960 represented a difficult time to the new China because the consequences of the deterioration in Sino-Soviet relations, the natural disasters, the Great Leap Forward Campaign and the anti-rightist struggle appeared simultaneously (Liu and Cheng, 2009). As a result, the national economy backed into a severe crisis and the country experienced the most serious economic difficulties since its founding in 1949. Both agricultural and industrial output value decreased throughout the three years of 1960-1962, see Table 2.1. People's living standards also deteriorated sharply even though these had grown during the First Five-Year Plan.

#### Economic readjustment

To cope with this difficult situation, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China directed by Chairman Liu Shaoqi<sup>5</sup> adjusted its strategies to deal with the grave economic crisis and famine. Therefore, the years between 1961 and 1965 were a period of economic readjustment. In the meantime, major adjustments also took place within both the agricultural sector and the industrial sector. Specifically speaking, according to Naughton (2007), a new set of policies were implemented from the beginning of 1961:

“Investment was chopped back, and some 20 million workers were sent back to the countryside. Within the rural sector, the communes were drastically restructured, to place responsibility for agricultural production on smaller groups of households. Bonuses and other material incentives in industry were revived. Nationwide, small

<sup>5</sup> Since Liu Shaoqi had succeeded Mao as Chairman of the People's Republic of China in 1959 and the Great Leap Campaign had reduced Mao Zedong's power in the government, Liu gained influence within the CCP at this difficult time.

factories were shut down by the thousands as an attempt was made to concentrate production in a smaller number of relatively efficient plants; rural industry in particular was cut back.... Existing production was reoriented, to the extent possible, to provide greater inputs into agriculture.... Free markets-closed during the Leap were reopened to provide an additional channel for peasants to supply food to cities and soak up purchasing power.... (pp: 72-73).”

The new policies brought rapid economic recovery and renewed economic growth. On the one hand, the new economic policies were instrumental in promoting a slow but steady increase in grain production (Breth, 1977). The estimated grain production in China improved from around 165 to 190 million tonnes during 1961-1965 (Breth 1977: 85). Although this was slightly below the record grain harvest of 200 million tonnes in 1958 (Rabushka, 1987: 210), there seems little doubt that the new economic policies had helped restore former levels of grain production. On the other hand, some progress was made in recovering and consolidating earlier levels of industrial production (Breth, 1977). With a standard equal to 100 in 1952, industrial output value improved to 535.7 due to the tremendous investment in heavy industry during the GLP. However, it fell sharply to 358.3 with the collapse of the GLP and the implementation of the new economic policies helped restore the output value to the same level recorded in 1959, the second year of the GLF, see Table 2.1. In addition, recovered from the GLF, the output values of light and heavy industry were balanced again with a slight excess from the former (Rabushka 1987: 209).

### ***The Cultural Revolution***

As the Chinese began to show slow but steady signs of recovery from the devastation of the GLF, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution in August 1966. From then on till the death of Mao and the downfall of the Gang of Four<sup>6</sup> in 1976, China was in a so-called ten-year turmoil that was full of political fanaticism and economic fluctuations.

The Cultural Revolution was initiated by Mao Zedong who had been motivated by the success obtained through the struggle against the “political opponents” by 1966 (Rodziński, 1988). During the economic reconstruction in the early 1960s, Mao became increasingly critical of the social class relationships in the socialist Chinese society. Therefore, during the

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<sup>6</sup> The Gang of Four was the name of an important political faction during the Cultural Revolution. It was composed of four CCP officials: Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyan, and Wang Hongwen. The Gang of Four was considered Mao’s major political force for implementing the Cultural Revolution ideology during the initial stage of the Cultural Revolution. As they intended to tamper with the political power of the CCP during the latter stages of the Cultural Revolution, the Gang of Four was then labelled an anti-revolutionary force.

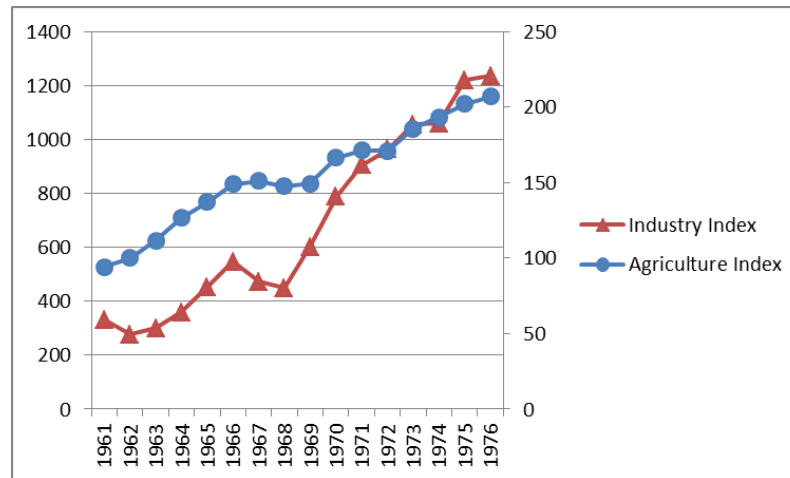
Tenth Plenum on September 1962, he emphasized the persistence of class struggles in a socialist society through warning that the classes which had been cleared out were planning a comeback and new bourgeois elements were about to come into being in our socialist society. Thus, this Cultural Revolutionary Campaign was initially launched with the original intention to defend the purity of Marxism, to enforce socialism and remove the bourgeois elements that were charged as opposing socialism but developing capitalism (Shen, 2008). Specifically, Meisner (1999: 315) states that:

“The Maoist aim was to bring about the total reformation of the country’s political structure and the social life of the nation and, moreover, the spiritual transformation of the people. ... The underlying Maoist assumption in the Cultural Revolution was that the existing state and Party apparatus was dominated by ‘bourgeois ideology’ and thus was producing capitalist-type socioeconomic relationships in society at large.”

In addition, Meisner (1999) claims that the power interests and the personal political ambitions of Mao and other Communist leaders were very much involved in the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution and the tortured course the movement took.

Cultural Revolution had a fluctuating impact on both agricultural and industrial production. In terms of the industrial production, as shown in Figure 2.1, there was a dramatic decline between 1966 and 1968, with the rate of reduction reaching a peak at around 13.8 per cent during 1967, which is also considered the most severed chaotic year of the whole ten-year turmoil. According to Breth (1977), the sharp decrease in industrial output during 1967-1968 was probably due to work stoppages, raw material shortages and disruptions to the transportation network caused by the revolutionary movements. However, the output value began to pick up rapidly after 1968. Thus, the production peak reached in 1966 had been restored by 1969. With respect to agricultural production, the Cultural Revolution seems to have had a relatively insignificant impact. Before it reached a peak in 1970, there was only a slight decrease during 1968. This is because, according to Breth (1977), there were few fundamental structural changes were made in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution.

Figure 2.1 Gross Agricultural and Industrial Output Value in Mainland China, 1961-1976 (1952=100)



Source: adapted from Table 2.1.

Drawing on the statistical data shown in Diagram 2.1, the Cultural Revolution did not adversely impact on the growth of Chinese economy, but it hindered the Chinese economy from developing as fast as it was supposed to. Fairbank and MacFarquhar (1992) further pointed out that even though the Cultural Revolution resulted in a serious loss during the most chaotic years of 1967-1969, it was actually only a temporary severe interference in the Chinese economy. Likewise, Chen (2009) indicates that the pace of development of Chinese economy during the Cultural Revolution was slow and the living standards of the people did not increase after all.

### The social structure

In capitalist societies, social stratification is prominently and constantly determined by market mechanisms; however, in state socialist societies, patterns of social stratification are fluid and vulnerable to shifts in political regulations and economic institutions (Zhou et al., 1996, Parkin, 1969). China, as a state socialist country, has witnessed an extensive change in social hierarchy especially during the Maoist era, because communist government of China launched a series of policies that dramatically altered the social structure at the time. In general, changes of Chinese social stratification during the Maoist era took place in two separate historical periods (Wu, 2002): the first period starts from the founding of the PRC in 1949 and ends in 1956; the second period starts in 1957 and ends in the early 1980s.

The first period covers the recovery of Chinese economy and the socialist transformation in agriculture, handicrafts, and capitalist industry and commerce (*san da gai zao*). The Land Reform Campaign launched by the CCP not only restored Chinese economy but also successfully eliminated the feudal landlord class. A new governing foundation consisting of four classes including working class, peasantry, urban petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie was formed in China. Afterwards, the collectivization of farming and state consolidation of urban economy eliminated the bourgeoisie, reconstructed the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie and gradually created a new social structure consisting of two classes of the working class, the peasantry and one stratum of intellectuals. Such social structure namely “two classes (*jieji*) and one stratum (*jieceng*)” was a widely acknowledged classification of Chinese population during the Maoist era (Dai, 2007, Lu, 2002).

It is worth distinguishing the two terms “social class” and “social stratum”, because they have been interpreted differently in Chinese society during different social-historical periods. According to Lu (2002: 5-6), “*jieji*” and “*jieceng*” have been the two words used to describe and analyse social stratification of Chinese population. The word “*jieji*” is used to translate “social class”, which represents the Marxist notion of class ultimately defined by the ownership of the means of production (Watson, 1984: 1). After the Liberation of the Communist Party in the Civil War in 1949, each individual was identified by a class position because the Party relied upon Marxist class theory at the time in an attempt to deepened the roots of revolution into Chinese society (Kraus, 1977). However, some Chinese scholars and ordinary people have been against the Marx’s sociology of social class termed “*jieji*” (Lu, 2002: 6), because it is so dominated by class struggles and class antagonism (Marx and Jordan, 1972: 22). In contrast, the term “*jieceng*” is more moderate in presenting a person’s position in social hierarchy and the term involves little ideology of class conflicts (Lu, 2002: 6). The term “*jieceng*” largely represents Weber’s conceptualization of social stratification, according to which a person’s hierarchical position in society is defined by prestige, power and wealth (Dai, 2007). However, in English, the term “class” can represent both “*jieji*” and “*jieceng*” (Lu, 2002: 6).

During the second period, the feature of identity (*shen fen*) came out to define one’s location in the social hierarchy in combination with class (Wu, 2002). The feature of identity had created various sub-categories especially for working class and peasant class. Hence, the threefold classification of Chinese population, namely “two classes and one stratum”, could hardly show the feature of an individual’s real location in the social

hierarchy (Chen, 2004). First and foremost, each member of the population in mainland China was classified as either rural resident or urban resident by their *hukou* identity assigned according to the household registration system, which was established in 1955 (it is still in place today) by the new Chinese communist government to control the massive rural-to-urban migration that was considered hindering the development of China into an urban welfare state (Wu and Treiman, 2004).<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, rural residents or urban residents with a rural origin were further located into different social position based on their political identity, which was actually his/her political origin, namely *chengfen* (Chen, 2004). Moreover, working urbanites were classified into qualitatively different status groups by the cadre-worker dichotomy which represents two crude job categories in the official coding system (Bian, 2002) and the work-unit boundary which refers to the organization that a working urbanite works in. While during the same period, the position of intellectuals in the social hierarchy experienced ups and downs several times because the Communist Party changed its opinion about the identity of intellectuals.

### ***“Two classes and one stratum”***

“Two classes and one stratum” was a threefold socialist era classification of Chinese population. “Two classes” represents the peasantry and the working class and “One stratum” refers to intellectuals.

#### Peasantry

During the Maoist era, rural residents grew to around 800 million and they constitute more than 82% of Chinese population during that time (China Statistical Yearbook, 1996). But economic stratification rarely existed in rural China as a result of agricultural collectivization during the Maoist era. After the intensive collectivization in agriculture during 1950s, peasant income was redistributed from the production team which he/she had been assigned to. The distribution of collective income was based on a work-point system resting on the principle “to each according to one’s labour” and this principle was uniform among all the production teams (Chinn, 1978). Nonetheless, work-point system operated along sexist lines as women were assigned fewer points than men: seven or eight compared to eleven or twelve, even though they were doing the same work (Dominelli, 1991: 107-108). Due to the low agricultural productivity and heavy state tax at the time, the crops or wages that each household received from the production team failed

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<sup>7</sup> All households were registered in the locale where they resided and were categorised as either agricultural or non-agricultural households (Wu and Treiman, 2004: 364).

sufficiently to feed and clothed them (Lu, 2002). As a result, poverty was very common in the countryside, so that there was little economic difference between rural households or between individual peasants.

Although economic stratification was not significant in rural areas, rural residents were assigned to different social position according to their political identities. An individual's political identity is actually his/her political origin, namely *chengfen* (Chen, 2004). It was an inherited identity could not be changed by personal effort. A series of political identities was produced according to farmers' various relations to the means of production or sources of economic support (Kraus, 1977: 56), and these political identities were assigned to each agricultural household before the Land Reform Campaign. Five categories of political identity were used according to Mao's analysis of rural classes in 1926 (Watson, 1984: 4): landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants, and landless labourers (hired agricultural labourers). The term "*chengfen*" is often used in conjunction with "*jieji*" and is perhaps the closest notion to the Marxian conception of social class (Watson, 1984). The socio-political hierarchy in the countryside took the poor and landless peasants as the most prestigious class, while the middle peasants, rich peasants and landlords were of less priority (Unger, 1984).

Political origin (*chengfen*) not only located individuals into different social classes but also strongly influenced their life chances in the Maoist era. The former poor and lower-middle peasants were to comprise the "good-origin" (*chengfen haode*) households. According to Unger (1987), they usually stood first in line for the most coveted jobs, such as teaching. Middle peasants were less competitive than poor and lower-middle peasants. Although middle peasants could become brigade cadres or even village leaders, they had to be especially capable and exceptionally activist to get political promotion. Moreover, people of good political origins had greater chances to join the army, receive education especially higher education, obtain employment and get promotion (Chen, 2004).

#### Working class

After liberation, the working class became the leading class in China. Although working people did not own any means of production, they were favoured and considered leaders of the country by Chinese Communist Party (Xu, 2007). Therefore, in the Maoist era, a person would feel proud of being a member of the working class. As the major class in the social structure in the Maoist era, working class people were further classified into

qualitatively different social strata by the cadre-worker dichotomy and work-unit boundary as explained below.

#### The cadre-worker dichotomy

The cadre-worker dichotomy created a status distinction among working class individuals. Cadre (*ganbu*) and worker (*gongren*) are two crude job categories in the official coding system (Bian, 2002a). Cadres were people who occupied prestigious managerial and professional jobs in Communist Party institutions, government organizations, social groups and state enterprises (Bian, 2002; Wu, 2002). But in a broad sense, cadres were often extended to include all those with a university degree (Treiman and Wu, 2001). The counterparts of cadres were ordinary workers.

Cadres were in the upper strata that everyone wanted to attain and they enjoyed a series of better welfares than ordinary workers (Lu, 2004). In general, there were three mechanisms through which an individual can become a cadre in the Maoist era. First of all, those who got an academic degree above technical secondary school and accepted the job assigned to them by the state would automatically obtain cadre identity. Secondly, among ordinary workers or even peasants, those who passed the political evaluation and performed well at work would have the chance to get promotion and then rise to the cadre strata. But promotion in each work-unit was restricted to limited quotas amongst the cadres assigned by the state, so the second mechanism was rarely accessed by individuals who wanted to acquire a cadre identity (Lu, 2004). Thirdly, junior and the above ex-military officers who were transferred to civilian work would automatically obtain cadre identity.

#### Work-unit boundary

As the counterparts of cadres, ordinary urban workers were further distinguished based on the work-unit (*danwei*) boundary. Work-unit refers to the organization that a working urbanite works in. In socialist China, workers were assigned to their respective work-units upon their graduation from school and were expected to stay in their work-units for life with daily necessities provided by their respective work-units. Thus, work-unit was also viewed as “mini-communities that provided comprehensive welfare for the workers from cradle to grave” (Sung-Chan and Yuen-Tsang, 2008: 78). Generally speaking, the stratification of the work-unit in the Maoist era was a state-collective dualism, which was comprised of privileged state-owned sectors and less-privileged collective sectors according to their relation to the state and its property (Zhou et al., 1996). Workers enjoyed better

career trajectories, promotion opportunities, and other life chances in state-owned sectors than they would in collective sectors (Bian, 1994b). But the most significant advantage obtained by state workers was the lifelong employment, namely the “iron rice bowl”, and the impressive array of insurance and welfare benefits (Ip, 1995). Therefore, workers in state-owned sectors were considered to be of a higher social status than those in collective sectors, although they all belonged to the urban working class. Zhou (2000) distinguished the following types of work organizations: Governmental agencies, public organizations, central government-owned firms, local government-owned firms, collective firms and private/hybrid firms. Among the six types of work organizations, the first four were directly administrated and financially supported by the state via the planning economy; while the last two were often sponsored by local governments or partly collectively-owned and partly privately-owned.

#### Intellectual stratum

Within Chinese academy, there is actually no consistent conceptualization for intellectuals but basically, intellectuals were carriers of knowledge but not owners of the means of production (Rui Li, 2003). According to Wu and Wei (2008), intellectuals referred to mental labourers who had received upper-secondary education, and had acquired professional skills. Between 1956 and 1966, intellectuals were comprised of four groups of people: skilled personnel, professionals, students and civil servants (Wu and Wei, 2008).

During the Maoist era, the social status of intellectuals changed a few times and was subjected to varied political regulations and state policies. Before the Cultural Revolution, the changing attitudes of the Party to the attributes of intellectuals underwent four stages (Yan, 2010). Initially, from the establishment of the New China to 1956, intellectuals were mostly considered a part of the working class. This judgement was taken as an appropriate one and received constant support from Premier Zhou Enlai from before the liberation of the Communist Party (Hemin Li, 2007). When the growing leftist thought emerged in 1957, the Party’s understanding of the social status of intellectuals changed, so that intellectuals were eventually redefined as a class of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois. Nonetheless, the acknowledgement that most of the intellectuals comprised the working class was restored by Zhou Enlai between 1961 and 1962. This recognition was turned down in 1963. Soon afterwards intellectuals were again assigned to the bourgeois.

During the Cultural Revolution (CR), since intellectuals were perceived by the Chinese Communist Party as bourgeois, the enemy of the proletariat, and a barrier to socialist

construction, they were assigned to a lower social status than the working class and peasantry. What is more, intellectuals were severely attacked over the course of the Cultural Revolution and were treated with suspicion and hostility by Maoist leaders whilst individuals with peasant and worker backgrounds were given priority (Zhou et al., 1996, J. S. Zhang et al., 2007, Kleinman and Kleinman, 1994). Subsequently, Mao's prejudice against intellectuals expanded to his discrimination against all educated people. As a result, the prevailing attitude among the society during the Cultural Revolution was "study is useless". Thus, educational achievements were not appropriate in assessing an individual's social status during the CR.

### ***Rural-Urban dualistic structure***

Key to the rural-urban divide was a rigid household registration system or *hukou* system. The *hukou* system was established in China's urban areas in 1951 and then it was extended to rural areas in 1955 (Fu and Ren, 2010). Since then, every citizen in China has been assigned either rural or urban identity. Even though bearing the same name with the residence recording systems in Taiwan or Japan, the Chinese *hukou* system serves distinctive functions by dividing citizens into two classes and thereby creating an urban-rural dualistic structure peculiar to China (Wing Chan and Buckingham, 2008).

Rural residents and urban residents were assigned to different positions in the social hierarchy because the *hukou* system prioritized the city over the country and treated rural residents as inferior second-class citizens. First of all, rural-to-urban migration was severely restricted (Wu and Treiman, 2004). Using the household registration system, the state only allowed peasants to leave their farms but not their villages. Secondly, the *hukou* system denied rural population access to permanent urban employment. Even though there were some working opportunities for rural household registers in market towns or urban cities, they were only allowed to work temporarily and had no rights to settle down permanently in these territories (So, 2003). This means that, when the work in the city was done, they had to return to the countryside immediately. Most severely, the state reserved resources disproportionately for those classified as urban residents (Cheng and Selden, 1994; Christiansen, 1990, Potter, 1983). For instance, the state provided urban residents with employment, housing, food, water, sewage disposal, transportation, medical facilities, police protection, schools, and other essentials and amenities of life (Banister, 1987: 328). None of the services or welfare entitlements routinely provided to urban residents were available to rural residents (Cheng and Selden, 1994).

Given the strong differentials in privileges and great disparities in the quality of life between rural and urban residents, changing one's *hukou* status from rural to urban is considered upward mobility in Chinese *hukou* hierarchy (Wu and Treiman, 2004). But there were great difficulties in moving from rural to urban status for a rural-born individual during the Maoist era. According to Lu (2004) and Bian (2002), only a few rural residents had the chance to move to cities or towns through attending higher education and accepting subsequent job assignments. Joining the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was another way of changing *hukou* status. But Party membership was generally not accessible to ordinary peasants because the CCP did not actively recruit individuals in rural areas (Wu and Treiman, 2004). Therefore, for most rural residents, attending higher education was perceived the only means for getting out of agricultural life.

### **Educational development**

According to (Lu, 2004), education has constantly been a significant factor influencing people's social status attainment in China. However, the magnitude of its effect is different in different historical periods. In this section, I will briefly introduce the various educational systems in traditional China, the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China in the Maoist era. Also, I will discuss the development in education and the role of education in promoting social mobility in each socio-historical period. Additionally, I will introduce women's status vis-à-vis men in access to education in Chinese society from imperial period to the Maoist era.

#### ***The Confucian educational tradition***

The role of education in pre-1911 China consists of four important periods (Hawkins, 1983). First of all, in the early Zhou Dynasty (1046 BC-256 BC), a set of moral codes later broadly termed Confucian emerged. As Confucius suggested that there should be no class distinctions in education (*you jiao wu lei*), Chinese traditional education was considered a system based on merits rather than ascriptions even though at the time social mobility was not widespread nationally. Secondly, during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD), Confucianism was declared to be the official state doctrine in 124 BC by the emperor Wu Ti, who established an imperial university called the Hanlin Academy, to perpetuate and implement Confucian philosophy. Scholars who trained in the Hanlin Academy and passed the imperial civil service examination in Confucian classics would become officials and bureaucrats in central or local government. In practice, the examinations were open to the masses, making it possible for a man of humble origins to move into the official bureaucracy, thus serving the cause of social mobility (Cleverley, 1991). However, Seeberg

(2000) argued that poor families could hardly afford the years of support either in terms of time or living expenditures. As a result, there was a strong correlation between an applicant's family socioeconomic status and his education or examination success at the time. It is also worth noting that women were not allowed to take those examinations. Hence, there was low social mobility, although Confucian thought constantly suggested that people could be removed from the drudgery of being a physical labourer or the hardships of peasant life through study (Fouts and Chan, 1995). Thirdly, during the Song dynasty (960AD-1279), a national educational system was established to facilitate training of civil servants and other government personnel following an increased emphasis on learning and knowledge and the revival of Confucian. The fourth historical period of educational change and development occurred during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Many scholars began to advocate an educational system that is more conducive to the needs of modernization and social change. Thus, modernization of the school system took place during this period without aiming to reproduce a scholar class.

### ***Women's inferior status vis-à-vis men in accessing education in China (221 BC-1911)***

For centuries of civilization, women in China experienced severe gender discrimination. In Chinese traditional society, the major role women played was within domestic and they were barely allowed to participate in waged work outside family. Women's values were largely realized through and embodied in family life, such as "serve the husband and educate the children" (*xiangfujiaozi*). This means that waged work outside family on the one hand and family care and domestic work on the other, were distinct domains for men and women. Moreover, because Confucians taught that a virtuous woman was subordinate to her father before marriage, her husband after marriage, and her son after her husband died, women's independence was rejected under this social norm and they were considered an attachment of men (Jimang Wang, 2011). The Confucius statements, such as "Men are born superior to women", "A woman without talent is virtuous one", "A man is assessed by his talent and achievement and a woman by her appearance", served to illustrate how demeaning women's social position had been in traditional China.

Being put into such an inferior position both within and outside the family, women were kept out of formal schooling in traditional China. Lee (1995) indicated that what women learned (usually from informal education at home but not school) in those days was limited to social ethics and family traditions that would help them become a virtuous wife or a good mother. Women's status in formal schooling became even worse with the arrival and

prevalence of Confucian ideology in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), when parents would not teach their daughters to read and write for fear that they might become over ambitious and not accept to a man's control, thereby failing to become a dutiful wife or mother. Hence, women had little chance to learn reading and writing, let alone being sent to school for formal education. However, given the existence of women's literature throughout history, Lee (1995) argued that there were a few fortunate women, most of whom were born either into a liberal family or in an era of relative enlightenment, who benefited from a private home tutor. But Lee (1995) added that, these intellectual women were only a tiny proportion of the entire female population in those days.

Although this small group of women were able to receive the same formal schooling as that of men, they were prevented from participating in any political, social, or academic public events. Most fundamentally, according to Liu and Carpenter (2005), the imperial examination which was conducted to aid the selection of government officials between AD 600 and 1905 was assumed to exclude women. This assumption was not questioned during the thirteen hundred years of its implementation and further confirms the severe gender discrimination women faced and its widespread acceptance among the Chinese population in those days.

### ***Education in the Republic of China***

The Qing dynasty collapsed in 1911 and the Republic of China established in 1912. This new regime brought an abrupt end to the prevailing educational system and the civil service examination system that dominated more than 2000 years of Chinese history (Hawkins, 1983). Afterwards, educational reformers in China began to search for more democratic forms of schooling. The Japanese and American educational systems exerted a strong influence on Chinese educational policy at the time, because increasing numbers of Chinese scholars were sent abroad after the establishment of the Republic of China and they returned with new ideas regarding the role and function of education (Hawkins, 1983).

The intention of educational reformers was to build a popular public educational system in China to replace the traditional elitist private system. However, education at any level was still not attainable for the masses (Seeberg, 2000). In terms of the primary education, although new public schools were open to all, the number of such schools was limited. So school-age children from disadvantaged groups were excluded. Following the new public primary schools were highly selective junior secondary schools and even more competitive senior secondary schools. Since most of these secondary schools were boarding schools,

they were practically inaccessible to the masses, only to the urban population and country gentry. The college entrance policy at the time was a separate mode, under which the admission size, recruiting criteria, and other policies were decided by college themselves (Zheng, 2008). This separate mode college entrance policy was just like the policy adopted in the UK, US, or some other western countries. However, few secondary school students would pass exit exams from the steeply tiered system of secondary education to enter colleges or universities. As a result, the function of education to promote upward social mobility waned during this period.

Within this new education system, although gender equality was granted in theory, far fewer girls than boys had access to schools in practice. Less than 1 per cent of the school-aged girls were attending school in 1910. Later in 1935, the percentage of girls in the total enrolment in secondary schools across China was not more than 20 per cent (18.83%).

The chaotic conditions created by the Second World War, the Chinese Anti-Japanese War and the Civil War during this period resulted in a distinct lack of provision of education and an overall poor quality of educational administration and instruction. Therefore, at the end of the era of the Republic of China, educational deficiencies were highly apparent (Cleverley, 1991). By 1949, more than 80 per cent of Chinese population was illiterate and the school enrolment rate of school-age children was around 20 per cent. In the same year, 25 per cent of elementary school age children were in class, 3 per cent of the appropriate age group was in middle school and only 0.3 per cent in higher education. Specifically, Lu (2004) indicated that during the 20 years from 1928 to 1947, the overall number of college or university graduates in China was only 18,500. All these figures affirmed China's low educational standards at the time.

### ***Education in the Maoist era***

After the victory of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, the CCP leadership started to reform the old educational system. Following the ideology of Mao who advocated an open school system in which members at large would play an important role (Hawkins, 1983), educational opportunities for peasants and workers whom Chinese Communist Party was going to unite increased dramatically. For instance, students of worker-peasant class origins in 1952 comprised 82 per cent in primary school, 57.7 per cent in middle school, and the quota of higher education for children of workers and peasants was higher than for children of other class origins (Cleverley, 1991). Moreover, the educational policy formulated low schooling costs for primary and middle schools, as well as free enrolment

to higher education for those who passed the entrance examination (Guan, 2000). So, money was not as important as it is in contemporary China for parents who expected their school-age children to go to school.

As a tool admitting students to higher education in China, a unified National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) was created in 1952 in response to the request of the Ministry of Education (Zheng, 2008). NCEE was a national unified examination that was under the ultimate control of the National Examination Authority within the Chinese Ministry of Education. From 1953 to 1965, NCEE played as the main access route to university in China, and the exam results alone determined their entry into Chinese universities (Davey et al., 2007). However, not all students were allowed to take this national unified examination between 1953 and 1965. Song (2009) indicated that NCEE registers were required to pass a check of their family origin, class ideology, and political performance before being able to take the exam. That is to say, the access to higher education was not available to all. But the positive aspect of this policy was that, workers, peasants and their offspring who were not able to go to school because of poverty before 1949 became more likely to get access to high education depending on their “good” origins, and thus, they got more opportunities for upward social mobility as well (Lu, 2004).

The Cultural Revolution (CR) was a disaster for the educational system in communist China. From 1966 when the Cultural Revolution campaign was initiated, many schools closed, students and teachers had to leave school and make revolution. When many primary and middle schools reopened after 1967 and universities were opened later in 1970-71, substantial structural changes were introduced (Hawkins, 1983). Most fundamentally, unified entrance examinations for both middle schools and universities were all abolished because enrolment by examination was criticized as excluding children from worker, peasant, and revolutionary ranks (Cleverley, 1991). Moreover, the half-work and half-study system was applied to all university and middle school students (Löfstedt, 1980). In the meantime, priority for placement in schools would go to children of peasants, workers, soldiers and revolutionary cadres, whom the radicals were interested in (Shen, 1995).

The NCEE was broken off from 1966 to 1976 along with the closing down of colleges and universities throughout the country due to the political movement. Although some colleges resumed recruiting students in 1972, they adopted a recommendation system rather than the previous national examination system. This recommendation system included four steps (Zhang, 2008: 60): Register Freely; Recommended by Common People; Approved by

Leadership; Reviewed by Colleges. Under this system, the major criteria adopted to select candidates for college admission were good class origin and political consciousness, while the importance of academic requirement was reduced to a very low level (Deng and Treiman, 1997, Hawkins, 1983, Shen, 1995, Cleverley, 1991). For example, candidates who wanted to be recommended to college or university were only required to be graduates of junior higher schools or up (Zhang, 2008: 60).

Because class origin and political performance became the determinants of a person's enrolment to higher education, children of poor peasants, workers, soldiers and revolutionary cadres gained priorities in being recommended to college or university (Shen, 1995). The study of Zheng (2007) provided empirical evidence for this situation. Based on students in Xiamen University, Zheng's research findings revealed that, in 1976 (the last year of CR), 36.17 per cent of the students in Xiamen University were children of cadres; students whose parents were peasants or workers occupied 26.08% and 15.99% respectively; whereas only 9.83% of the students were children of intellectuals.

However, the amended recruitment policy was carried out in a different way from Mao's initial educational line which advocated that educational programs should serve the masses (Chen, 1981). Since selection was to be based on recommendation by urban work-units or rural communes, Xu (2000) contends that, the elites in the group of workers-peasants-soldiers tended to take advantage of their privileges or social capital to send their children to university. Seeburg (2000) also indicates that the route for urban and rural residents to mobility was called the "backdoor" (*hou men*) and the key was held by CCP cadres. Under this situation, local CCP cadre's children, regardless of educational background, were recommended for university study while villagers had little hope that they could aspire to participation in schooling for their children. As a result, a common phenomenon prevailing in the society during that time was that, students who took the largest proportion among all university students were mostly the children of cadres or other social elites. Such a situation implies that, tertiary education failed to be the route through which disadvantaged groups could achieve upward social mobility (Lu, 2004).

In spite of the interruption of the Cultural Revolution, gains in education were impressive from the time the communist government took charge of the New China. During the period 1949-1952, primary school enrolments rose from 24.3 million to 51.1 million, which accounted for about 60 per cent of school-age children. Middle school enrolments, including special technical/vocational schools, rose from 1.2 million to 3.1 million and

higher education students from 117, 000 to 191, 000 (Cleverley, 1991). Primary school enrolment rate was 61.7 per cent in 1957. It increased to 84.7 per cent by 1965. In 1978, the rate increased to 95.5 per cent, which illustrated that primary education was almost universalized in China. Junior secondary education made great development as well during the time. In 1957, only 44.2 per cent primary school graduates were enrolled in junior middle school. But in 1975, more than 90 per cent primary school graduates would proceed to go to junior middle school. See Table 2. 7. Regarding the secondary education, Löfstedt (1980) indicated that, junior middle school education was already universal in the large and medium-size cities and in senior middle school as well.

In terms of tertiary education in the Maoist era, the quantity of new entrants, enrolments and graduates was still low by comparison with the quantity in the post-Maoist era. But great development had been achieved by 1978. From 1952 to 1965, the number of new enrolments in higher education more than doubled. In 1970, when institutions of higher education were either closed or stopped recruiting new students due to the Cultural Revolution, the figure of college entrants decreased to 42,000, which was four times less than before the CR. But subsequently in 1978, the number increased dramatically to 402,000, ten times more than in 1970, and two times more than in 1975. This is partially because of the restoration of the National College Entrance Examination in 1977. The number of students graduating from institutions of higher education, in spite of the decrease during the cultural revolutionary years, it increased from 32,000 in 1952 to 119,000 in 1975. See Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Number of New Students Enrolment, Students Enrolment and Graduates of Higher Education: 1952-1978

| Year | New Students Enrolment | Students Enrolment | Graduates |
|------|------------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| 1952 | 79,000                 | 191,000            | 32,000    |
| 1957 | 106,000                | 441,000            | 56,000    |
| 1962 | 107,000                | 830,000            | 177,000   |
| 1965 | 164,000                | 674,000            | 186,000   |
| 1970 | 42,000                 | 48,000             | 103,000   |
| 1975 | 191,000                | 501,000            | 119,000   |
| 1978 | 402,000                | 856,000            | 165,000   |
| 1980 | 281,000                | 1,144,000          | 147,000   |
| 1985 | 619,000                | 1,703,000          | 316,000   |
| 1986 | 572,000                | 1,880,000          | 393,000   |
| 1990 | 609,000                | 2,063,000          | 614,000   |
| 1995 | 926,000                | 2,906,000          | 805,000   |
| 2000 | 2,206,000              | 5,561,000          | 950,000   |
| 2002 | 3,205,000              | 9,034,000          | 1,337,000 |
| 2004 | 4,473,000              | 13,335,000         | 2,391,000 |
| 2006 | 5,461,000              | 17,388,000         | 3,775,000 |
| 2008 | 6,077,000              | 20,210,000         | 5,119,000 |
| 2010 | 6,618,000              | 22,318,000         | 5,754,000 |

Source: National Statistics Bureau, China Statistical Yearbook (1996, 2001), China Statistics Press, Beijing.

### ***Women's improved access to education during the Maoist era***

Since the Chinese Communist Party took political power and established the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Communist government has made constant efforts to improve women's social status versus men and instituted a series of measures to promote gender equality in China. Liu and Carpenter (2005: 279) stated that:

“The Chinese Communist Party government implemented a gender equality policy from its beginnings in 1949. Reinforcing Marxist and Leninist ideology, Mao Zedong, first Chairman of the government, issued this statement: ‘Women can hold up half the sky.’ It soon became a popular political slogan. The Chinese Women's Federation was authorized to be in charge of women's affairs of the nation, including education. The Federation issued several documents to emphasize the significance of women's education. These documents stated that all school-age children, boys and girls, were expected to receive at least five years of education (Chen and Gao, 1994). For the first time, all girls had the opportunity to go to school.”

Chinese women's access to education increased steadily during that time (Bauer et al., 1992). For instance, the proportion of female primary students in both rural and urban areas of China rose from about 30% in the early 1950s to almost 40% in the late 1950s. Then it climbed to 45% in the late 1970s. The female proportion in high school increased from 25% to 40% between 1949 and 1981. Moreover, the proportion of women in universities and colleges grew from 20% in 1949 to 25% in 1953.

However, Liu and Carpenter (2005) noticed that the beliefs of socialism promoting gender equity failed to overcome the deeply rooted Confucian beliefs about gender roles and social practices, particularly in conservative rural areas, where there were limited educational resources. Thus, although the gender gap in accessing education narrowed over time during the Maoist era, it still existed.

### **Post-Maoist Era: 1977-present**

Deng Xiaoping's grip on power through the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and his subsequent initiation of the reform and open-door policy at the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress on December 22nd, 1978, marked the beginning of the post-Maoist era. After Mao's death in September 1976, Hua Guofeng arrested the Gang of Four, and thereby brought the Cultural Revolution to its end in October. As a successor of Mao Zedong, Hua Guofeng asserted that he was going to follow Mao's legacy and continue his policies. Thus, instead of rectifying Mao's leftist errors resulting in the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, he declared the “two-whatever” editorial in 1977. The “two-whatever” indicates: “to support whatever policy decisions were made by Chairman Mao” and “to unswervingly follow whatever instructions were given by Chairman Mao”. Afterwards, Hua was denounced for following everything Mao decided and directed as what the “two-whatever” conveyed (Vogel, 2011). Conversely, Deng Xiaoping received increasing

encouragement and support by the higher-level Party leaders at the time. Therefore, on July 17, 1977, the Third Plenum of the 10th Party Congress passed “The Decision Concerning the Return of Comrade Deng Xiaoping to Work.”<sup>8</sup> Soon afterwards, the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress (hereafter the Third Plenum) began on 18th December and ended on 22nd December, 1978. The goal of this conference was to correct the “leftism” that prevailed before and during the Cultural Revolution, to rectify Hua’s “two-whatever” guidelines and to re-establish the Marxist ideological line for the Party. In addition, the Third Plenum shifted the emphasis of the Party’s work from “class struggle” to “socialist moderation”. Thereafter, the Maoist era passed and the Communist China stepped into the post-Maoist era.

### **Economic reforms: rural reforms and urban reforms**

Since the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party held in 1978, Deng Xiaoping and other Chinese leaders shifted the focus of their work to economic development. In the same year, they implemented the Economic Reform and Open Door Policy, the goals of which were to reduce the domination of the command economy, eliminate the residual economic inefficiencies from the Maoist era and foster domestic markets in China (Wong and Han, 1998, Zheng, 2005). Afterwards, a series of economic reform programmes were initiated firstly in rural and then in urban areas according to the guidelines of the Market Reform and Open Door policies. Therefore, 1978 marks the beginning of the post-Maoist era, which is also the era of post-Maoist economic reforms (Yin and Gordon, 1994). So in the present thesis, post-reform era and the post-Maoist era represent the same period. That is from 1978 to the present.

### ***Rural Reforms***

Deng Xiaoping aimed to increase peasant income through the Four Modernisations<sup>9</sup> in agriculture, science and technology, industry and the military (Dominelli, 1991: 109). Soon after the Third Plenum in 1978, rural reform was introduced through which collectivized

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<sup>8</sup> At the plenum, Deng was officially returned to positions including: member of the Central Committee, member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, vice-chairman of the party, vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission, vice-premier, and chief-of-staff of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army.

Behind Hua Guofeng and Ye Jianying, Deng ranked third among on the Standing Committee. Available at: <http://dangshi.people.com.cn/GB/165617/166496/168121/10011522.html>.

<sup>9</sup> The term “Four Modernizations” was derived from Zhou Enlai’s report for the Fourth National People’s Congress in January 1975. He called for rapid modernization in 1) agriculture, 2) industry, 3) national defence, and 4) science and technology, so that China would be transformed into a “powerful, modern socialist country” by the end of the 20th century. But the realization of this goal had been left to the Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping since Zhou was ill with cancer when he deliberated this editorial.

agriculture prevalent since the mid-1950s was abandoned and communes built during the Great Leap Forward campaign were dismantled. The “household responsibility system” which re-established the family household as the basic unit of production was widely applied in rural areas. Under this new system, farmers were permitted to use their private plots to increase production of light consumer durable and agricultural products, and they were allowed to release the agricultural products gained from private plots through the free market where all surplus products are exchanged after they had turned over a certain amount of grain to the government as tax (Dominelli, 1991). By the end of 1983, 98 per cent of peasant households had converted to this new system and received appreciation for having increased production and productivity (Meisner, 1996). Growth rates in all major agricultural sectors were accelerated to levels much higher than the long-term average level over the pre-reform period (Lin, 1992).

Peasants were never restricted to villages doing agricultural work in the post-reform period. They were encouraged to work in either rural or urban industries, commerce, transport, building and other trades. Due to the agricultural output growth (See Table 2.1), free market development and new income opportunities, the net per capita income of rural households rose from less than 150 *yuan* in 1978 to around 400 *yuan* in 1985, and reached to more than 2000 *yuan* by 1997 (Oi, 1999). At the same time, the life quality of the great majority of rural residents improved significantly (Meisner, 1996).

### ***Urban Reforms***

The central government was encouraged to initiate comprehensive economic reforms in urban areas in light of the successful experiences from the rural reforms. The focus of the urban reforms was to remove the barriers around industrial enterprises and create a more favourable environment to promote higher economic efficiency. Along with the increasing status of the market economy was the government’s reduced control and intervention in enterprises (Wong and Han, 1998). Particular emphasis was given to the development of collective and private enterprises, especially in the tertiary sector of the urban areas (Li, 1993). Therefore, by 1992, even though state-owned enterprises still produced most of the industrial output, the highest annual real growth between 1980 and 1991 was provided by private enterprises between 1980 and 1991. See Table 2.4.

| Type of firm | 1992<br>Output share<br>(percentage) | Annual real growth,<br>1980-1991<br>(percentage) |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| State        | 48.4                                 | 7.8  |
| Collective   | 38.2                                 | 18.6   |
| Private      | 6.7                                  | 140.6  |
| Other        | 6.6                                  | 43.5   |
| Total        | 100.0                                | 12.8   |

Table 2.4 Industrial Growth and Structure

Source: the table is cited in (Rawski, 1994: 272). The data present in the table are derived from Statistical Yearbook of China's Industrial Economy (1992: 34, 36); Statistical Survey of China (1993: 70).

Moreover, due to the Open Door policy initiated in the early 1980s, the amount of foreign investment expanded dramatically (Rawski, 1994). International trade has been increasing and the Chinese economy has gradually become a part of the globalizing world economy (Guan, 2000). Specific economic zones such as Shenzhen were set up as test grounds for new economic policies regarding foreign countries and more coastal regions were opened up for foreign investment. Later in the 1990s, the government opened up China even more by joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) and deepening domestic economic reform (Zheng, 2005).

### **Socio-economic development**

Eventually, economic reforms and openness greatly influenced the urban development of Chinese cities and stimulated significant improvements in the Chinese economy.

### ***The growth in national economy***

Extraordinary economic growth took place in China after the beginning of Deng's economic reforms in 1978. The official data shows that the average annual GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth was 6 per cent in the pre-1978 period, but ever since the start of the Opening Up Policy and reforms in its economy, China has had averaged 9.4 per cent annual GDP growth by 2005 (Naughton, 2007). Moreover, although China accounted for less than

1 per cent of the world economy in 1978, it accounted for 4 per cent of the world economy by 2004 (Zheng, 2005). Currently, the GDP of China accounted for 9.3 per cent of the world economy by 2010 (International Statistic Yearbook, 2011). No wonder that China plays an increasingly important role in the world's economy.

### ***Increased household income***

Along with the growth in the national economy is the increased household income for Chinese people. The official data show that the annual per capita rural household net income increased by about 82 per cent from 1978 to 1992 in spite of inflation. This high growth has been maintained in the following two decades. At the same time, the growth in annual urban disposal income is also phenomenal. See Table 2.5.

Table 2.5 Annual Per Capita Household Income (*yuan*)

| Year | Rural net income | Urban disposal income |
|------|------------------|-----------------------|
| 1978 | 133.6            | 343.4                 |
| 1980 | 191.3            | 477.6                 |
| 1985 | 397.6            | 739.1                 |
| 1989 | 601.5            | 1373.9                |
| 1990 | 686.0            | 1510.0                |
| 1992 | 784.0            | 2026.6                |
| 1993 | 921.6            | 2577.4                |
| 1994 | 1221.0           | 3496.2                |
| 1995 | 1577.7           | 4283.0                |
| 1996 | 1926.1           | 4838.9                |
| 2000 | 2253.0           | 6280.0                |
| 2004 | 2936.4           | 9421.6                |
| 2008 | 4761.4           | 15781.0               |
| 2009 | 5153.0           | 17175.0               |
| 2010 | 5919.0           | 19109.4               |

Source: State Statistical Bureau, Statistical Yearbook of China, 2011<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Available at: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/statisticaldata/yearlydata/>.

### ***Improved living standard***

The growth of household income has brought about an improved living standard for Chinese people. Basically, although the data remain controversial, China's official poverty statistics reveal that poverty in the rural population was reduced from 31% in 1978 to 3% in 2000 (Park and Wang, 2001). In addition, Chai (1992) indicated that real per capita consumption in China had risen at an average annual rate of 7 per cent from 1978 to the early 1990s. Thus, the average standard of living of a Chinese citizen in 1990 was twice more than that of 1978. Moreover, as an internationally acknowledged index of a country's living standard, the Engel's coefficient<sup>11</sup> in the pre-reform China was sustained over 60% which means people were living in a severe poverty during that period. But since 1978 when economic reforms were launched, the index of Engel's Coefficient reduced year by year, as shown in Table 2.6. The statistical data further indicated the take-off growth of the Chinese economy and the significant improvements in people's living standards.

Table 2.6 Engel's Coefficient of Urban and Rural Households (%)

|       | 1978 | 1992 | 2000 | 2010 |
|-------|------|------|------|------|
| Urban | 57.5 | 53.0 | 39.4 | 35.7 |
| Rural | 67.7 | 57.6 | 49.7 | 41.1 |

Source: State Statistical Bureau, Statistical Yearbook of China, 2011.

However, national economic growth alone cannot provide the whole picture of China's recent economic development. First and foremost, as it shows in the above table, a gap remains between urban and rural households in terms of the Engel's Coefficient. Such a gap not only indicates that the consumption level of rural residents is lower than that of urban residents, but also illustrates that rural residents' consumption outside of food is still limited compared to urban residents. According to Zhang (2006), the major reason for rural residents' lower consumption level is having far less income than urban residents.

### ***Urban-rural income inequality***

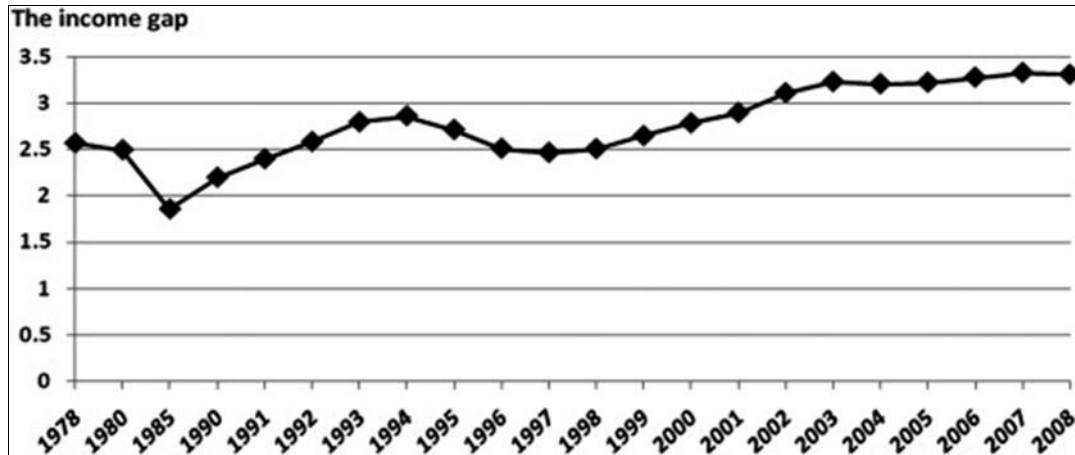
Indeed, although economic reforms initiated since 1978 have significantly improved the average well-being of Chinese people, the development has often been uneven (Zheng, 2005). Yang (1999) indicates that China has undergone a dramatic increase of urban-rural income inequality since the start of the economic reforms in 1978. China's urban-rural income ratio (shown in Figure 2.2) has become one of the highest in the world (Sicular et al.,

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<sup>11</sup> The Engel's coefficient is measured by the proportion of household income spent on food.

2007). The urban-rural income disparity has also impeded the progress of poverty reduction in China (Yao, 1999).

Figure 2.2 The income gap<sup>12</sup> between rural and urban residents in China, 1978-2008.



Source: National Bureau Statistics of China, 2009 (cited in Long et al., 2011).

Scholars have investigated the factors underlying the severe urban-rural income disparity (e.g. Yao, 1999, Sicular et al., 2007, Liu, 2005). The household registration system (*hukou*) that denies rural residents the rights to urban life, education, and employment has been the major factor resulting in China's urban-rural income inequality. What is more, the value of rural labourers and the price of agricultural products have been restrained by national policies of severe urban bias and the monopolized market economy (Zhang et al., 2011: 21). Thus, Yao (1999) notes that reducing urban-rural income inequality requires a fundamental change of government attitude that up to now has been urban biased.

***Control population growth: The one-child policy***

China's population has experienced rapid growth since 1949. In the end of 1949, China's population was around 542 million. In 1952, China held 574.82 million individuals, but the number increased to 962.59 million by the end of 1978. As it has been widely accepted that mounting population pressure will hinder modernization process and economic development (Shen, 1998), the central government has strongly advocated curbing China's population growth. Measures instituted include birth control and family-planning programs, abortion, encouragement of late marriage, and the one-child-per-family policy (Hua, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> The income gap was calculated by dividing the per capita disposal income of urban households by the per capita net income of rural households.

The one-child policy was introduced in 1979 and it dictated that an individual family is only allowed to have one child (Hesketh et al., 2005). This one-child-rule applies mainly to urban residents, while in rural areas, a second child is generally allowed, especially if the first child is a girl (Goodkind, 2004). This provides evidence that gender discrimination against women still exists in China, especially in rural areas. China's population growth rate has been somewhat slowed at least partially by the one child policy. The growth rate in 1978 was 1.2 % and then it increased unevenly to 1.661% by 1987. But from 1988, the population growth rate decreased constantly to 0.479% by 2011 (China Statistic Yearbook, 2012). The UN predicates the average annual population growth rate of China will be 0.4% by 2015. Hesketh, Li and Zhu (2005) examined the consequences of the policy in regard to population growth, the ratio between men and women, and the ratio between adult children and dependent elderly parents. The results illustrated that: (a) the total fertility rate, which is the number of children a woman of child-rearing age can expect to have, on average, during her lifetime, decreased from 2.9 in 1979 to 1.7 in 2004. The UN predicates that the total fertility rate is 1.6 between 2010 and 2015. This is far below the "replacement rate" which is 2.1. (b) the reported sex ratio at birth, defined as the proportion of male live births to female live births, increased from 1.06 in 1979 to 1.17 in 2001; and (c) the rapid decrease in the birth rate as well as the improving life quality led to an increasing proportion of elderly people and an increasing ratio between elderly parents and adult children. In addition, the one-child policy has changed the Chinese family structure after its inception, whereby the one-child-per-couple family became the dominant paradigm in China (Fowler et al., 2010). For instance, by 2011, three-person-household took the largest proportion, 27.7%, among all households in China (Chinese Statistical Yearbook, 2012). What is more, scholars have argued that the one-child policy has reduced parents' educational gender bias, since one-child families have no incentive to discriminate against girls in education and girls do not have brothers to compete with for parental investment in education (e.g. Tsui and Rich, 2002, Fong, 2002).

### **Social structure evolution**

China's class structure has changed dramatically in the wake of post-1978 market-oriented economic reforms. The creation of a mixed "market-socialist" economy has eroded the Maoist "two classes and one stratum" social structure and created conditions for a new pattern of social stratification (Bian et al., 2005). The feature of identity in the Maoist era, either *hukou* identity or political origin, has gradually been replaced by occupational categories that define an individual's social status (Lu, 2002). Simultaneously, a structure of

discrimination based on political origins created during the Land Reform campaign according to peasants' ownership of means of production was officially discontinued after 1978 (Unger, 1984; Zhou et al. 1996).

In rural areas, since the commune system was replaced with the household responsibility system and the *hukou* system was loosened, peasants were not restricted to the countryside and they were given a large degree of control over their own activities (Goldstein, 1990). Plus, rewards would be based on an individual's work efforts for rural residents (Dominelli, 1991). Many surplus agricultural labourers were induced to go to nearby market towns or faraway cities to work as temporary migrant workers (So, 2003). Consequently, the large influx of agricultural workers to Chinese cities created huge "floating populations", who accounted for more than 20% of the inhabitants of large cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou in the 1980s (Wong and Han, 1998). And the number of rural migrant workers increased constantly and dramatically, from an estimated 30 million in 1989 to about 130 million in 2006 (Shi, 2008). Despite the growing freedom, it remains extremely difficult for rural migrant workers to acquire urban registration and their human capital is not well-rewarded by comparison with urban residents regarding job opportunities, wages, and other employer-provided benefits (Knight and Song, 2003). So rural migrant workers (*nong min gong*), emerged in cities after economic reforms, are as a group in a disadvantageous status in the urban labour market.

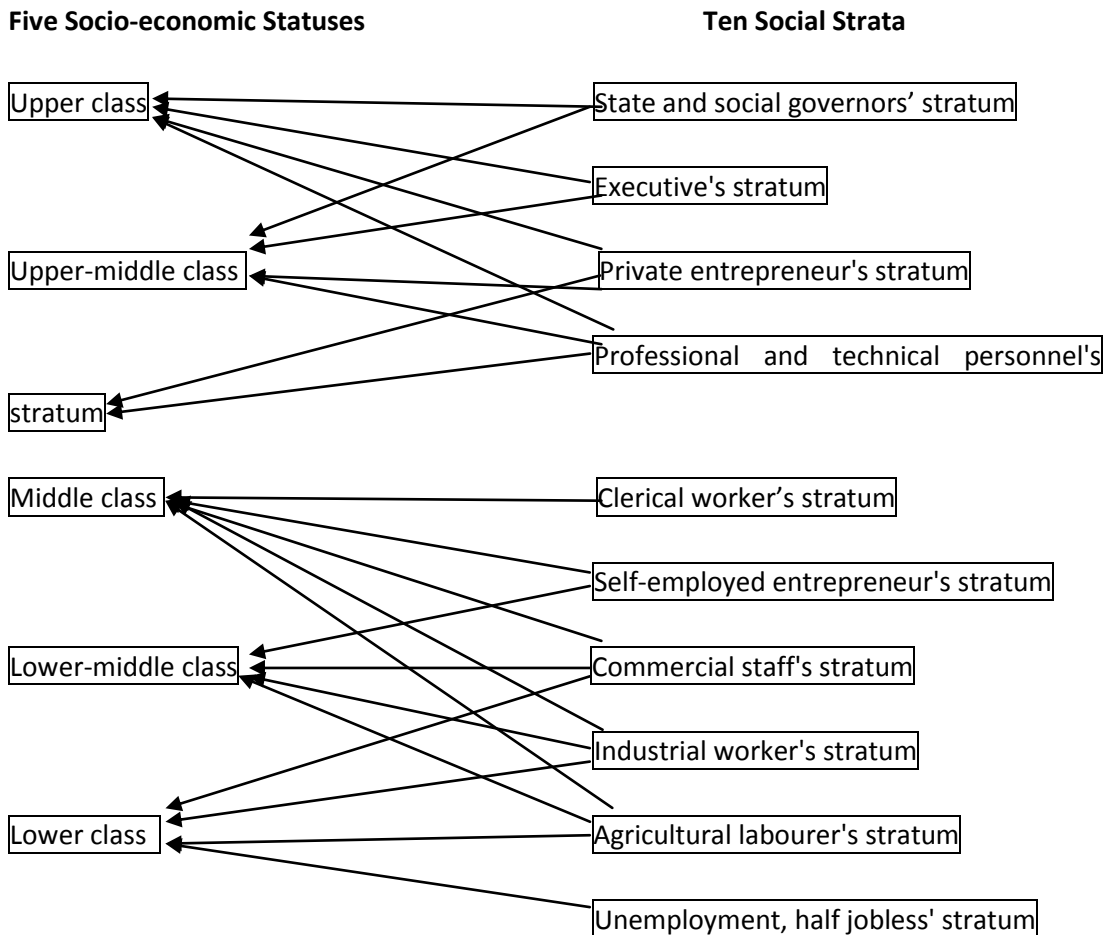
Actually, since 1978, China has experienced a rapid process of urbanization. The proportion of urban population in China rose from 17.92% in 1978, to 26.41% in 1990 (China Statistical Yearbook, 2000), then the figure rose significantly from 30.89% in 1999 (China Statistical Yearbook, 2000) to an impressive 51.3% in 2011 (National Economic and Social Development Statistics Bulletin, 2011). This indicates that more than half of Chinese population are urban residents at present. In terms of the dynamic behind this dramatic urbanization progress, Zhang and Song (2003): 387 argue that rural–urban migration has been the dominant source (75%) of the growth of China's urbanization between 1978 and 1999.

In urban areas, along with the rapid industrialization, the urbanization and marketization processes have formed a more diversified and advanced occupational structure in comparison with that existing in the Maoist era. In the present occupational structure, the number of senior occupations and the proportion these occupations covered has increased. Thus, people have got more chances to climb up the social ladder regarding their

occupational status and income (Lu, 2004). Moreover, similar to industrialized market societies, occupational stratification is more and more likely to reflect the categorization of social status in contemporary China (Lu, 2002). At the same time, the previous state-control job assignment system has been replaced by a “mutual-selection” employment system. The mutual-selection system refers to applicants making their own choices over work-units or occupations, and employers conducting recruitment according to their own principles. Based on this labour employment policy as well as the growing market-oriented economy, individuals who have acquired more education are more advantageous in obtaining working opportunities (Maurer-Fazio, 1999, Haizheng Li, 2003). Hence, people are getting more confident with their future and they are more likely to aspire for a higher social status, because they believe that they can achieve it as long as they make the effort (Lu, 2004).

In 2002, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences issued *The Report on Social Stratification Research in Contemporary China* is considered the most comprehensive attempts to provide a systematic analysis of China’s contemporary social stratification (Anagnost, 2008). This report is primarily edited by Lu (2002), who proposes a “ten strata” social structure comprising “five socio-economic statuses”. See Diagram 2. 3. Occupational categorization is the base of the classification of the ten social strata. The possession of organizational resources, economic resources and cultural resources are the stratification criteria for the ten strata (Lu, 2002: 8).

Figure 2.3 Social structure and social hierarchy in contemporary China



Note: Arrows in the above diagram represent that some of or all of the occupations in each stratum can be assigned to one of the five socio-economic statuses.

As for the use of language in social stratification analysis, there was a gradual shift from using the term “class” in the Maoist era to the adoption of “social strata” in post-Mao era, particularly during the economic reform-era (Anagnost, 2008). Specifically speaking, Liang (1997) argued that “as society develops economically, class as an organisational principle of society is superseded” (cited in Anagnost, 2008: 503). Thus, the term “class” as a tool to analyse social stratification can no longer grasp the complexity of the market-driven social difference in economic reform-era of China, because the Marxist notion of class featured by class struggles is no longer applicable in modern China which aims to develop a “harmonious society (*hexie shehui*)” (Watson, 1984, Anagnost, 2008). Ever since the 1990s,

“social strata (*shehui jiecheng*)” has replaced Marxist notion of “social class (*shehui jieji*)” in the analysis of social stratification in modern China, because the new term of “social strata” refers social inequality in a way that does not assume social antagonism (Anagnost, 2008: 500-503). Therefore, Chinese scholars nowadays tend to use the term “social strata (*jiecheng*)” rather than the term “social class (*jieji*)” in social stratification analysis. As Diagram 2.3 shows, Lu (2002) adopted the word “socio-economic status” or “social stratum” rather than “social class” to categorize people in contemporary China. I will also be very careful in using “class” and “strata or socio-economic status” to describe an individual’s social position in the subsequent sections of this chapter and the following chapters of the current thesis.

### **Educational development**

The post-reform period has witnessed an amazing development in education. The restoration of the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE), the launch of the nine-year compulsory education and the large and rapid expansion in higher education all have contributed to the development of education in modern China. An academic degree has gradually become the key means to obtain a job in the labour market and to acquire a higher social status in China (Sun, 2005). Therefore, people of any social category have paid growing attention to education and have attempted to invest in their offspring’s education in order to bring about intergenerational social mobility (Wang, 2012). But problems also emerged along with such rapid development, among which the devaluation of academic degree has received the most attention in the current society as it impacts on the mediating role of higher education in social mobility. Moreover, women’s status in accessing educational opportunities has improved dramatically in post-Mao era, especially in the past three decades.

### ***Return of the National University Entrance Examination***

When Deng Xiaoping returned to work as a key leader in the central government in 1977, he attempted to amend the higher education system. Before Deng’s return to work, he insisted that the selection of students for better educational institutions should be carried out according to competitive entrance examinations other than “proper class background” and “proper political thinking”. Therefore, when Deng began took charge of state education, he not only ended the recommendation system but also restored the University Entrance Examination in 1977, which had been stagnant for ten years due to the Cultural Revaluation. From then on, everyone in China us equal to compete for Higher Education opportunities and the recruitment decision is made based on their exam results, but not on

their family origin or political performance anymore (Zheng, 2008). Vogel (2011) said that the restoration of the NCEE indicated the first time in China enrolment for college was entirely based on academic merit since the Communists ruled China. Furthermore, Lu (2004: 79) argued that, higher education was almost available to everyone at the time, not only because of the fair university entrance examination system, but also because higher education was free for entrants. Thus it came to be the most influential factor in motivating people's upward social mobility.

### ***Reforms in the education system***

Since 1978, China has carried out a thorough reform of the education system to speed up the development of national standards in education (Dewen Wang, 2003). Among all the system reforms that have been launched in the past three decades, changes in the higher education recruitment system, the universalization of nine-year compulsory education and the expansion in institutions of higher education have been the focus of educational policy in China. These system reforms have significantly increased the availability of educational opportunities and have increased people's access to education.

### ***Changes in the higher education recruitment system***

In the early stages of the reform era (1977-1985), the number of students that could be recruited by higher educational institutions was entirely controlled by the Chinese Ministry of Education, namely the "single-track system". Under this system, all the recruited students could enjoy higher education for free because almost all the expenditure of running a higher education was funded by the state (Yin and Gordon, 1994). The state even subsidized students' living expenses so that higher education was affordable to all students who qualified (based on the scores of the National College Entrance Examination) and few would be rejected by a higher educational institution due to financial constraints (Qu, 2008).

In 1985, in order to keep pace with the state market-oriented system reform, the Central Committee issued the policy document entitled "Decision of the CCP Central Committee Concerning the Reform of the Educational System". This allowed higher education institutions to "enrol a limited number of self-financed students beyond the national enrolment plan". Yin and Gordon (1994) defined those who self-fund higher education as "fee-paying students", and stated that:

“These fee-paying students generally fall into two categories: commissioned students and self-supporting students. The former refers to those enrolled on the basis of contracts with enterprises and other employing organisations, or even individual employers; the latter refers to those who have to pay out of their own pockets. While commissioned students will usually go back to work for the employers who have paid for their commissions, self-supporting students are expected to find their own jobs upon graduation (P: 219-220).”

From then on, the “single-track system” was switched into a “double-track system”. “Double-track system” claims that higher education institutions should recruit state-funded college entrants, as well as fee-paying students. Among all the new college entrants, there was a considerable increase in the number of fee-paying students from 1985 to 1989, although the number of self-supporting students was almost negligible before 1985 (Yin and Gordon, 1994).

In 1993, the state council issued another document entitled “Program for China’s education reform and development”, which announced the government’s desire to increase the proportion of fee-paying students among all the new entrants to higher education institutions. Afterwards, the “double-track system” was re-unified into a new single-track system, which was experimentally carried out in some higher education institutions from 1994. Wenli Li (2007) argued that this was a large-scale cost-recovery policy, which intended to terminate the dual-track system of public and personal financing for university students.

This “re-unified single-track system” was quite opposite to the initial state controlled enrolment strategy. According the new system, each student should pay for his or her own higher education. This means that the double standards on the tuition fee for students within and outside the state plan were abandoned. According to this re-unified principle, all the new college entrants should be recruited, be charged and be employed against the same criterion (Sun 2010). From then on, the role that “money talks” has become a harsh reality in respect to attending tertiary education (Yin and Gordon, 1994: 224). By 1997, this system had been substantially implemented among all the regular institutions of higher education throughout China.

In essence, the above system changes represent the marketization of Chinese higher education, which denotes a process whereby higher education in China becomes a priced

commodity provided by competitive suppliers (Yin and Gordon, 1994). Thus, all college students are required to pay whatever amount tuition their university has set, irrespective of family income.

As a result, from 1990s, the access of people from financially disadvantaged groups to higher education might be blocked because they cannot afford the tuition costs. Or, they may not even dare to expect for higher education since they know they have no way to pay for it.

#### *Nine-year compulsory education*

During the past three decades, the implementation of compulsory education in both primary and secondary levels has been a focus of educational policy in China. In 1985, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China released the Decisions on the Reform of China's Education System, which clearly outlined the goal of universalizing nine-year compulsory education step by step. The nine-year compulsory education is combined by six-year primary school and three-year junior secondary school. In 1986, the National People's Congress passed the Compulsory Education Law, proclaiming the compulsory provision of the nine-year basic education and that all the six-year olds have the right to schooling regardless of their gender, ethnicity, and race. The law requires that the state, the community, schools, and families guarantee the right of all children to schooling and it also stipulates that tuition should be free of charge to students receiving nine-year compulsory education, and the miscellaneous charges should also be abolished gradually. However, the charge of both tuition fees and miscellaneous changes were in operation before 2008, due to the lack of state funding and local investment in education, especially in underdeveloped regions and rural areas (Wang, 2003). Thus, it has been since 2008, when nine-year compulsory education became entirely free of charge in both rural and urban areas, that China had achieved the universalization of nine-year compulsory education both in name and in fact (Diao, 2010).

With the expansion in compulsory education, China has made great improvements in primary school education and junior secondary school education. From 1986 to 2010, the enrolment rate of school-age children rose from 96.4 per cent to 99.7 per cent, an increase of more than 3 per cent. The proportion of primary school graduates entering junior secondary school rose from 69.5 per cent to 98.7 per cent, an increase of almost 30 per cent. The proportion of junior secondary school graduates entering senior secondary schools rose from 40.6 per cent to 87.5 per cent, an increase of 47.1 per cent. See Table 2.7.

Table 2.7 Situation of Compulsory Education in China, 1952-2010.

| Year | School-Age Children |                    | Primary School Graduates |   | Junior Secondary School Graduates |   |
|------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|
|      | Number (million)    | Enrolment Rate (%) | Number (million)         | Percentage of Graduates Entering Junior Secondary schools (%) | Number (million)                  | Percentage of Graduates Entering Senior Secondary schools (%) |
| 1957 | 49.866              | 61.7               | 4.980                    | 44.2  | 1.112                             | 39.7  |
| 1962 | 108.360             | 56.1               | 5.590                    | 45.3  | 158.4                             | 30.0  |
| 1965 | 116.032             | 84.7               | 6.676                    | 82.5  | 1.738                             | 70.0  |
| 1975 | 122.619             | 96.8               | 19.994                   | 90.6  | 10.477                            | 60.4  |
| 1978 | 121.313             | 95.5               | 22.879                   | 87.7  | 16.926                            | 40.9  |
| 1980 | 122.196             | 93.9               | 20.533                   | 75.9  | 9.647                             | 45.9  |
| 1985 | 103.623             | 96.0               | 19.999                   | 68.4  | 9.983                             | 41.7  |
| 1986 | 100.675             | 96.4               | 20.161                   | 69.5  | 10.570                            | 40.6  |
| 1990 | 97.407              | 97.8               | 18.631                   | 74.6  | 11.091                            | 40.6  |
| 1995 | 123.754             | 98.5               | 19.615                   | 90.8  | 12.443                            | 48.3  |
| 2000 | 124.453             | 99.1               | 24.192                   | 94.9  | 16.071                            | 51.2  |
| 2002 | 113.104             | 98.6               | 23.519                   | 97.0  | 18.799                            | 58.3  |
| 2004 | 105.481             | 98.9               | 21.352                   | 98.1  | 20.704                            | 63.8  |
| 2006 | 100.755             | 99.3               | 19.285                   | 100.0   | 20.624                            | 75.7  |
| 2008 | 97.720              | 99.5               | 18.650                   | 99.7  | 18.629                            | 82.1  |
| 2010 | N/A                 | 99.7               | 17.396                   | 98.7  | 17.486                            | 87.5  |

Source: National Statistics Bureau, China Statistical Yearbook (1996, 2001), China Statistics Press, Beijing.

According to the Law for Compulsory Education, parents are under obligation to send their school-age children to primary school and subsequently to junior middle school. This

means that school-age children after 1986 should at least finish junior secondary education in principle, no matter whether they or their families expect them to do so or not. Therefore, given that the age of entry to primary school was six to seven, I suppose that children born after 1980 have received higher educational expectations in average from their parents compared to those who were born before 1980. In addition, having obtained primary and junior secondary education was no longer a competitive advantage for a person since the late years of the Maoist era. The primary school enrolment rate and the proportion of primary school graduates entering junior secondary schools have been more than 90 per cent since 1975, even though the later one experienced some decrease before it reached the peak of 100 per cent in 2006. So parents who wish their children to become distinctive either in educational attainment or become competitive in labour market have to expect them to obtain an educational level higher than junior secondary school. Nowadays, due to the expansion in higher education during the 1990s, which I will talk about in the following section, even an academic degree awarded by a higher educational institution cannot guarantee a decent job or a higher social status for an individual.

#### *The expansion of higher education*

The recent expansion of higher education in China has been significant. Levin and Xu (2005) argue that the situation of rapid growth and numerical expansion in higher education enrolments since 2000 has been incomparably greater than the historical experience of any other countries. We can see from Figure 2.4, Figure 2.5, regarding the regular institutions of higher education, the number of new entrants, the number of students and the number of graduates have been fluctuating since the end of 1970s till the end of 1990s. Most significantly, the expansion in higher education has apparently been accelerated since 1999.

Figure 2.4 Number of new students enrolment in regular institutions of higher education and number of graduates from regular institutions of higher education (million): 1978-2011

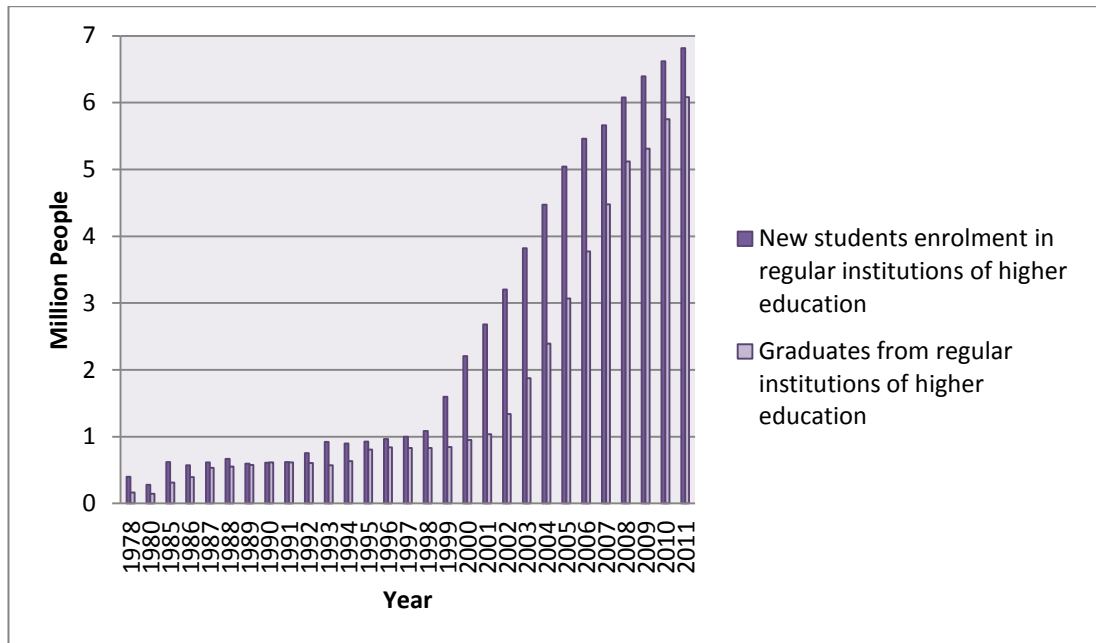
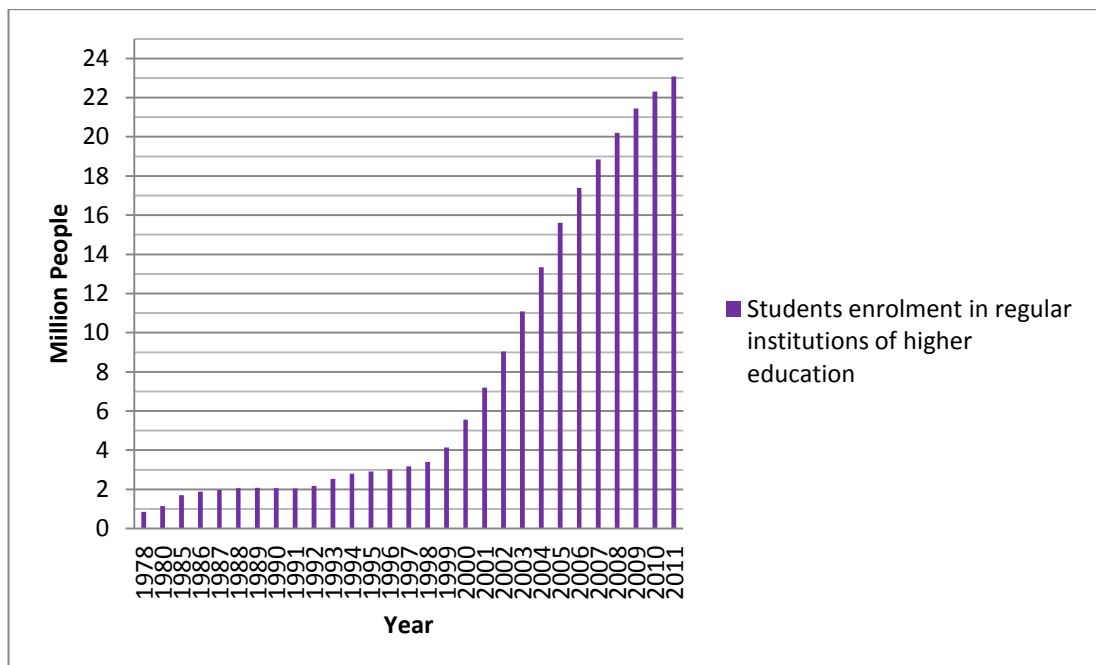


Figure 2.5 Number of students enrolment in regular institutions of higher education (million): 1978-2011



The causes of expansion in higher education are various. From the economic perspective, the expansion of higher education was set up to cope with the Asian financial crisis

occurred in the late 1990s, to release employment pressure in the labour market, expand the domestic demand and promote the economic growth (Hu, 2009). From the demand and supply perspective in market theory, this huge expansion in tertiary education in China has been compelled by two factors: one is derived from the labour market where there is an increased demand for highly educated workers. For example, the share of workers with a college education or above increased from 12.6% in 1988 to 28.1% in 2001 (Zhang et al., 2005). The other factor is derived from the increasing return on education in China. This means that the educational level achieved has a significant positive impact on successful job seeking and starting salary (Li et al., 2008). As I have mentioned, China had an extremely compressed wage structure in the pre-reform period. Hence, some researchers have estimated a low rate of education return in China during the 1980s (e.g. Byron and Manaloto, 1990, Meng and Kidd, 1997). But during the 1990s, the return on education increased simultaneously following the progress of economic reforms (Maurer-Fazio, 1999; Gustafsson and Li, 2000). Specifically, the rate of return on education was only 4.0% in 1988, but it had risen to 10.2% by 2001 (Zhang et al., 2005). Furthermore, they observed that the increase in educational return has been observed across all groups of workers categorized by gender, experience, region and ownership. Therefore, demands for higher education are promoted and individuals are getting more and more inclined to invest in higher education in order to secure a decent job or social status.

All in all, human capital represented by academic degrees has become more and more important in determining an individual's status achievement in modern China. Lu (2004) said that China became a "Degree Society", where higher education began to be taken by families of every social class as a means to secure a higher status for their children.

#### *The status of women vis-à-vis men in accessing educational opportunities*

Equal participation in formal education for women and men improved dramatically during the four decades from the early 1950s to the end of 1980s, alongside modernization in state socialist China. Besides the direct benefits of documents promoting gender equality in education issued by the central Chinese government, women also benefited from the remarkable expansion of education launched from the early 1950s. The percentage of women vis-à-vis men at all levels of education increased (Mak 1989: 109-133). For example, in primary school, the percentage of girls in total enrolment rose from 28 per cent in 1961 to 44.8 per cent by 1985. During the same period, women's enrolment in secondary education rose from 26 per cent to around 40 per cent. The rise of women's enrolment in

tertiary education was not as impressive, from around 20 per cent in the beginning of the 1950s to no more than 30 per cent by 1985.

However, through a close examination of women in education and the labour-force in China based on the data from the 1987 One Percent Population Survey, Bauer et al. (1992) argued that gender inequality still existed in both urban and rural areas, although state policy in theory provided equal educational opportunities for both men and women. Zheng and Lian (2004) also indicated that, in the process of the development for equal education in China, the rate of improvement for men was higher than that for women. So, men and women did not benefit equally from the national policy. The results of the One per cent Population Survey in 1987 revealed that, 48% of men and 88% of women aged 45 and above in rural areas were illiterate, while the proportion of 15-19 years old boys and girls who were illiterate was 6% and 15% respectively. In urban areas, 29% of the men and 67% of the women of the older age cohort were illiterate, compared to 2.3% of younger men and 6% of younger women. These numbers indicate that, children or young adults in both rural and urban areas had more opportunities than their parents to attend formal schooling, but the proportion of women who were illiterate was still around two and a half times more than that of men. The rural-urban gap persisted as well. This means that, girl children in rural areas were still in the worst position educationally in those days.

More recently, women's status in accessing education has witnessed considerable improvement. But the gender imbalance in higher education has not altered fundamentally (Duan, 2006). In spite of the expansion in higher education, the percentage of women students studying in institutions of higher education increased from 23.4% in 1980 to 41.0% in 2000. In 2010, the percentage of women students among all undergraduate students was 50.86%, which means there were more women students than men students in colleges. In the same year, the percentage of women post-graduate students was 47.86%. However, there were still fewer women doctoral students than men doctoral students. In 2006, the percentage of women among all doctoral graduates was 33.87% (China Statistical Yearbook, 2007), and the figure increased only slightly to 36.13% in 2011 (China Statistical Yearbook, 2012).

### ***Devalued academic degree in Chinese labour market***

When the mutual employment selection system replaced the unified job assignment system in the late 1990s, the labour market that had prevailed in industrialized countries became evident in China. Initially, individuals with higher educational degrees had more

advantages in getting a waged job. However, as time passed by, the grim employment situation in the recent labour market reflects that an academic degree has been devalued in terms of its function in job applications. Li et al. (2008) argue that along with the expansion of higher educational institutions is the increasing number of job seekers with higher education qualifications, which in turn has impacted on the supply and demand of well-educated labourers in the labour market. Compared to those who entered in the labour market before the expansion of higher education, fresh graduates may find it difficult to obtain jobs.

Evidence for the devaluation of academic degree in the labour market can be found from the results of empirical survey research conducted in China. Wen (2005b) indicated that the employment rate of graduates with either a college diploma or a BA in 2003 (60.5%) was a bit lower than the employment rate of graduates in 1998 (62.6%). What is more, the starting salary of graduates with either a college diploma or a BA in 2003 was significantly lower than the starting salary of graduates in 1998, when the inflation and general wage increases amongst employees had been controlled. However, although the employment situation of postgraduate students is better than undergraduate students, the employment situation of postgraduate students has also become more and more severer recently along with the rapid expansion in higher education (Wang and Zhao, 2006). For instance, there was a 0.48% and a 0.78 % decline in the employment rate for graduates with a MA in 2006 and 2007 in Shandong province (Guo and Yu, 2008).

Thus, Qian (2004) claims that nowadays academic degree only provides people with a qualification to enter the labour market, it can never guarantee a job for a graduate. As a result, although higher education in China had effectively produced social mobility during the 1970s and 1980s (Zheng, 2012), its role as an engine of upward social mobility has diminished since the late 1990s (Xiang and Liu, 2011, Wu, 2009).

Also, it is noteworthy that gender discrimination against women in employment is becoming more and more severe due to the increasingly fierce job competitions among higher education graduates (Qibing Wang, 2011, Haiping Li, 2007, Wu, 2005). Under the same conditions in terms of academic degree, the inferior status of women graduates compared to their men counterparts is embodied in several aspects relating to Chinese labour market. Firstly, there are less working opportunities available for women than for men. In other words, working organizations such as government departments, educational or research institutions, banks, hospitals and other commercial organizations are more

likely to recruit men rather than women who are both university graduates. For instance, 42 among the 75 investigated enterprises replied that they would only recruit men while only 26 of them would recruit both men and women (Pan, 2004). Secondly, men are much more likely than women to obtain better jobs in terms of occupational prestige, wage, insurance, welfare and working condition (Qibing Wang, 2011). This indicates that gender segregation still exists in current Chinese labour-force. Thirdly, women's job applications are much more likely than men to be turned down due to their appearance, height, weight, and age. Survey data reveal that 31.3% of the women informants replied that they had the experience of being rejected by enterprises due to the aforementioned factors. However, only 10.9% of the men informants said they had such experiences (Wang, 2002). Physical characteristic-based discrimination against women in employment has already received intensive attention in Western countries such as the UK and America (Duncan and Loretto, 2004, Puhl et al., 2008). As for China, this issue is also receiving more and more attention from social scientists due to its influence on women's employment.

All in all, the chance for women to obtain upward social mobility through higher education becomes even more severe than that of men.

### ***The mediating role of education in social mobility persists***

Although higher education is not as effective as before in promoting better social status, it is still indispensable in China for a person who wants to get a job in the labour market, because an appropriate academic degree is still a necessary qualification for a new graduate to enter the labour-force (Qian, 2004). This is also attributable to the fact that formal schooling is still a key factor determining the class destination for children whose parents are ordinary or not affluent (Zheng, 2007).

Some studies have provided empirical evidence that illustrate the persistence of education in social mobility in contemporary China. For instance, Lin and Bian (1991) drew on Blau-Duncan's model (Blau and Duncan, 1967) to assess the status-attainment process in Tianjin, China. But in the causal sequence, Lin and Bian included work-unit section and party membership as independent variables, in light of the characteristics of Chinese society compared to the industrial country of America. Using the zero-order correlation and path coefficients, they found that, for men (after age has been controlled for), education explains 37% of an individual's occupational status; while for women estimated in the same condition, the regression coefficient for education was 23%. In terms of the first-job

achievement, the explained variance for an individual's own education was 0.31 for men, and 0.24 for women.

Most recently, Pang (2012) examined the status attainment process in China based on Lin-Bian's status-attainment model. The data used by Pang was from the *2008 Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS)* conducted by the National Survey Research Centre at Renmin University in Beijing, China. Pang's status-attainment model illustrates that an individual's own education significantly impacts on his/her first job, as well as his/her final occupational status. But in Pang's model, the estimated effect of education on occupational status was 0.217, which is smaller than in Lin-Bian's model. To explain this, Pang argued that, the decrease of the explained variance for education merely indicates the contribution rate of education in respect to an individual's occupational attainment has slightly reduced, whereas education is still an important factor. Additionally, Pang's status-attainment model indicates that father's and child's job-sector and party membership have little impact on child's occupational attainment. However, these factors were significant variables in Lin-Bian's model in influencing an individual's status attainment. It argues that China's recent transformation to market-oriented economy has largely destroyed the economic institutions prevalent in the planned economy period, when job-sector distinction and political identity largely determined a person's status attainment. When excluded these insignificant variables, Pang's model illustrates that the only significant variable which directly influences one's first job is his/her own education (0.45). Moreover, it reveals that the direct effect of parents' occupation on children's occupational attainment is not significant at all. This finding further argues the significant effect of education in defining a person's social status and its role as mediating factor in social mobility in current Chinese society.

In a word, ever since the implementation of the Economic Reform and Opening Up Policy, the demands for an individual's educational attainment have been increased along with the progress of industrialization and the emergence of the knowledge economy in China. Consequently, education turns out to be the most important factor determining a person's occupation status, particularly the first job (Yu Li, 2007). Even though the magnitude of the influence of higher education in determining one's occupation status declined when compared to that of the 1980s or the early 1990s, it is still the most important factor nowadays.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the changing socio-institutional context of People's Republic of China. I have discussed and analysed the predominant social, political and economic events and reforms that have significantly impacted on the development of national economy and education, and that have determined the evolvement of social structure. Whereby, I indicate that China has changed a lot in its social and political institutions and largely developed its economy during the past decades. Chinese social structure transferred from the rigid "two classes and one stratum" mode to a more comprehensive "ten stratum" social structure which to a large extent includes all the necessary social strata of any industrialized country. I have also reviewed and analysed the changing mechanisms of social stratification and social mobility in modern China. It shows that education has largely determined a person's social status ever since the traditional period. Higher education, in particular, acts as a mediating factor in social mobility in modern China, regardless of the recent degree inflation after the expansion in higher education.

## **Chapter 3 Research Methodology and Research Methods**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents a general landscape of the research design. It explains the research methodology and methods I employed to solve the research problem. It also illustrates the detailed research procedures employed as well as the ethical issues considered in the research for the thesis. I will discuss how I recruited the research participants, how I collected data through life history interviews and how I analysed the qualitative data. In revealing these practical research procedures, I also have attempted to pursue reflexivity on my researcher role and the implications of this for the thesis.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Narrative method**

There are no adequate definitions for narrative or narrative research that are agreed by all academic scholars so far. Consequently, people have given specific definitions to these terms in light of their own research goals or topics. According to Hinchman and Hinchman (1997), narratives in human sciences should be defined as discourses that have a clear sequential connecting events in an order that will be meaningful for a definite audience. Similarly, Abbott (2002) defined narrative as the representation of an event or a series of events. More specifically, Esterberg (2002) considered narrative a kind of story told by someone with a beginning, a middle, and an end. More recently, Elliott (2005) indicated that narrative research also can be defined as any study relying on narrative materials that are composed of either qualitative or quantitative data.

Narrative research has been conducted within a wide range of disciplines. For example, it has been used to understand how family system may affect the child's development (Fiese and Sameroff, 1999), to explore the transmission of risk and competence through story telling with families (Dickstein et al., 1999), and to construct new concept for education through analysing the life history of one specific individual (Wolcott, 1983).

#### ***The advantages of narrative method***

With regards to utilizing narrative as a research instrument to approach sociological questions, firstly, the advantage is about the breadth and depth of information narratives could provide. It is worth noting that narrative texts are usually filled with sociological information and most empirical evidences for sociological study are largely in the form of narrative (Franzosi, 1998). Furthermore, Dhunpath (2000) argues that, in a narrative

discourse, events are always presented in their contexts including physical, institutional circumstances and social, cultural environments, as well as interpersonal relationships with significant others like parents, mentors, colleagues and peers. Secondly, a narrative approach makes it possible to grasp the meaning of a person's individual experience from his/her personal perspective. Webster and Mertova (2007) argues that narrative inquiry is more concerned with individual truths as it seeks to elaborate and investigate individual interpretations and views toward complex and human-centred events. Also, interpreting personal experiences provides a coherent account of how and why something happened (Fiese and Sameroff, 1999). Thirdly, since narrative is predominantly retrospective, Chase (2005) has noted that narratives not only can illustrate what happened in the past, but also can express an individual's emotions and thoughts that will enrich understandings of the past events and the individual's behaviours at the time. From psycho-social perspective, biographical narratives as narratives of self-making foster ethical communication, produce counter hegemonic discourses and critical texts that may mobilize change for the future (O'Neill and Harindranath, 2006).

### ***The disadvantages of narrative method***

Apart from the above advantages, narrative research approach also has drawbacks in itself. One of the two themes I want to address here is, if we deem a narrative as a story told by an individual, then we cannot deny that, in different contexts or with different audiences, people would probably tell very different stories (Esterberg, 2002). Thus, it needs to be stressed that a story teller's perspective would change in relation to the circumstances around him/her during an interview or the course of research (Bryman, 2008). So that a researcher needs to be aware that, the narrative or story provided by an informant may be different if this informant were interviewed by another researcher in a different time or place for example, even if the same interview questions were put forward. Fundamentally, it reveals that the validity and reliability of narrative studies is a concern. I will deal with this issue in the next section. The second disadvantage of using narrative as research instrument is, as it has been criticized, that the material obtained in narrative research is often too descriptive and too large in terms of amount. As a result, not only the narrative analysis is a time consuming process, but also the analysis of narrative must struggle with the question of how much information a researcher needs to get about someone else to feel confident that he/she can understand something about them.

### ***Validity and reliability in narrative research***

Having been aware of the advantages and drawbacks of narrative methodology, the next issue I want to address is how to enhance the quality of narrative research and guarantee the credibility of a research report derived from studying narratives. Explicit discussions regarding the credibility of social science studies were driven from concerns about their validity and reliability, these two concepts were inherited initially from the quantitative or scientific tradition (Seale, 1999). However, under critique from the qualitative research society, specific criteria adequate for judging the quality in qualitative research have gradually been deemed to differentiate these from quantitative studies. This section briefly deals with the issue of the credibility in narrative research from the perspective of its validity and reliability.

According to Polkinghorne (1988), the validity of a narrative research depends more on meaningful analysis than on consequences, since the conclusions of narrative research predominantly stay open-ended and they do not claim to represent the exact “truth”. This means that, the goal of narrative research is neither to produce certainty nor to provide results that represent general truths; instead, it aims to show how things might be. Thus, in narrative-based research, validity tends to be more concerned with the issue that, whether the research is well-grounded and supported by the data that has been collected. Reliability in narrative research usually refers to the dependability and the trustworthiness of the data including field notes or interview transcripts, as well as the ease of access to the data (Polkinghorne, 1988). Riessman (1993) suggests that persuasiveness is the greatest when theoretical claims of a narrative project are supported by evidences derived from informants’ empirical accounts and when alternative interpretations for the data have been considered. Thus, enhancing the reliability of narrative research requires the researcher to make a well referenced trail available for any reader to access the results and stories collected for the study.

### **Life history method**

Both narrative and life history research look at and represent individuals’ life experiences with particular attention to their individuality and complexity (Cole and Knowles, 2001). Chase (2005) thinks that life history is a mode of narrative research and it is also the more specific term used by researchers to describe an extensive autobiographical narrative that covers all or most of an individual’s life. But Code and Knowles (2001: 20) consider life history research as “taking narrative one step further”, because life history research is concerned with the broader contexts far ranging as cultural, political, familial, social, and so

that it usually beyond the individual or the personal spheres that narrative research likes to stress. Life history methodology was central in anthropology but it has obtained a rather chequered history in social and educational research in recent decades. *The Jack-Roller*, published in 1930 for the first time, is about a study on juvenile delinquency and maladjustment. This book has enjoyed a continuing and well-deserved popularity. It also has proposed individual life history or life story as a vital device to approach sociological phenomenon (Shaw, 1966). However, in spite that life history method is becoming more and more popular as an alternative research genre, its status as a legitimate research methodology continues to be challenged by the positivist or empiricist tradition (Dhunpath, 2000).

In this section, I will stress the distinction between life history and life story in order to emphasize and make clear the specific features of life history research method. Then, the values and drawbacks of this method will be discussed in terms of their implications for approaching my own research questions.

### ***The differences between life story and life history***

From the perspective of the amount of information a narrative contains, Kelley and Tseng (1992) distinguished life history method from life story method in spite that both of them are biographical methods. She indicated that sociologists had used “life history” to refer to work made up of stories told by informants (interviewees) in terms of their lives and supplemented with data from other sources, such as official records, historical events and so on. Similarly, Goodson (2004) said that in order to make a ‘life story’ become a ‘life history’, one should employ a new range of interviews and documentary data as supplements. Moreover, it has been argued that a life story can be considered as one part of a life history, the part which is told to another; and the other part, is the social cultural context which needs to be taken into account when organizing and analysing the life stories told to others (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). Mann (1992: 272) further explained the difference between the two by saying that:

“A fundamental assumption that seems to distinguish the life history from the life story is that with the life history approach there is an attempt to represent some kind of historical truth about the life in question. On the other hand, the life story approach attempts to represent the experiential truth of the life lived. That is, to give expression to the person’s own story, as they tell it, of their lived experience.”

From the perspective of how the story is told by the informant rather than the scope of information it contains, Atkinson (1998) contends that, different from a life history which focuses predominantly on a specific aspect of a person's life or historical event, time or place, the life story is told in the form or style that the person telling it feels comfortable to.

Drawing on the above discussion, it might be safe to conclude that moving from life story to life history involves a move to include historical, cultural or social contexts into interpretation of the story about one's life. The current study aims to understand the role of parental educational expectations in relation to its impact on children's achieved status in the social hierarchy that has witnessed constant changes in the past decades in mainland China (this will be discussed in the next chapter). Thus, it is necessary to take the specific socio-historical contexts, places and cultural contexts into account when analysing the stories told by the participants in terms of the research questions. Also I need to draw on other materials as supplements to make their life course a more coherent one that makes more sense to people who do not know China very well. Accordingly, I consider the present study a life history study.

### ***The values and drawbacks of life history method***

As a research method, life history has its own strengths and weaknesses.

Sociologists who call for a fundamental reassessment of conceptual and methodological tools for research are convinced that survey research is unable to generate deep knowledge about society and will lose sight of the real or original object of investigation (Karpati, 1981). As for the life history research method, Ferrarotti (1981) has claimed that it makes it possible to reach and look at the social realities or social relations constituting the very substance of sociological knowledge, so that if a researcher wants to know 'why', 'how', 'what's it like' and 'what does it mean to you', then he/she may be well-advised to consider the life history method as a research instrument. This character of life history method is actually the initial reason that led me to think about employing it as the basic instrument to approach my research question.

Armstrong (1987) also has identified some advantages of doing life history research. Firstly, life histories are particularly useful for exploration of the subjective reality of individuals. That is to say, this method values the person's own story or the interpretations that people place on their own experiences as an explanation for their own behaviour. Secondly, life history enables us to see individuals both in terms of their whole life as well as in relation to the history of their time covering the various religious, social, psychological and

economical currents present in their world, thereby enabling us to understand better the choices, contingencies and options given to those individuals. Thirdly, by focusing on an individual as a single case, it is possible to provide a critical analysis of some ideas that have traditionally been taken for granted or assumed. For instance, historians discovered that oral history obtained through interviews could bring not only more information but wholly new perspectives from ordinary people (Thompson, 1981). More specifically, Thompson (1981) said that:

“Life history appears to offer information which is from its very nature coherent, rooted in real social experience; and is therefore capable of generating wholly fresh sociological insights as opposed to the self-reflecting answers of predetermined questions (p. 289).”

In terms of my own research questions, the advantage of using life history method is to understand fully people’s status attainment process. Collecting their life stories and analysing the information within a historical context seem a better way to realize the research objectives stated in the introductory chapter. Moreover, life history privileges the voices of research participants and triangulates their voices with cultural texts representing their lived experiences.

However, life history is not without problems. First and foremost, O’neill and Harindranath (2006) noted that a key aspect to consider in life history/biography research is the importance of memory and forgetting. For instance, in the context of recalling a decision-making process, respondents may have difficulty remembering the process and be unaware of what really influenced their decisions due to their limited ability to recall and analyse these processes and the changes that have occurred (van Heugten, 2004). Secondly, in a life history study, informants often cannot avoid reshaping or re-evaluating their lives according to their special life-experiences and the present life circumstances (Karpita, 1981). Interviewees may also respond defensively and give answers that place themselves in a positive light or may seek to impress the interviewer (van Heugten, 2004). However, postmodern research is less concerned with replicability and accepts the inevitability of bias. It would rather focus on the context of the speaker and the account, and on the account’s “textuality” and internal construction (Opie, 1992: 35). This contention encouraged me to attend to context and process rather than finding fact or truth during my research.

Another issue that a researcher should bear in mind when to employ life history as the research technique is that, as argued by Knudsen (1990), the "life story" and the "life history" are a shared composition of two authors, the narrator and the investigator. Thus, it is low in reliability insofar as the same subject or subjects were approached by a different researcher but for the same purpose, the final product is likely to be different (Armstrong, 1987). I have addressed this issue by using a reflexive approach through examining my researcher role and its impacts on the research process and the quality of the study.

### **Reflexivity and researcher's insider or outsider role**

The feature of the above three research methods encouraged me to adopt a reflexive approach throughout the research course. I was alert that my advanced knowledge, subjectivities, values and beliefs might shape my research results. An engagement of reflexivity allowed me to systematically reflect on my research identities as insider or outsider throughout the fieldwork and to analyse the way in which my research identities influenced the research process and the credibility of this study.

#### ***Reflexivity***

Methodologically, the concept of reflexivity is considered as a means of enhancing credibility in qualitative research (Dowling, 2006; van Heugten, 2004). From the phenomenological perspective which indicates that a researcher cannot avoid bringing individual experience, personal background and pre-existing understanding of a phenomenon into the research process, reflexivity is defined as thoughtful, conscious self-awareness of the roles that qualitative researchers play (Finlay, 2002). It stresses the ability of a qualitative researcher to distance from the research process and critically reflect on that process. Furthermore, Guillemin and Gillam (2004) claim that reflexivity is not a discrete entity; rather, it is an on-going and active process of critical reflection both on what knowledge has been produced ("what do I know") and on how this knowledge comes into existence ("how do I know what I know"). Reflexivity allows us to "observe our feelings and positionality and the analysis of this dynamic becomes an important source of data" (Takeda, 2013: 286). Actually, reflexivity is a significant part of the process of knowledge production, especially in qualitative methodologies (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

#### ***Researcher's insider or outsider role***

Al-Makhamreh and Lewando-Hundt (2008) assert that the literature focusing on the approach to reflexivity is pertinent particularly in terms of the researcher's insider/outsider role in the field. Debates around researcher's insider/outsider role were raised and

mounted primarily by Black, feminist and minority scholars who claimed that, being an insider to the group under study give him/her a more complete knowledge than that available to outsiders (Griffith, 1998). According to the extant literature, the conceptualization of the researcher's insider/outsider role is varied so far. First of all, researchers who choose to study a group they are a member of are insider-researchers; while outsider-researchers are not a member of the group under study (Kanuha, 2000, Breen, 2007). The "membership" is usually determined by a researcher's fixed identities that are commonly attributed to readily identifiable and socially recognized points of difference, such as social status (Merton, 1972); race and gender (Reinharz, 1992); culture, origin and language (Banks, 1998, Sherif, 2001), or political identity (Brayboy and Deyhle, 2000, Oriola and Haggerty, 2012), and other commonalities. Another factor determining a researcher's insider/outsider role is familiarity with and knowledge of the participants or the research domain under study. Griffith (1998) argues that familiarity with the group being studied ascribes insider positionality for a researcher; while one who has no pre-existing knowledge of the group is an outsider. Researcher's insider/outsider role also relates to whether he/she has the same life experiences with research participants, because life experiences may outweigh the structural or biographical characteristics in shaping one's individuality (Bridges, 2001).

In the following section of this chapter, I will address the roles I played during the research and their implications on sampling, data collection and data analysis. By doing this, I sought to establish and enhance qualitative reliability for my research. Moreover, I demonstrate that I moved from seeing myself only as an insider to an insider-outsider, which deems that instead of considering the issue of researcher's role from a dichotomous perspective, a researcher is allowed to occupy a "betwixt-and-between" position, thus simultaneously being an insider and an outsider (Hellawell, 2006, Ergun and Erdemir, 2010).

### **Sampling criteria and the sample**

Sampling takes place in the process of defining the population on which a study will focus (Cohen et al. , 2007). In this section, firstly, I will discuss different techniques of sampling in social research, and then I will introduce the sampling criteria of the current study, finally, the recruitment strategy and the composition of the research sample will be explained.

### **Different sampling strategies in social research**

Generally speaking, there are two categories of samples: probability samples and non-probability samples. The former is distinguished from the latter by identifying whether it is

using random processes or human judgments to select the individuals or other units for a study (Henry, 2009). Probability samples are usually used in survey research or other statistical studies and this category of samples has been discussed by the professionals such as Bryman (2008), May (2001) and Bernard (2002). The term “non-probability sampling” essentially includes all forms of sampling that are not conducted through the ways of probability sampling (Bryman, 2008). According to Henry (2009), when non-probability samples are used, it is not reasonable to attribute the results to the entire population since the sampling process can create bias. Hence, only probability samples allow a statistical generalization or representation to the whole population (May, 2001).

Basically, there are three types of non-probability sampling strategies. They are convenience sampling, snowball sampling and quota sampling. Bryman (2008) claimed that “convenience sampling is one that is simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility (p. 183).” This is just a group of people available to the researcher. For example, in a biographical study, the individual may be “convenient” to study because she or he is available (Creswell, 2012). Snowball sampling was defined by Bryman (2008) as a form of convenience sampling in certain respects. According to this strategy, the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people or sometimes with just one essential participant who is relevant to the research topic and then uses them to make further contacts with other people. Fink (2003) suggests that snowball sampling is particularly useful when a population listing is unavailable or difficult to compile, such as teenage gang members and undocumented migrants. Similar to convenience sampling, this technique also lacks external validity and the ability to generalize. In quota sampling, the sample should reflect a population according to the relative proportions of people in different categories. However, quota sample is comparatively less often employed in academic social research but in commercial research (Bryman, 2008).

In this research, I adopted convenience and snowball sampling strategies for practical considerations such as time and financial factors. Basically, I managed to get in touch with people whom I knew from school age and encouraged them to participate in my research. They also referred me to their parents who were also invited to be my research participants. Moreover, my mother, a school teacher, helped me by inviting her friends and colleagues to participate in my research. Some of those who had already agreed to participate in my research introduced me to their acquaintances as well. Detailed

explanations about the sampling process and the strength and weakness of this sampling strategy will be discussed later on page 97 to page 100.

### **Sampling criteria for the current study**

The sample for my study is a purposive sample because I had explicit criteria that I used (Patton, 1990). I knew explicitly that the goal of the research is to look at the mechanisms, through which parental educational expectations influence children's social mobility. The research was designed to take both parents' and children's accounts into consideration, in order to gain a thorough understanding of the interaction between parents and children in relation to children's status attainment processes as a function of parental expectations and children's aspirations. Thus, the sampling unit should be a family, and then both parents and their child would be invited to participate in the study. In families which had more than one child, I determined to recruit the first child into my study. However, it occurred that their first child was not available when I conducted the fieldwork. Consequently, I recruited the child who was available and meet the sampling criteria in terms of age cohort as well. Also, I intended to recruit people or families of varied social status based on their educational level, occupation, family income or household registration as either a rural or urban resident.

### ***Stratifying the sample on a generational basis***

"Age" is one of the basic categories of human beings and is a primary factor which can influence people's attitudes and behaviours (Sun, 2010). From a sociological perspective, age provides an analytical framework for understanding the interplay between changing social structures and human lives (Riley, 1987). In the everyday life, the term of generation is widely used to distinguish different age groups in society or to locate people within historical time (Pilcher, 1994). Since the purpose of my research was to explore parents and their first child born in and living through different historical time, "Generation" was the criteria I used to select parents as participants in practice.

The notion of generational difference is widely accepted in contemporary sociology (Eyerman and Turner, 1998). Apart from S.N. Eisenstadt's *From Generation to Generation* (1956), there are many other significant theoretical contributions in modern sociology to the development of the theory of generations. Mannheim's (1952[1923]) *The Problem of Generations* treated the concept of generation from a sociological perspective, and it locates generation within socio-historical contexts. Mannheim (1952) assumes that a person's location in the socio-historical structure sets the parameters of their experiences,

thus it indicates “certain definite modes of behaviour, feeling and thought (291).” He also insists that in order to share generational location in a sociological meaning sense, individuals must be born within the same historical and cultural context and be exposed to experiences that occur during their formative adult years. Similar to Mannheim, Ortega y Gasset (1933, cited in Kertzer, 1983) formulated a concept of generation based on the notion that people born at approximately the same time grow up sharing an historical period that shapes their views. Following the same direction, Rosow (1978) argues that the concept of social generation should be seen as an index locating people in a socio-historical structure. More recently, Braungart and Braungart (1986) indicated that a group of people become a generation due to a particular social movement which provide them with shared experience and some commonality in outlook. The notion of generation in this regard has also been applied to Chinese society, which I shall consider in the next paragraph.

Although there has been a growing interest in studying generations in China in recent years, it appears that there is no consensus about how to categorize generations in China (Sun and Wang, 2010). Nonetheless, Sun and Wang (2010) argued that the Chinese could be grouped into four generations in relation to four particular social movements occurred in China since the establishment of the modern Republic in 1949 (p.68): “the Great Leap Forward (from 1958 to 1961)”, “the Cultural Revolution (from 1966 to 1976)”, “the beginning of economic reform (started in 1978)”, and “the societal transition (started in 1992)”. Following the same direction, I gave my own partitioning of Chinese in consideration of the research question and research objectives of the current study. I grouped the Chinese into three generations. The partitioning was made in relation to particular social movements, socio-institutional reforms and policy changes in China after 1949. In the present thesis, I named the three generations as Generation A, Generation B, and Generation C. Table 3.1 is a summary of the key social economic and political contextual factors that underpinned the stratification of the sample.

Table 3.1 A summary of the key social economic and political contextual factors that underpinned the stratification of the sample.

| Generation A  | Generation B   | Generation C  |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Land Reform Campaign (1950-1952)</li> <li>● Household Registration System (1955)</li> <li>● First Five-Year Plan (1953-1957)</li> <li>● The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Economic Reform and Open Door Policy (1978)</li> <li>● One-child Policy (1979)</li> <li>● Nine-year Compulsory Education system (1986)</li> <li>● Tuition-payment system in Higher Education (1989)</li> <li>● Mutual Employment selection system (1998)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Rapid and Large-scale expansion in Higher Education (from 1999)</li> <li>● The Policy of Studying abroad (2000)</li> </ul> |

Additionally, I'd got to make sure the participants I chose were also alive and well enough for me to interview them. It is also worth noting that, I did not choose my research participants of different historical time according to their birth year, but in light of the year when parents gave birth to their first child as, following Sun and Wang (2010), I consider that the above mentioned social movements, socio-institutional reforms and policy changes in China might affect parents' attitudes to their child's education and social development. My research set out to examine their potential impact on parents. Thus, following this direction, Generation A, B and C for my study represent parents who gave birth to their first child during 1960-1979, 1980-1989 and after 1990 respectively. Given the real situation, in 2011 when I conducted my fieldwork in China, the age of parents who had their first child during 1960-1979 would be around 60-70 years old, the age of their children would be 40-50; the age of parents who had the first child during 1980-1989 should be 40-50 years old, their children would be 20-30 years old; while in the third cohort 1990 to the present, the age of parents was supposed to be around 20-40, and their children

predominantly were adolescents or young children. Both parents and their child, mostly the first child, were recruited as participants for this study.

### **The sample size**

The sample size is also a critical issue that need to be taken into consideration when sampling (Cohen et al. 2007). In respect to life history research particularly, Cole and Knowles (2001) argue that it is almost unlikely to involve tens or hundreds of informants or participants in a life history research, due to the heavy investment of time and efforts required for collecting and analysing data of storied nature. Given that my study is an exploratory one, the purpose of which is not to achieve representation of the entire population, and considering the money and time available to me as an individual doctorate researcher, I planned to recruit 15 families with 3 family members (father, mother and child) in each family for each generation, thus 45 participants. However, I got 42 participants eventually. I lost the mother in Family 3, the father in Family 4 and the father in Family 14. Both the mother in Family 3 and the father in Family 4 were born during the early 1930s and they had passed way when I conducted my research. The father in Family 14 was not able to join my research because he was working as a migrant worker in a city which is far away from home when I conducted my fieldwork. He had no access to a laptop or other devices through which I could talk to him. I did not send him a questionnaire either as I thought it could not fulfil my research goal. Nevertheless, I think their absence had caused little substantial impact on my research results because their child and spouse' interviews made a good compensation to the missing of their original accounts.

### **The recruitment of research participants**

Basically, the strategies I employed to choose the research participants were based on the principle of convenience sampling approach, which implies that researcher uses what is simply available or easily accessible to him/her (Bryman 2008; Basit 2010).

The participants were selected from my home city, Hebi in Henan province, China. Primarily, I decided to interview in the geographical area where I lived for financial reasons as my research was entirely self-funded. In addition, because I was born in the city and lived there for many years, I found it relatively easy to identify potential respondents from my own knowledge.

See Figure 3.1 in below for a general understanding of the location of Hebi city where I conducted the fieldwork for the current research. It is constituted by two counties and three districts. Hebi is located in the north of Henan province, China. It covers an area of

2128 square kilometres and has a population of 1,430,000 at present, among which 590,000 are urban dwellers.

Figure 3.1 Location of Hebi city, Henan province, China.



Source: TravelChinaGuide, <http://www.travelchinaguide.com/cityguides/henan/hebi/>.

Apart from the convenience sampling approach, “snowballing technique” was also adopted to recruit research participants. Snowballing technique indicates that the researcher makes initial context with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then use them to make further contact with other people (Bryman, 2008). Research participants in my study were recruited either through my own networks or my mother’s networks. Seven families were recruited from my own networks through the initial contact with the child of each family because they were mostly my schoolmates or people I knew, and then they offered me the chance to interview their parents as well as themselves. The other eight families were recruited through my mother’s networks. My mother was a teacher in the key secondary school in Hebi city. She made the primary contact with her colleagues or friends and then introduced me to those who wished to consider joining in my research.

This method was effective in finding participants as I did not need to spend much time and money to find the sample subjects. However, the participants I recruited were dependent on the original group of people I made contacts with. A result of this was that the representativeness of my sample was limited. For example, due to my mother’s identity as a teacher, the parent participants recruited from her network are predominantly teachers who usually have obtained a BA or a college diploma. This resulted in my sample having limited coverage of those with other educational qualifications, and it meant that the professional groups were over-represented. However, my research does not claim generalizability. The conclusions have to be treated with caution, although the trends that the research holds for those participants. Moreover, as this research is, in effect, primarily

exploratory, it raises questions that can be explored through further research and with other segments of the Chinese population.

### ***Researcher's role and its implications for the recruitment of research participants***

The advantages of a researcher's "insider" position were my first concern when I was doing the research design. It has been affirmed that the selection and recruitment of research participants can be much easier when a researcher occupies the "insider" position, due to his/her familiarity with the community, the requirement of establishing trust and rapport with the group under study (Breen, 2007, Chavez, 2008). I decided to conduct the fieldwork in my home city mainly because I identified myself as an insider researcher to the place and to the people living there when I acknowledged the cultural, social, and linguistic affinities that might facilitate my access to the field and my initial contact to potential participants.

Actually, I failed to recruit people from outside of my school and family networks. In order to expand the variety of my research sample, I tried to recruit some parents who had a doctoral degree so as to understand their educational expectations for their child. I emailed some professors in a local university, but they all refused by saying that, for example: "I do not have time"; "My child is busy with his/her school work, so we cannot join your research."

I think their rejections were mainly due to my outsider identity. First of all, I was a stranger to them. I got their email addresses from the official university website. As argued by Hofstede (1980), most Chinese do not feel comfortable dealing with strangers whereas they tend to become highly involved in conversations with someone they know. Secondly, they were professionals who were in a much higher social status than me. As traditional Chinese cherish hierarchical status in social relations (Chiu, 1987), they chose to distance me because I was not a member of their group. Had I been a professional like them, a colleague of theirs or even a student of theirs, my access would likely have been increased dramatically.

My insider identity was far more apparent when I attempted to recruit research participants through my personal network. I introduced the research design to people I knew, such as my friends or classmates, and invited them to be my research participants. As I expected, they were all quick to promise me that they would join and do their best to help with my research. In order to get consents from their parents, I asked each of my friends who had agreed to join my research to arrange a time for me to talk with their parents in person. All my friends' parents agreed to meet me at home and most of them

agreed to join my research immediately after listening to my explanation of the study. They always offered me drinks and refreshments during my stay at their place; they also invited me for lunch or supper. Therefore, I confirmed that I was perceived as an insider as they tried to be helpful, caring, and empathetic and treated me as trustworthy.

Another group of participants was recruited through my mother's personal network. She contacted with her friends and colleagues, most of whom were familiar with me while there were also a few that I did not know. They all accepted my mother's invitation by saying: "Nothing is more important than our daughter's study. I will definitely do my best to help her." The use of the words like "our daughter" and "help", further confirmed my insider identity.

The process of recruiting people through my personal network was not always smooth. All my friends' parents agreed to meet me at home and most of them agreed to join my research immediately after listening to my explanation of the study. But there were still some parents who felt initially reluctant to participate. This reluctance resulted from their perception of my identity as an outsider. For example, the father of one of my friends questioned my relationship to the government of the UK, and I was even considered a "spy". He asked me:

"Does the UK's government fund your research or yourself? Were you asked to investigate Chinese families or did you choose to do so? Since you are a researcher from an institution in the UK, I am afraid that all the information you have collected from China will be used by the government of the UK. If this is true, you are no different from an authorized spy! I will not give you any information."

I afterwards explained to him again about the information included in the Informed Consent Form which had passed the Ethical Approval, although he had already read this form before giving the above account. I told him that my research was self-funded and I made my own decision to investigate Chinese families. I informed him that all the information collected during the interview would remain confidential and the information would be used for the research only. Moreover, I made it clear that it was up to him whether he would join in my research or not and it is free for him to withdraw consent or discontinue participation in this project at any time without any prejudice. Anyhow, he accepted the interview and signed the Informed Consent Form. We actually had a very

successful interview in spite of the difficulty I had experienced in gaining his agreement to be interviewed.

Overall, my role as “insider” or “outsider” largely determined where I was able to conduct the fieldwork and whom I could recruit as research participants. Such experiences reminded me that, researchers especially those doing research individually, can only do what they can do rather than what they want to do. Thus, I suggest that a researcher reflects on his/her researcher identity very carefully from the initial stage of creating a research proposal.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues have been taken into serious consideration in the current research project. Basically in practice, a detailed explanation regarding how the research and the fieldwork would be carried out and a statement of the ethical manners I would involve were submitted to the School of Applied Social Sciences and I did not engage in any fieldwork activities, like recruiting research participants, until this proposal was approved by the Ethics Committee.

Because each research project might involve different ethical principles and different ethical issues arise at each step of a research process, so that researchers should keep a clear mind about what ethical issues should be addressed throughout the whole research process (Bryman, 2008). As for the current study, the issue was concerned about the most was getting potential participants’ informed consent, which is also considered as an essential part of conducting research in an ethical manner (DurhamUniversity, 2010).

### **Informed Consent**

Getting informed consent from research participants, as a widely accepted procedure, aims to guarantee the rights of human subjects to know the activities involved in a research project and to approve their participation (Homan, 1991). Furthermore, Homan (1991) indicates that the innate character surrounding the principle of informed consent is that potential research subjects or participants should be allowed the freedom to agree or to refuse participating in a research, after they have been informed the comprehensive information regarding the nature and purpose of the research. It implies that, the wishes of each research participant should be fully respected, so that researchers cannot force them to get involved if they do not want to or punish them for not doing so.

The issue of how much information the prospective research participants should be given about any research project is a hotly debated among social researchers. May (2001) indicated that a complete understanding of the aims and process of the research itself, as well as the estimated consequences following its publication in the public domain would be informed and explained. However, Bryman (2008, p.121) claimed that, although the prospective research participants should be fully informed about the research process, it is extremely difficult to show them the complete information covering every stage of the research project, as not all issues can be properly estimated.

It is also worth noting that, the concern for the researcher should not be overlooked in making ethical decisions. May (2001) says that ethical decisions are not based on biased attitudes toward the researcher or the researched. They are concerned with what is right. It implies that, we cannot overly pay attention to the requests from subjects while ignore the rights of researchers or sponsors who are also major participants in the research project. Actually, it is in the informing of consent that researchers can assure themselves that they are following prescribed principles and relieve themselves of certain responsibilities toward participants (Homan, 1991). Hence, the design of informed consent form should stress the responsibilities and obligations of both research subjects and researchers.

In practice, I obtained written informed consent from my participants. Three themes were stressed in producing the informed consent form for the current study. Firstly, I included as much information about the research project as possible, in order to guarantee that the prospective participants have acquired sufficient understanding of what will be going on before making their decisions about whether or not they like to join in the research. Secondly, I informed them that I would take steps to ensure that research data and its sources remain confidential. I would also guarantee anonymity through taking steps to make sure that reported quotes and incidents are not directly traceable to particular individuals. Moreover, I indicated that data would be saved as a password protected Microsoft Word documents to ensure that only me will have access to these. And all paper files would be kept in a secure and locked cupboard. Thirdly, I underlined that they have the right to withdraw participating in the study at any time of the research course, in case that new problems might emerge as the research proceeds and then the willingness of participants to continue joining in the research might reduce. Nonetheless, I was aware that a signature on an informed consent form from the participant is not sufficient in itself.

The consent of participation needs to be seen as a process which involves establishing trust between the researcher and the researched before, during and after the research (Barata et al., 2006).

## **Data collection**

In social science studies, there are different methods of data collection such as surveys, interviews, participation, observation or secondary data analysis. In light of the research question and the objectives of this study, I consider interviews, which are also one of the most popular methods for gathering qualitative data in social science research (Basit, 2010), a better means to collect data for the present research. The interview has advantages in terms of qualitative data collection. It emphasises narrative forms of meaning and allow participants to tell stories on their own terms (Byrne, 2004). In addition, interviewers can clarify comments from respondents, and can stimulate the respondent to give richer information (Robson, 1993). But there are different types of interviews prevalent in social scientific studies so far. Hence, before explaining the specific data collection method employed in my research, I will briefly discuss three basic types of interviews including structured interview, semi-structured interview, and unstructured interview at first.

### **Forms of interview**

#### ***Structured interview***

A structured interview is typically inflexible as the interview questions pertaining to the required information are usually prepared in advance by the research before conducting the interview (Englund et al., 2004, Hardy and Bryman, 2004). It is the rule that, when conducting structured interviews, the explanations should be standardized, leaving little room for deviation from the schedule (Catsambis and Beveridge, 2001). Although some of the questions might be open-ended which allow interviewees to give answers in their own words, questions in a structured interview force interviewees to choose between fixed answers, this might resulted in missing information that are important to the interviewees (Esterberg, 2002).

#### ***Unstructured interview***

Unstructured interviews typically do not have a set of questions prepared in advance or strict procedures to follow, they arise naturally in a conversation or observation (Esterberg, 2002). However sometimes there may be just one single question that the interviewer asks and the interviewee is then allowed to respond freely (Bryman, 2004). It also allows

interviewees to talk about the subject by their own words within their own frame of reference. May (2001) states that in an unstructured interview, the interviewer or the researcher only need to have a goal in mind, and the informant is free to talk about the topic.

### ***Semi-structured interview***

Basically, the goal of conducting semi-structured interviews is to explore a topic more openly and to give interviewees more chances to express their own opinions in their own words (Esterberg, 2002). According to (Sarantakos, 1993), a semi-structured interview has the elements from both structured and unstructured interviews. It typically refers to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions being scheduled in a certain sequence, but those questions do not need to be followed exactly in the way outline in the schedule (Bryman, 2008). Thus, it supports the researcher to ask further questions which are not in the interview guide, in response to the responses of interviewees. May (2001) also argues that the interviewer can seek clarification and elaboration on the answers given. This enables the interviewer to have more latitude to probe beyond the answers and in turn enter into a dialogue with the interviewee. But all the questions stated in the interview guide should be asked and a similar wording will be used from interviewee to interviewee (Bryman, 2004), whereby, semi-structured interview provides a better structure for comparability than unstructured interviews (May, 2001).

### **Data collection strategy for the study**

A face to face conversation between informant and researcher is perhaps the most commonly used strategy for collecting life history data that usually cover information of the entire biography of a respondent. Bryman (2004) explained that life history interview can be considered as one type of unstructured interview covering the totality of an individual's life; thereby, a life history interview allows the subject to look back in detail across his or her entire life course, even from birth up till the day being interviewed. But I deem that a combination of methods is often useful in order to collect thorough information from a person, because it is difficult for any single in capturing fully the richness of human experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This means that it is not necessary to use unstructured interview separately from other interview techniques to collect life history data.

Besides I had a clear goal in relation to the information I want to gain from each interview, there were some other reasons that motivated me to employ semi-structured interview as

one of the major techniques to collect life history data from the research participants. The most important reason was that I did not have any previous experience of doing interviews. Therefore, a well-designed interview schedule was necessary for me to avoid missing any relevant topics. But I would not be governed by the interview schedule. This means that interview questions were not going to be followed exactly in the same way outlined on the schedule. Actually, I allowed myself and my respondents a lot freedom during the conversation. For example, I would ask further questions or probing questions which were not in the interview guide but derived from the responses of interviewees. Moreover, a semi-structured interview schedule was needed to recruit research participants because some research candidates asked to look at the interview questions before agreeing to participate in the research. Un-structured interview which typically does not have a set of questions in advance (Esterberg, 2002), cannot meet their requests.

When interviewing parents, I basically asked about their expectations for the child, why they had such expectations, and how they became involved in their children's education or occupation. When interviewing children, I asked about which educational level they would like to achieve, how their educational aspirations fit into their parents' expectations as well as their educational and occupational experiences to date. Due to the open-ended feature of the interview, probing questions were used very often in order to obtain more information and clarification of their accounts (Barriball and While, 1994). Interviews were conducted at interviewees' home respectively and each interview lasted at least two hours. The fieldwork lasted four months, from January 2011 to May 2011.

### **Pilot the interview**

Basit (2010) suggests that all interview schedules are piloted carefully is an essential step within a research project and a pilot study helps enhance the validity and reliability of a research programme.

### ***The significance of pilot study***

Since one can hardly anticipate what will happen during an interview, if one is not confident whether the designed interview questions will get the kind of information being looked for, it may be necessary to pilot the interview before engaging in fieldwork (Armstrong, 1987). To Wilson (1994, Wilson and McClean, 1994), pilot testing is a process for assessing the effectiveness a newly designed questionnaire and a pilot test can highlight questions which may be ambiguous or difficult for respondents to answer. The pilot interview is an advanced stage of development and close to the real thing although it is not

the real one (Gillham, 2000). Hence, a researcher can use people who are representative of the research sample but not necessarily from that particular group to conduct a pilot study. Although pilot test takes time, it is important and must be included in a research plan since it will largely improve the research quality (Wilson and McClean, 1994). Likewise, Merrill (2009) suggests that we should try things out before doing the fieldwork and get feedback on what we do and how others experience it.

After a pilot study, it is worth taking time to think about why the interview went well or not, and the researcher must not hesitate to change interview questions, or reconsider old questions if necessary. Each interview is a learning process since Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2002) indicate that interviews must evolve. It means that, even though the preparation of the whole process of an interview is necessary, midcourse adjustments and modification of approaches should also be taken into account. Bryman (2004) further argues that pilot interviews can be useful to fulfil the qualification criteria of interviews.

### ***Procedures of the pilot study***

I conducted the pilot study in Durham, a few weeks before I went back to China for the fieldwork. I recruited two adults for this pilot study. Both of the two participants were my friends, this was because Merrill (2009) had suggested that it could be helpful to have a critical friend to talk to and from whom to get some feedback on what we do and how other experience it. One of them spoke English as the first language. Although I would do my fieldwork in China by speaking Chinese, I decided to choose at least one person who speaks English during the pilot stage. This was because my interview schedules had originally been designed in English and it was also the English version that would be shown to future readers of my thesis. Hence, I wanted to make sure that all the questions would make sense to English-speakers. The other participant was Chinese who almost fully met the sampling criteria of my research participants. By interviewing her, I hoped to learn how to interview my future interviewees effectively and to modify items in the interview questions prior to conducting the actual interviews.

### ***Reflections on the pilot study***

The pilot study revealed several problems. First and foremost, the logical order of the interview questions illustrated in the schedule was weak. Both of the two interviewees criticized that they felt lost when they replied to my questions because my questions did not connect with each other very well. Since one character of semi-structured interview is that although the interviewer has a series of questions being scheduled in a certain

sequence, those questions do not need to be followed exactly in the way outlined on the schedule. In consideration of this, after giving the very first question I always asked further questions depending on the response from my interviewee. It turned out that I shuttled back and forth among the questions in the interview schedule and this made my respondents feel confused about what I really want to know through each question. They could not figure out my central idea and in turn could only give vague answers. After the pilot study, I reorganized the interview questions by categorizing them into different topics. During each interview, I would start from a topic and asked related questions under this topic. When I found that all the questions belonging to this category had been replied, I would go to the next topic and ask questions under it. In this way, I would not miss any interview questions.

Another problem was that some questions were not clear enough so that the respondents did not know what to say about a certain question. For example, one question was: “what the most important thing given to you by your family regarding your education and occupation?” When it was asked, the Chinese interviewee just stopped and felt confused. She said that she really did not know from which aspect she could reply since the question was too general. After that, I changed the question into: “Tell me about those aspects of your education (or occupation) that your parents helped you with?” When I asked in this way, the interviewee became much more confident with her response and I got the appropriate information as well. I changed all the questions which had been considered unclear after the pilot study. And I also checked the clarity of those amended questions with the two informants recruited in the pilot study.

The third aspect that needed to be improved was my feedback to the interviewee. One participant said she really wanted to get my confirmation that she was talking about the right thing. But I had not said anything like “yes, you are right!” or “that is exactly what I want to know.” This made her lack confidence when she replied to my questions. She also advised me not to look through the interview schedule too often since she felt this behaviour made her feel that I was not quite into her responses. In addition, the other participant suggested that I give a summary after a lengthy interview. She explained that after giving a long answer, she always forgot the main idea of her reply. So at that time, a brief summary about what she had talked about was necessary and this was also a good way to remind the interviewer which question to ask next. Bearing in mind this problem, I learned by heart all the interview questions before going to do the fieldwork. So the

frequency of looking through the interview schedule was reduced during the real fieldwork. I also paid attention to my communicating behaviours during the interviews. I gave confirmation and appreciation about what the informant had told me when appropriate and I always gave a brief summary after a long reply before going on to another question.

Finally, from the two pilot interviews, I found that taking field notes was necessary although there was a tape recorder there. But it was better to use special symbols instead of writing word by word since the latter approach would take time and some important information might be lost when I was writing. In consideration of this, when interviewing people in the course of the fieldwork, I would write down, for example, the social events that happened in a person's life, turning points of an interviewee's life, specific viewpoints, and the expressions of the informant. The time used for taking notes during an interview was restricted to less than ten minutes in order to focus on the communication. This forced me to write very fast and use abbreviations. For example, "Cultural Revolution" was recorded as "CR"; "Turning point" was recorded as "TP". Using abbreviations proved to be a good way of taking notes without missing any information. These field notes were written on a notebook and they constituted an important part of my research diary. They were particularly useful while I was analysing interview transcripts.

In terms of the time for each interview, I had planned to use one hour for each. However, I used approximately two hours for the interview with the Chinese interviewee although just one hour with the English speaking respondent. I found that the time might have to be very flexible depending on the character of each individual. Therefore, it might be unwise to stick to the time limitation. Otherwise, the respondent may not have enough time to talk and I might not get enough information either.

In summary, several advantages were derived from carrying out the pilot study:

- 1) Testing the feasibility of research methods, especially the interview method.
- 2) Considering the practical and technical challenges and difficulties.
- 3) Developing research questions and analysis procedures.
- 4) Verifying the research design and enhancing its validity.
- 5) Improving my interview skills and minimising risks of failure during the research.

## **Recording and transcription**

All interviews during the fieldwork were recorded by a tape recorder. Although I could summarize what people said depending on my memory, it is simply impossible to remember such matters as pauses, overlaps and other things alike, without the help of a tape recorder. Taping interviews means these can be replayed and then the quality of interview transcripts improved (Silverman, 2001). I also took notes for each interview by writing down some key words in the responses on a notebook. In addition, the emotional climate of each interview was included in the notes because this might affect the subsequent interpretations made (Anderson, 1991).

After each interview, the tape recording would be transcribed into readable text. Transcriptions are useful because they offer a more accurate record of the interview and they are also necessary for researchers who hope to analyse the stories line-by-line (Fraser, 2004).

Depending on the type of research, the number of people involved and the analysis to be done, transcription may have several stages (Powers, 2005), among which there are two basic steps: initial transcription and corrected final transcription (p. 30). Accordingly, I created a verbatim transcript (in which every word the speaker said is written down) for each interview in the first stage. I also included pauses, repetitions and laughter in the verbatim transcripts because silences and pauses in an interview are likely to have meaning (Fraser, 2004; Silverman, 2001). While in the second stage, I edited the initial verbatim transcripts. Typically four alterations should be included to edit the initial verbatim transcripts (Powers, 2005, p. 62), these were: 1) word changes, often related to grammar; 2) deletions, of things such as false starts, non-words, and repetitions; and 3) additions, of words or editorial comments that clarify or provide context. Powers (2005) further suggested that making decisions about how to edit a verbatim transcript should be directed by research goals. For example, if the goal is to produce a text for ease of reading, then narrative flow and clear meaning rather than filler words or nonverbal sounds should be captured. As for the current research, because I was more interested in the content of the interviews than the organization of talk, I edited the verbatim transcripts by deleting some filler words, repetitions and broken sentences in order to make the narrative or text clear and comprehensible to the reader.

All transcriptions have been saved as password protected Microsoft Word documents to insure that only me will have access to these. And those electronic documents have been

printed out as well. I saved all paper files in a secure and locked cupboard. They would be destroyed once I finished my postgraduate study.

### **Researcher's role and its implications for data collection**

Atkinson (1998) argues that when conducting an interview, the existing relationship between interviewer and interviewee moves to a different phase and this exchange changes everything between them. As for my research, I had various pre-existing relationships with the research participants due to the fact that they were recruited either from my network or my mother's network. Such relationships impacted on the interviewing process, especially for Chinese people who are more likely to perform appropriate roles by assessing his or her relationships with others in specific contexts owing to the relation-oriented character of Chinese culture (Gao, 1998).

There were pivotal points in my fieldwork which revealed that, my pre-existing relationships with the research participants coupled with my role as a researcher, determined how they would perceive my identity during an interview. Most importantly, their perceptions of my researcher identity impacted on the data I could collect. Thus, I will in this section make visible some of my empirical experiences from the fieldwork to demonstrate how my identity was defined and re-defined. Finally, the fieldwork experiences revealed that it was my insider-outsider role that determined interview rapport and the data that I could collect, which in turn shaped the thesis. The notion of "insider-outsider" implies that instead of considering the issue of researcher's role from a dichotomous perspective, a researcher is allowed to be an insider and an outsider simultaneously (Hellawell, 2006, Ergun and Erdemir, 2010). Furthermore, my fieldwork experiences suggested that, my insider-outsider role was not a singular identity maintained throughout an interview; instead, it shifted during my interactions with participants. Thus, I conclude that my insider-outsider research identity shifted along an insider-outsider continuum and it was subjected to my constant negotiation and renegotiation with research participants even within one interview.

### ***Interviewing a close friend of mine***

The first story is about a participant with whom I had a long-term close relationship ever since our school age. She is a young woman and we are the same age. We had experienced several pivotal life events together and we understood each other very well. Therefore, the communication between us during the interview would be based on the rich knowledge that existed between us. Given this situation, I considered myself an absolute insider

before going to interview her. However, the reality turned out to be that I was not an insider or an outsider, but both. Their combination constituted my role and put me into an insider-outsider position. I will explain this below.

Initially, the interview was carried out in a relaxed atmosphere and I did not even need to make an effort to establish an appropriate rapport. But then I found that it was neither like the ordinary chatting we used to have as friends, nor like the formal interviews I engaged with participants who were not as familiar to me. Our communication turned to be something in-between.

On the one hand, owing to my identity as a close friend, thus an insider, there were several times during the interview when I was asked not to be too serious, as she felt uncomfortable talking with me in such a formal way. This might be because, as Chen (1997) argued, participants who are friends of the researcher may find it hard to adapt to the sudden role transformation of the latter from a friend to an academic researcher. There were also many times when she took it for granted that I knew the answer to the questions I probed into, so she felt annoyed about having to explain them. On the other hand, due to my professional identity, she tried to distance herself from me as she concealed things that might be too sensitive to be released to an outsider. I realized such role shifts only after I threw out the following question:

“I know you had been doing very well in school and, as you mentioned just now, your mother was very strict with your study. But do you remember what your mother’s attitude was when you got bad exam results that one time?”

She became silent, which caught me off guard because I had not expected it. After a while, she continued, saying:

“I did have experiences of failure in exams. You know how upset I was about that. As for my mother, she was strict as you say and sometimes she even punished me. But [pause]... everything has passed and I do not want to recall it. Shall we move to the next question now?”

This quote expresses her concern about my outsider identity. Drawing on the close relationship between us and my knowledge of her personality, I believed that she would reply to this question if we were not having a research interview but an ordinary chat.

This pivotal point reminded me that I was an insider-outsider rather than an absolute insider or outsider to the research participants who were well-known to me. The situation during the interview was actually created simultaneously by my insider identity and outsider identity. Thus, my insider-outsider role determined the interview rapport, the data I could collect and in turn shaped my work.

### ***Interviewing a person I did not know***

Another case indicating how my researcher identity was negotiated during the research process is the interview with a woman who was recruited through my mother's network. She and my mother had been friends for several years and they were very familiar with each other. My mother made initial contact with her and invited her to join my research. She accepted the invitation immediately. But I did not expect her to be as close to me as to my mother, because I had never met her before. Thus, I thought I was an outsider in view of our remote relationship and my lack of knowledge about her life.

Since I perceived myself as an outsider when I started the interview with her, I did not dare to ask directly about her family income because in China this is recognized as so sensitive a question that few people would answer it. So, I initially referred to her social status instead: "Which social class are you in, from your point of view?" She said:

"Well, family income is the most important indicator of social class in my opinion. I am in the lower-middle class pertaining to my salary. But I am not the bread winner in my family anyway, because my husband earned much more than me."

Then I probed: "So what do you think about the social status of your husband or your family?" Surprisingly, she replied to this question by mentioning her husband's income directly:

"Regarding the monthly income of my husband, I have not even told this to my relatives... I take you as my own child since you are my friend's daughter. I feel responsible to help you with your study, so I will let you know the amount [laughs]. But would you promise me not to release it to anybody else and your mother in particular?"

I reflected on my researcher identity at that moment. On the one hand, the participant mentioned that she decided to tell me her husband's salary because of her underlying responsibility as an elder. She thought she had the responsibility to support my study, although I owed this success to my mother who was an intermediary between me and the

interviewee. According to Yum (1988), intermediaries are useful in bringing out-group members together into new relationships. That is to say, although I myself had no pre-existing relationship with this woman, my mother's involvement established a close tie between us; thus, I was treated with much more intimacy than I deserved as an individual who she met for the first time. On the other hand, if I were not a researcher who had subjected herself to ethical review and had been committed to confidentiality and anonymity, as outlined in the consent form, I do not think she would have told me her family income. Therefore, it was my role as an insider-outsider that makes her feel comfortable enough to provide me with such private information. And I benefited from being an insider-outsider in terms of data collection, as I got information that I would hardly be given if I was just an insider or an outsider.

### ***My research role as an insider-outsider***

I began this research seeing myself as an insider because I was a Chinese person doing research in my home town. I was an outsider because I was doing research, and doing research from a base within a Western country. I thought this would be advantageous, but I found the process was full of surprise. To begin with, I found my researcher status changed constantly, even within one interview. As I describe below, the two roles became blurred, as well as sometimes being discrete, and so I think this constant shift of identity is best termed the researchers as "insider-outsider". Moreover, my insider-outsider role was not a singular identity maintained throughout the course of the research. My fieldwork experience revealed that participants perceived my research identity as dynamic and shifting on the insider-outsider continuum even within a single interview. I observed that interviewees would distance themselves from the researcher on one dimension while seeking commonality on another dimension, as suggested by Song and Parker( 1995). I could be closer to the insider pole at some moments and become closer to the outsider pole at other moments. Additionally, elements of differences and commonalities between researcher and research participants are various, and these can impact upon the researcher-participant relationship. My researcher role granted me special prestige through my educational background.

Confucian philosophy, which has constituted the most influential thought throughout the five thousand years' history in China, provides a unique cultural belief that formal education is the most important thing in one's life (*wan ban jie xia pin, wei you du shu gao*) and academic achievement leads to higher social status (*xue er you ze shi*) (Li 2001). Moreover, throughout the long Chinese history, intellectuals were considered the elite of

society and first-rank scholars were always awarded high positions and prestige in society (Chen 1981). Therefore, during the interview with a third year undergraduate student studying in a non-prestigious college in China, I was ascribed the role of an “idol” because I was a doctoral candidate and my study experience was in a Western country. He said to me:

“Oh, I really hope I could be like you, studying in one of the world’s best universities and getting a doctoral degree. You are my idol!”

“An idol”, the role I would never anticipate being bestowed upon myself, before talking to this man put me close to an outsider position in the beginning of our communication. He also expressed his concern about my outsider status and questioned my capacity to understand his experience. He stated:

“You must have been a good student in school; otherwise you cannot achieve an educational level as high as a doctorate. In contrast to your experiences, I was always a bad student and I had no way to achieve a doctor’s degree, not to say study abroad. How can you ever understand my terrible life?”

I realized the distance and the power imbalance between us. He was always so cautious during the interview that he kept asking me whether he was saying the right thing or not. I thought this would unduly impede the interview. So I attempted to establish a proper rapport for gathering information. Since he would also humbly ask me about my life in terms of study and career, I replied as best as I could, because this was considered necessary to assist the storyteller in making sense of his own story and in finding deeper meaning in the narrative (Atkinson, 1998). Moreover, this was identified to be a good way to minimize any status differences that exists between the researcher and the informants in an interview situation (Gough, 2003). I told him, for example, how I applied for the research programme, how I improved my English, how my life experience was and how I managed to achieve a good academic performance.

Then my position was surprisingly shifted from the side of outsider to the side of insider, provided the acknowledgement that my role is in the insider-outsider continuum, as he sympathetically told me in the middle of our communication:

“Your life is actually not as wonderful as I thought. I think probably you are just one of us, who are worrying about academic performance and the risk of unemployment after graduation.”

In this case, I acknowledged that although I could not claim to understand all his experiences, I shared part of them. When this point had been noticed by the young man after more and more information of mine had been shared with him, he changed from viewing me as “an idol” to considering me as one of them. Therefore, I concluded that his perception of my research position moved away from the outsider pole and became closer and closer to the insider pole on the insider-outsider continuum as the interview proceeded. Likewise, Chavez (2008) expressed that, in interviewing her mother, they shared closeness when talking about the period of her mother’s life when she raised her; but when her mother discussed her own life as a child, she became a removed observer listening to detailed stories she knew little about. It reminded me to constantly reflect on my research identity within each interview, and it also raised an important issue that must be considered in all research endeavours with participants who identify with a group based on shared experience.

In addition, I learned from this case that my research identity was decided by the research participants. This means that I could not simply act on my own preferences in terms of the research position. This observation supports the concern of Allen (2004), who argues that researchers’ insider-outsider status is not founded on taken-for-granted common-sense assumptions that derived from their intuition and feelings.

## **Data analysis**

### **Data analysis procedures**

Overall, microanalysis ran through the course of data analysis. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990):

“Microanalysis is a detailed line-by-line analysis necessary at the beginning of a study to generate initial categories (with the properties and dimensions) and to suggest relationships among categories (p.57).”

Specifically speaking, several stages were involved in the course of data analysis. The essential first step was reflecting upon each interview right away and writing down my thoughts and reflections. This procedure can be considered as “writing memos”. Memos are defined as written records of analysis that may vary in type and form (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This step helped to spark my thinking and encouraged me to look at the data in new ways. The second step was transcribing the taped record into typed words. Then I started to read through the stories line by line or even word by word while

highlighting the parts which I thought were interesting or relevant to the research questions. In other words, the reading of the data at this stage involved looking carefully at the data with a view to identifying aspects of them that may be significant (Sapsford and Jupp, 2006). Annotations were made where necessary. The next step was coding. Coding as a key process in grounded theory is also identified as a process in approaches to qualitative data analysis more generally (Bryman, 2012). Coding took place when I read through interview transcripts for the second time, during which themes emerged and categories were produced accordingly. I re-read the interview transcripts until no new themes could be identified. Moreover, when analysing interview transcripts through the aforementioned steps, I bore in mind that the meaning of text had to be considered in its specific context. Concretely, this meant relating particular experiences or accounts expressed by individual interviewees to the broader history of their life and the wider social context, including the cultural, political, economic and policy dimensions.

In consideration of the large body of interview transcriptions and field materials, I drew support from computer techniques to manage and analyse the qualitative data as well. The use of computer programs to aid the analysis of qualitative data is a recent innovation (Fielding and Lee, 1991). I adopted the NVivo software to facilitate the analytic process. NVivo is a software package designed to assist in the analysis of qualitative data. The package can enable a researcher to rapidly and accurately analyse research items such as questionnaires, transcripts of interviews and focus groups and other literature. The detailed procedures of how I used NVivo software in analysing data are outlined in below.

First of all, I set up a project for each of the three generations recruited for this study separately. Within each project, five folders were created under the Internals folder. Each folder represented one family and the interview transcripts of all the three or two family members were imported into this folder. The next step was reading through those transcripts while working on coding nodes. In NVivo, a node is used for each concept, theme, idea or category found in the data. NVivo stores references to the coded data in these nodes. Tree nodes were also created for those free nodes which were connected to express similar sorts of ideas. Because I interviewed people in Chinese, the transcriptions were also in Chinese. So the coded data were automatically in Chinese. But I used English to name the nodes representing the coded data, because I thought that since the thesis should be written in English, it would be better for me to think in English when analysing the data.

### **Researcher's role and its implications for data analysis**

Due to the specific experiences I had during the journey of sampling and data collection, the role I played during the data analysis process had also drawn my attention to appreciating that representations of others' accounts and experiences is related to who we are (Bolak, 1997). Thus, when I started to analyse the qualitative data I collected from interviews, I was aware that I might interpret the same phenomenon in different ways from other researchers due to my specific personal background or pre-existing knowledge of the phenomenon. This reminded me to examine reflexively my researcher role throughout the data analysis process and to address the potential influences my researcher identity would have on the research results.

There are debates about whether a researcher is supposed to be in an insider position or an outsider position when interpreting qualitative data. Howard (1985) has claimed that a researcher should be recognized as a neutral, value-free truth-seeker who tries to understand the world in a totally objective manner. Likewise, Allen (2004) preferred the outsider position because it frees the researcher from potential bias arising from too close an affiliation with the research subjects.

In contrast, some researchers argued that subjective attributes of a researcher cannot simply be avoided while making a research design (Mullings, 1999). In the same vein, Atkinson (1998) claimed that qualitative designs call for subjective judgments, personal consciousness and experience from researchers, whose interpretations of other's stories, thus, may be the product created in combination with his/her personal experience.

The issue then shifted to the collaborative and reflective role of researcher in an academic report. For example, Roberts (2002) suggested researchers indicate their presence in the research and the influence of their social background, like gender, race, social class, or religion on it. Merrill (2009) even asked researchers to include their own biography in theses before giving interpretations of the research subjects' life documents.

To summarize, these debates have revealed that, the involvement of researcher's subjectivity in qualitative data analysis does not necessarily mean the research is defective. However, researchers should be reflexive in the course of analysing qualitative data by situating themselves socially and emotionally in relation to their research participants (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003).

As for the current research, although I initially decided and tried to distance myself from the qualitative data and looked at the collected stories as an outsider, I afterwards realized that my biography and personal experiences might have shaped the interpretation and presentation of the data. For example, I could hardly be entirely reflexive about the responses from parents because I had not been a parent, although I might have experienced being parented by my parents. Thus, I was more objective when interpreting their stories. However, it was more likely for me to have more insights into the stories of children, especially those who were the same age as me. Reading their stories sometimes made me feel that I was also an informant. Moreover, it occurred to me that, the Chinese culture I had inherited caused me to interpret some phenomenon arising from my data by taking elements for granted, and forget to consider that these might not make sense to people from different cultural backgrounds.

In view of this reality, improving the quality of this piece of research required me to triangulate the information from multiple sources, methods and theories (Mathison, 1988, Callender, 2006). For instance, I attempted to explore context, process, coherence and connectivity of the themes in the accounts of the respondents. Moreover, I have attempted to make visible my position within the written research by revealing the circumstances that surrounded data collection and analysis as far as possible, I will also clarify the underlying rationale for my claims in the analysis chapters. I hope this will have brought a certain degree of rigor to the research analysis and research results, and improved the validity and reliability of the study.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter addresses the methodology of the present study and illustrates the research procedures. The following chapters move to analysis of the data and discussion of the research findings.

## **Chapter 4 Findings: Generation A**

### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the participants recruited for the cohort referred as Generation A. The families recruited for Generation A depict those families in which parents had their first child in 1960-1979. This chapter comprises four analytical sections. The first section presents the composition of the sample and its context. The second section outlines parents' expectations capturing three themes including "leave the peasant life", "get a permanent job" and "no specific request about educational level to be attained". These expectations are further distinguished as "compulsory" or "optional". The third section presents and interprets the factors shaping parents' expectations. The fourth section examines how parents' expectations impact on children achieving higher socio-economic status than they. It suggests that the interactions between parents' expectations for their children and children's aspirations for themselves as well as the impact of social contexts in promoting or hindering children's upward inter-generational social mobility.

## Sample and Background Information

Table 4.1 The demographic information for the participants recruited to Generation A

| Demographical Index |                             | Family 1                       | Family 2         | Family 3                     | Family 4           | Family 5                        |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Child's             | Birth year                  | 1966                           | 1963             | 1961                         | 1962               | 1964                            |
|                     | Birth order                 | eldest                         | eldest           | eldest                       | eldest             | eldest                          |
|                     | Birth place                 | Rural                          | Rural            | Rural                        | Rural              | Urban                           |
|                     | Gender                      | Male                           | Female           | Male                         | Female             | Male                            |
|                     | Education                   | Bachelor's degree              | Senior secondary | College Diploma              | College Diploma    | College Diploma                 |
|                     | Occupation (Prestige score) | Middle-ranking official (67.1) | Peasant (29.3)   | High-ranking official (69.1) | Accountants (66.4) | Secondary school teacher (72.9) |
| Father's            | Birth year                  | 1946                           | 1940             | 1936                         | N/A                | 1937                            |
|                     | Birth place                 | Rural                          | Rural            | Rural                        | N/A                | Rural                           |
|                     | Education                   | Primary                        | Primary          | Primary                      | N/A                | Senior secondary                |
|                     | Occupation (Prestige score) | Peasant (29.3)                 | Peasant (29.3)   | Peasant (29.3)               | N/A                | Mechanic (61.4)                 |
| Mother's            | Birth year                  | 1946                           | 1940             | N/A                          | 1935               | 1940                            |
|                     | Birth place                 | Rural                          | Rural            | N/A                          | Rural              | Urban                           |
|                     | Education                   | Under primary                  | No schooling     | N/A                          | Junior secondary   | Senior secondary                |
|                     | Occupation (Prestige score) | Peasant (29.3)                 | Peasant (29.3)   | N/A                          | Sales clerk (42.1) | Secondary school teacher (72.9) |

Note: N/A=Not Available.

The families in this chapter depict those families in which parents had their first child in 1960-1979. Therefore, as shows in Table 4.1, the five children recruited for GA were born in 1966, 1963, 1961, 1962 and 1964 respectively. That is to say, they were born soon after the Great Leap Forward Famine, which was prevalent in China during 1959-1961. The three years of 1959-61 have been named "three-bitter-years" in modern Chinese history. During this period, the sharp decline in agricultural production and the widespread famine not only led to a deterioration in people's quality of life (Peng, 1987), but also resulted in massive starvation in China (Lin and Yang, 1998). Therefore, it could be expected that the first concern for parents at the time might have been to see their children sufficiently fed and clothed.

Among all the five children recruited for GA, those in Family 1 (F1), Family 2 (F2), Family 3 (F3) and Family 4 (F4) were born in rural areas. Parents in F1, F2 and F3 were peasants. The mother in F4 used to work in a town as a sales clerk before the Cultural Revolution (CR) (1966-1976). But when the state issued the “send down” policy in 1968 in response to Mao Zedong’s call on educated youth to go to the countryside to be re-educated by poor peasants (Zhou and Hou, 1999), her husband who had completed senior secondary education was sent to a village. Hence, she followed her husband who had settled in the countryside and they became peasants. Family 5 (F5) was the only urban family recruited for GA. When this child was born, the father was a mechanic and the mother was a secondary school teacher.

Children recruited for GA were mostly born and brought up in the countryside. It is not irrational to attribute this phenomenon to the composition of Chinese population at the time. By 1949 when the New China was founded, 89.4 per cent of the total population were rural residents. As parents recruited for GA were born during 1930s or 1940s, they were most likely to be rural inhabitants. Even during the 1960s, the proportion of rural residence in China was still over 82 per cent (China Statistic Year Book, 1997), so it is not surprising that when I attempted to recruit children for GA, candidates of rural origin outnumbered those of urban origins.

### **Children’s educational levels are higher than their parents**

In general, the educational attainment of parents in GA was quite low compared to their children. The father in F1, F2, and F3 had finished primary school, while the father in F5 had completed senior secondary education. The mother in F1 attended primary school but failed to complete it, and the mother in F2 had no schooling experience. Unlike the mother in F1 and F2, the mother in F3 finished junior secondary education and the mother in F5 finished senior secondary education. But their children all had achieved higher educational attainment than they. The child in F1 had a BA, which was the highest educational attainment among these five Generation A children. The child in F2 had finished senior secondary education while the child in F3, F4 and F5 had all obtained a college diploma. This also indicates that, children in GA had achieved upward intergenerational mobility in terms of education.

The comparatively low educational attainments of parents in GA could be attributed to the poverty, the lack of educational institutions and the patriarchal nature of Chinese society at the time when these parents were school-age children. Before the Chinese Communist

Party (CCP) began to launch the mass education system which implemented low costs for primary and middle schools as well as free higher education, few families could afford the costs of schooling. This phenomenon was thoroughly embodied in the accounts of parents recruited for GA. For example, the father in F1 said that:

“It was common for children not to go to school at the time when I was a young boy, because of poverty.... I gave up studying after finishing the primary school as I could not bear the hunger anymore.”

Lack of educational institutions, particularly in rural areas, also resulted in the low school attendance. Evidence has been derived from the accounts of the father in F5. He was the lucky one as even though there were no schools in his home village, he got a chance to enrol in a school which was located in a city. Thus, he successfully changed his rural identity through education. He expressed how difficult it was for him to obtain the chance to go to school:

“I was born in a poor village, where there was no primary school at all. But I was lucky because my neighbour, who was a teacher, agreed to bring me and his own little brother to the school in the city. Although I finally got a chance to study in a school, my parents did not support me because they had no money. Then, my father had a talk over this issue with my uncle. At last, in consideration that I am the oldest son in my family, they agreed to send me to study in that school. But, the only thing they could provide for me was food.”

The above account also highlighted that if the father in F5 had not been a boy, the request to go to school might be turned down. Thus, it revealed a patriarchal nature in Chinese society that valued boys more than girls and impacted negatively on school attendance of girls. Confucian attitudes and norms supported a strong hierarchy based on gender. The distinction between men and women in traditional Chinese society were largely manifested in such Confucian mottos as “Men are born superior to women”, “A woman without talent is virtuous one”, “A man is assessed by his talent and achievement and a woman by her appearance”. Deeply influenced by such cultural norms, Chinese parents barely allowed women to study or go to school. During the interview, the mother in F2 who had no school experiences expressed how harsh the situation was for girls who attempted to study:

“I have no school experience, nor do my sisters. Girls were not allowed to go to school in the old days, because people deemed that educated girls would be wild

and lose the virtues belonging to women. My grandpa even beat my mom, when I told them that I wanted to go to school.... Girls from elite families were not allowed to study either, as it would be a shame for these 'prestigious families'."

Bauer et al. (1992) noted such gender discrimination against women that was inherited from traditional Chinese cultural values. They indicated the lower female than male proportion of total students enrolled in universities and colleges, high schools and primary schools between 1949 and mid-1960s. In 1949, the proportion of female university students was 20%, then it increased to around 27% in the middle of 1950s, but it dropped dramatically to less than 15% in 1961. The proportion of female high school students was about 25% in 1949, the proportion of female primary school students was at the same level. Although they both increased steadily afterwards, but the proportion was not more than 30% by 1961.

The CCP leadership began to reform the educational system from 1949. I have already explained this in Chapter 2. Briefly, an open school system that favoured the countryside and children of peasants was advocated at this time. Educational institutions, primary schools in particular, were expanded dramatically in rural areas. The educational policy also formulated low schooling costs for primary and secondary schools, as well as free higher education and students were provided with a living allowance. Therefore, tuition was not such a heavy financial burden for rural households. But to a large extent, children's access to middle schools still depended on the availability of transport and parents' capacity to pay for board and lodging (Cleverley, 1991). All in all, educational opportunities for both rural and urban residents were dramatically increased during the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, as the CCP government had made efforts and changes to increase the status of women and to promote gender equality after the founding of the PRC, the gender gap in educational attainment narrowed over time from 1949 to 1987, although gender inequality still persisted in China (Bauer et al., 1992).

### **A life contingency: the Cultural Revolution**

Children of GA had experienced one of the most severe social disasters throughout Chinese history, the Cultural Revolution (CR). It broke out in 1966 and lasted until 1976. This is a distinctive life experience for children of GA, as those recruited for the other two cohorts were born after the CR. During these ten turbulent years, children of GA were supposed to be school students in light of the conventional school age of 7 to 12 years for elementary students (Pepper, 1990). However, CR resulted in a widespread disruption to the formal

educational system, especially in the urban areas (Giles *et al.*, 2008, Meng and Gregory, 2002). Schools stopped normal operation for at six-year (Meng and Gregory, 2007). When schools opened again, a half-work and half-study system was applied to all university and middle schools (Löfstedt, 1980). Based on this new system, students had to spend most of their time working in a school factory instead of studying in a classroom. Even in the class, the only things they learned were the *Quotations from Chairman Mao*. Moreover, during the CR, the slogan of “study is useless” was prevalent in China (Hawkins, 1983). These interruptions had significant adverse impact on school experiences of children in this cohort. For example, the child in F2 said:

“During the chaotic years, students did not study at all. We were just doing whatever we liked in class and did not pay any attention to the teacher. But the teacher did not care about us either.”

The child in F4 also expressed how little study was valued during the CR, she said that:

“There were only eight students in my class. We were always encouraged to work in a factory, not to study. Actually, we had no textbooks at the time.”

Nonetheless, the specific impacts of the CR on the participants recruited for GA were varied as they had different political identities. An individual’s political identity was actually his/her political origin, namely *chengfen*. There were five types of political identity at the time: landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants, and landless labourers. During the CR, those who had rich peasants and landlords origins were the targets of revolutionary rebels, while those who were poor peasants and landless labourers were given priority regarding school recruitment and job assignments (Tang and Parish, 2000). Another group that was discriminated against and attacked during the CR was intellectuals (Chan *et al.*, 2008). They were treated with suspicion and hostility. (See Chapter 2 for a detailed explanation)

Among the five families recruited for GA, F1, F2, F3 were poor peasant households, thus they were not attacked during the course of the CR. For example, the child in F3 said:

“As a poor rural household, the impact of Cultural Revolution was not obvious to us.”

In addition, the father in F1 expressed that:

“I was just a poor peasant, how could I be attacked?”

However, parents in F4, F5 were identified as intellectuals, thus their life chances all had been altered because of the CR. For F5, the father was a secondary school teacher before the CR. But he was forced to work in a factory as a mechanic. His wife was also a teacher. She did not lose her job during the CR, but she stated that teachers were labelled “the stinking Number Nine” (*chou lao jiu*), which illustrates the low social status of intellectuals and represents how seriously they were discriminated against during the CR. The situation was much harsher for F4. The father of F4 was attacked during the CR. He worked in the city, but he was sent down to the village as punishment for people who were labelled “a Rightist” (Kraus, 1977: 73) and to be re-educated by poor peasants. Even though the mother in F4 was not directly attacked by political rebels, she was forced to follow her husband to the village by the leader of her work-unit. If she wanted to keep the job and continue living in the town, she had to divorce her husband who would definitely go to the countryside. At last, she resigned her job and went to the village with her husband since she did not want to break up the marriage. From that point, their life was altered completely. Not only were they themselves influenced by the CR, but their children were also discriminated against due to the father’s “bad” political identity. Mostly severely, their children were not allowed to go to school because studying opportunities prioritized children of “good origins”, such as poor peasants and workers (Tang, 2000). Their one child expressed how her childhood was affected due to her father’s political identity:

“I had an unfortunate childhood. When I was in the primary school, my father was severely attacked because he was labelled ‘a Rightist’... And I, as a descendant of ‘a Rightist’ person, was treated with hostility.... I felt I was in an inferior status in the society and I did not dare to play with other children. They always laughed at me for my father’s ‘bad’ political identity. So I always stayed at home, as it made me feel safe!”

For parents and children in this cohort, the CR was a contingency that they had not expected. It affected the opportunities that they could actually access and altered the cultural values that had deeply influenced them. Thus, it is necessary to examine whether these changes had effected their expectations and aspirations, and how these altered their life chances subsequently.

### **Inter-generational mobility**

As the present study investigates the impact of parental expectations on their children’s inter-general social mobility, which to refer the socio-economic position of children relative

to their parents (i.e. the relationship between the class position an individual occupies and the class in which he or she was brought up in), it is necessary to make explicit the disparities between parents and children regarding their positions in the social hierarchy at first. The social status of each participant recruited for GA shown in Table 4. 2 were based on Lu’s (2002) classification of five socio-economic statuses (SES) in contemporary China. Moreover, in view of the “two classes and one stratum” social structure of Mao’s regime (specified in Chapter 2, pp. 28-42), parents in F1, F2, and F3 belong to the peasant class, parents in F4 and F5 belonged to the intellectual stratum before the CR; whereas, the parents in F4 converted to be a peasantry and the father in F5 became a working class person due to the revolutionary campaign of CR.

Table 4.2 Socio-economic status of the participants recruited to Generation A

|        | Family 1            | Family 2     | Family 3     | Family 4            | Family 5            |
|--------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Father | Lower status        | Lower status | Lower status | N/A                 | Lower-middle status |
| Mother | Lower status        | Lower status | N/A          | Lower-middle status | Middle status       |
| Child  | Upper-middle status | Lower status | Upper status | Middle status       | Middle status       |

Table 4.2 illustrates that all the children recruited for GA had either achieved a higher socio-economic status than their parents or stayed in the same socio-economic position as their parents. And without exception, for those who had achieved upward social mobility, the route to success was education, predominantly through higher education.

Children in this cohort had mostly benefited from the restoration of the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) in 1977. From 1977, higher education was available to everyone because the recommendation system was abandoned and academic merit became the only criteria for the college entrance-selection. Thus, except for the child in F2, all the other four children had taken the NCEE, subsequent to which, they either enrolled in a college or a university. When they graduated, they were assigned a job by the state without considering their preferences as the unified job assignment system operated in China at the time. What is more, the reason why the child in F2 did not achieve upward social mobility was she did not acquire an appropriate academic degree as she dropped out of school in the final year of senior high school. An appropriate academic degree means a

college diploma, a BA or higher than a BA. Graduates from technical secondary school (*zhongzhuan*), such as the parents in F5, were also qualified for state job assignment at the time.

### **Summary**

In summary, the children recruited for GA were born in famine and brought up in turmoil. Life was so difficult during their childhood that food and clothes were their first concern. They encountered one of the most severe social disasters in Modern Chinese history, the Cultural Revolution, which was a contingency that they had not expected but seriously affected their life chances. In the following section, I will explore what parents expected for their children under these complex social and political contexts.

## **Parental Expectations for Their Children**

### **The classification of parental expectation**

During the interview, each parent was invited to talk about their educational expectations for their child. The response I expected to get when I created the interview schedule was an explicit answer or a statement from which I could pick out an educational level that the parents expected their child to achieve, as “I wanted my child to finish the higher education and get a Bachelor’s degree”. However, the reality turned to be totally different from what I anticipated. In terms of their educational expectations for the child, parents recruited for GA, who were primarily peasants, stated that they expected their child to leave the peasant life or get a permanent job. When I asked what kind of job they expected the child to do, they all said that they had never thought about it at all, they just wanted them to get a permanent one whereby they could afford a normal life. As a result, I could not rank their educational expectations according to the educational hierarchy of the state as high, medium or low. In view of this situation, I encouraged these parents to explain how they thought their expectations could be realized. Unsurprisingly, they all perceived education as the only route to success. But, they could hardly say how much education they wanted their child to obtain in order to realize these expectations. Instead, they replied that they would either support the child to do the best or encourage him/her to learn until they became eligible for a state-assigned permanent job. Therefore, “leave the peasant life”, “get a permanent job” and “no specific request about educational level to be attained” comprised and characterized the expectations of parents recruited for GA. Their expectations implied that there was no certainty in a peasant life, but a permanent job in a city implied certainty and met all their family’s needs.

Furthermore, I distinguished parents' expectations as "compulsory" or "optional". As an explanation, parents who held compulsory expectations were insistent on their hopes for their child's future. This contrasts with parents who had what I term optional expectations. These parents wished that their children would leave the peasant life but allowed for optional possibilities. They would not mind if the child failed to achieve their aspirations as long as the child did his/her best. Based on these two categories, I considered F3, F4 and F5 as having compulsory expectations; while, F1 and F2 as having optional expectations.

Table 4.3 shows the categorization of parents' expectations for their child, simultaneously based on the compulsory/optional dichotomy and the three characteristics including leave the peasant life, get a permanent job and no specific request about educational level to be attained.

Table 4.3 Parental expectations of their children's life in Generation A

| Parental expectation                                       | Compulsory |    |    | Optional |    |
|--|------------|----|----|----------|----|
|  | F3         | F4 | F5 | F1       | F2 |
| Leave the peasant life                                     | √          | √  |    | √        | √  |
| Get a permanent job  | √          | √  | √  | √        | √  |
| No specific request about educational level to be attained |            | √  |    | √        | √  |

### Detailed descriptions of parental expectation

To explain the above table, I will provide thick descriptions of parents' own words about their expectations of their child's life in order to give them voice. Children's words will also be presented as a supplement to their parents' accounts.

Family 1:

"To be honest, as a peasant, what I expected for my son was just a permanent job in the city. I had not considered which educational level I wanted him to achieve. But I knew that it would be better to study than to work on the farm. How hard it was to work on the farm as a physical labourer! He could escape this hardship only through studying." (Father)

"I would support his study based on my economic ability. But in terms of how much he should learn, it was really up to him, not me." (Father)

All the three characteristics were identified in Family 1, GA. The father not only expected the child to get a permanent job in the city, but also mentioned the hardship of peasant life. Thus, he wished the child to escape the hardship of being a peasant. But he had no idea about which educational level the child should obtain. He said that the child should make his own decision. Thus, he was a child-centred parent in this regard. What he could do was to pay for the child's education according to the family's economic condition. He also mentioned that he would give up funding the child's school expenditure if it went beyond his capacity to pay.

Family 2:

"I had always been supportive of my children's study. Whoever wanted to go to school, I would support him/her as my family's economic condition at the time could afford for their schooling.... When they dropped out of school, I was so angry but I could not help that. I expected them to go to school, to get a job and to get rid of the farm work. But I also believed that if one does not have talent in studying, then he/she should base their life on physical labour. So when they dropped out of school, I turned to ask them to work hard on the farm." (Mother)

The above accounts affirmed that the mother in F2 had always been supportive of the child's study. Similar to F1, the mother expressed the view that she expected the child to leave the farm, to get a job, but she had no specific goal about the child's educational level to be attained. However, the mother did have high expectations for her child's education. She did not have explicit targets about educational level because she did not have the knowledge of the school system to set one. But the high expectations were thwarted by her children who was neither interested in school nor making efforts in her study. At the same time, her children seemed very determined to leave school and did not want to negotiate with her. Eventually, this mother realized her children wanted not realise her expectations and so felt that there was nothing she could do. Thus, the mother agreed her children to give up school although she was disappointed. Moreover, given that this mother let her daughter to make the final decision in relation to her study although she did agree with her daughter's opinion, I consider the mother was operating a child-centred parenting style.

Family 3:

“My father just expected me not to be a farmer and to get a job. He firmly believed that studying was the only route for me to achieve this goal. So he always asked me to study hard and pushed me a lot. He often told me that if I could not receive higher education, he would abandon me.” (Child)

As we can see from the above statement derived from the child’s narrative, the expectation of the father in F3 for the child’s future was the same as that of the parents in F1 and F2. But different from them in that his request about the child’s higher education was coercive and he left little autonomy for the child. Thus, he was an authoritarian parent.

Actually, “receive higher education” was literally translated from the Chinese saying “*shang da xue*”, which represents any educational levels being equal to or higher than technical secondary school (*zhong zhuan*) in the Maoist era. At the time, people often referred to “*shang da xue*” to express a high educational achievement. It was different from what higher education means in contemporary China, i.e., college or university. Students who have graduated from colleges will be awarded a college diploma. Students who have received undergraduate education in universities will be awarded a Bachelor’s degree. The educational level of a college diploma is lower than a Bachelor’s degree. It usually costs 2-3 years to get a college diploma but 4-5 years to get a Bachelor’s degree in modern China.

Family 4:

“Good education means good jobs. So I consistently supported my child to study even if my family was so poor during that time, because I believed that learning is always good for a person. But in terms of which educational level I expected her to achieve, I really had no idea about that. I just expected her to learn as much as possible.” (Mother)

The same as the father in F3, this mother also expressed her consistent encouragement for the child’s study. And she also said that she would aid her child’s education regardless of the family economic condition. Different from F1, F2 and F3, “leave the peasant life” was not derived from the mother’s account toward the child’s future, although they were living in the countryside and doing farm work. Nonetheless, the emphasis of her wish of a good job for the child could be identified as an indirect expression of the expectation that the child escape farm work.

## Family 5

“I took the NCEE during the second year in the high school. But my exam result just passed the line for the technical secondary school.... My father came to talk this over with me. He suggested me that I take the NCEE for a second time and try to get an offer from either a college or a university. This was also because they expected me to have a higher educational level than theirs, as he himself and my mother had already completed the technical secondary school.” (Child)

Within all the five families recruited for GA, F5 was the only urban family. Parents in this family were urban residents and the child was born in the city. Thus, they did not mention “leave the peasant life” when talking about their expectations for the child. Moreover, although parents in F5 did not mention it by themselves during their interviews, the child’s account revealed that they expected him to go to college or university, rather than attending a technical secondary school. This indicates that parents hope their children achieve more than they in terms of educational achievement.

I think each parent in GA had high educational expectations for their child in general. This is because, primarily, although there were no more than 10 university or college students per 10,000 population in China by 1978 (Chinese Statistics Yearbook, 1996), parents in F3 and F5 still expected their child to go to college or university. Particularly, the parents of F3 who were poor peasants did not give up their expectations for the child’s higher education even though the CCP cadres’ children were over-represented in obtaining recommendations for college or university study in the early 1970s. Thus, these parents’ high educational expectations were embodied in their firm determination of getting their children the limited chance of going to college or university. For the other three rural households, although they did not refer to higher education directly in their statement, I still think they had high expectations for their child because there was no certainty in a peasant life and a permanent job in the city not only implied certainty, but also met all their needs. These rural parents were determined that their children escape the hardships of peasant life that they had experienced. They expected their children to move from the rural life and wished them to have a better life than they. These were high hopes for rural parents due to the particular socio-cultural contexts (Zhu and Chen, 2000).

## Summary

Parents recruited for GA rarely set specific educational levels or occupations that could be categorized according to the educational hierarchy and the Lin-Xie occupational prestige

scale. My research results revealed that their expectations of the child’s future comprised three major themes: leave the peasant life, get a permanent job and no specific request about educational level to be attained. I also provided detailed narratives from both parents and children regarding parental expectations of the child’s life, in order to give them voice. I conclude that the parents in GA had high educational expectations for their child.

### **Factors Influencing Parental Expectations**

What factors shaped parents’ expectations for their children? When asked about their educational expectations, why would these parents refer to the hardships of peasant life and the hope for a permanent job instead of giving any specific requests for educational level? In response to these questions, two categories were identified. The first was the social context, focusing on the state policies and socio-political environment that had affected parents’ expectations for their child’s education. The second was family background, which addressed the issues of family’s economic condition and parents’ educational attainment.

Each of the two categories contains complementary subcategories, and each sub-category comprises several themes. An outline of the themes is shown in Table 4.4, after which is my interpretation and discussion for each of these themes.

Table 4.4 Factors influencing parental expectations in Generation A

| <b>Category</b>         | <b>Sub-category</b>                    | <b>Theme</b>   |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Social Context          | Rural-urban divide                     | Hardships of peasant life                              |
|                         |  | Seeking security                                       |
|                         |  | “Don’t become like me”                                 |
|                         | Unified job-assignment system          | Education leads to a permanent job                     |
|                         |  | Personal preferences are not considered                |
|                         | Educational system                     | Recommended-enrolment in higher education              |
| The Cultural Revolution | A barrier for those in the wrong class |  |
| Family Background       | Family economic condition              | Living expenditures                                    |
|                         |  | Utilitarian value of having children in the work-force |
|                         | Parental educational attainment        | Limited knowledge of the educational system            |
|                         |  | Achieve more than parents                              |

## **Social Context**

This category includes the significant issues of the social and policy context that parents and children recruited for GA had gone through. It comprised three subcategories: rural-urban divide, unified job-assignment system and educational system.

### ***Rural-urban divide***

This sub-category stressed the large gap of life condition between rural and urban areas. Ever since 1958, the household registration system (*hukou*) was applied throughout the country. Since then, every citizen in China had been classified as rural or urban personnel, with the rural population fixed firmly at the bottom of the *hukou* hierarchy (Cheng and Selden, 1994).

From the parents' point of view, the peasant life was one of great hardships and they intended to seek an urban life with more security for their children as a way of keeping such hardships at bay, in order that their children would live a better life than theirs.

### ***Hardships of peasant life***

The planned economic system in the Maoist era required every rural resident to work collectively for production teams and their income was redistributed by production teams. The distribution of collective income to each peasant household was based on a work-point system relying on the principle that the more you work, the more work-points you would get and thereby you would earn more money or agricultural products. But there was a gender bias within this income distribution system. Women were assigned fewer work-point than men even if they were doing the same work (Dominelli, 1991, Chinn, 1978).

Nonetheless, the income that peasants could obtain from production teams or communes were limited in comparison with the amount of labour they offered. They not only suffered physical and mental oppression by working on the farm for production teams, but they were also pinched with poverty in those days. The father in F1 complained about the severe living conditions of rural households at the time. He said:

“One person would only be given a half kilo of oil per year.... not many work-points could be gained no matter how hard we were working on the farm. So we would be satisfied as long as we do not suffer from hunger or starvation.”

The father in F2 elaborated one day of his countless days working for the production team. He stated that:

“I went to the farm before sunrise. Then I worked in the farm for a whole day in order to gain more work-points. I begrudged spending time for dinner as I would rather do more farm work. During the night when I returned home from the farm, it was painful on my body but I could not rest until I got better, because if I took a day off from farm work, my children and wife would probably endure the torments of hunger for a few days.”

The inferior status of the rural population was stressed during the Cultural Revolution. During the Cultural Revolution when the official attitude emphasized the ideological importance of learning from poor and lower-middle peasants, most urban workers were sent down to the countryside, in order that they could be re-educated by peasants. However, being sent down to the countryside was not viewed as being ideologically strengthened; rather, it was considered receiving stern punishment (Potter, 1983). Potter (1983: 478) explained this phenomenon:

“...the change from worker to peasant had such devastating social consequences, of which participation in productive labour was among the least; more important were the loss of status, loss of economic security, and loss of access to urban life.... Urbanites experienced it as a humiliating penance of indefinite, perhaps permanent duration: to live like a peasant was a punishment. This in itself illustrates the gulf in status between peasants and workers.”

In view of such grim living conditions and lower social status of being a peasant, parents who were agricultural labourers all insisted that they expected their children to leave agricultural life. Moreover, the more parents were embedded in these hardships, the more they would expect their children to leave the peasant life.

#### *Seeking security*

As the output of agricultural production depended very much on the natural environment which was out of the control of human beings, rural inhabitants lacked security. The child in F2 mentioned the risks of farming based from natural disasters:

“Peasants were living on the farm but farm work was always against risks, such as natural disasters. That is to say, the annual agricultural output could not be predicted; so that, our income could not be guaranteed at all.”

Since peasants were rewarded in direct proportion to the success of the production team, they would have to bear the losses if the production team failed, no matter whether the

failure was attributed to incompetent labourers or natural disasters (Potter, 1983). In contrast, workers could count on their earnings because they knew in advance what they would be paid for their services in work-units (*dan wei*). In addition, since workers in urban work-units could not produce grain or food by themselves, the state provided them with grain rations. It has been argued that, it was this grain ration that had been viewed as the key distinction between peasants and workers (Potter, 1983). Moreover, the state reserved its resources disproportionately for those who were classified as urban residents (Cheng and Selden, 1994; Christiansen 1990, Potter, 1983). For instance, the state provided urban residents with employment, housing, food, water, sewage disposal, transportation, medical facilities, police protection, schools, and other essentials and amenities of life (Banister 1987: 328). But none of these services or welfare entitlements that were routinely provided to urban residents was available to rural residents (Cheng and Selden 1994). All such policies made the life of peasants far less secure than the life of urban inhabitants. Thus, parents' expectations of leaving the peasant life represented a sense of seeking security for their children. And I think this was a high expectation given their limited resources and what they had faced.

*"Do not become like me"*

In the face of the hardships of peasant life and the appeal of urban life, parents who were peasants pointed out time and time again that they did not want their children to be the same as themselves. They repeated the saying "I hoped that my child could be different from me, and be better than me" or "I did not want my child to become like me." They continuously talked with their children about many aspects of their own life as bad and frustrating, such as their low income and daily struggles:

"I often told my child, that 'haven't you found out how hard you father's life is? I am telling you, if you do not study, your life will be the same or even harder'." (Mother, F2)

Hence, their expectation of "leaving the peasant life" or "get a permanent job" reflected the wish of a different life for their children and upward social mobility too.

***Unified job-assignment system***

By the 1990s, the labour market was unified by a centrally-administered allocation system. According to this system, students graduated from technical secondary schools, colleges or universities would be directly assigned a job by the state. There was no freedom in job hunting under this labour policy and once a person was employed, he or she could not

resign or seek another job (Ip, 1995). Due to this job-assignment system, on the one hand, parents stressed the role of education in promoting upward social mobility; on the other hand, parents could hardly request a preferred job for the child since their preferences would not be considered by the Central Labour Bureau.

*Education leads to a permanent job*

Due to the mandatory constraints imposed by the household registration system, it was very difficult for a rural registration holder to get a permanent job in the city (Lu, 2004). Thus, the employment system provided the primary chance for rural inhabitants to get rid of the peasant life through attending schools<sup>13</sup> and accepting the subsequent job assignments away from the countryside (Hawkins, 1983; Luo 2004, Wu and Treiman, 2004, Xiaogang Wu and Donald J Treiman, 2007, Ip, 1995, Chen and Uttal, 1988). For example, the child in Family 3 said that:

“My father took education as the only way to change my destiny, I mean, to get a permanent job and become an urban *hukou* holder...”

Therefore, I conclude that the reason why parents stressed “leave the peasant life” as an expression of their educational expectations for the children was that, they had set “becoming eligible to escape the agricultural life” as a benchmark for their children’s educational achievements. That is to say, the level of education these parents expected their children to obtain should provide them with a ticket out of the countryside via a job-assignment. Therefore, although they did not mention any specific educational level directly, they still expressed how highly they valued education through these expectations.

Jobs assigned via the unified job-assignment system were characterised as “permanent”. Once a person was assigned a job by the state, their employment would be guaranteed for life and he/she would never have the risk of being dismissed by the employer. Dismissal would only occur if the worker had severely violated labour law or committed a crime (Chan et al., 2008). Thus, Chan et al. (2008) argued that the labour policy under a planned economy was a “lifelong employment”, or “the iron rice bowl” — the common Chinese expression for it. When a rural registration holder was assigned a permanent job in an urban area, he/she would leave the countryside and live as a worker. And simultaneously,

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<sup>13</sup> As a detailed explanation, Wu and Treiman (2007) indicated that, for students with a rural *hukou*, there were two strategies for securing an urban *hukou* via higher education: the first was to gain admission to a specialized secondary school (*zhong zhuan*), which conferred urban *hukou* status immediately upon admission; the second was to gain admission to an academic senior high school (*gao zhong*) and then to a tertiary institution (*da xue*).

he or she would be conferred urban *hukou* status. Then, he/she would never endure the hardships of peasant life or live with a sense of insecurity.

Along with the permanent employment system was the temporary employment system. This labour system was used to recruit rural labourers to supplement permanent employees, most of whom would be part of the urban working population. Rural registered householders were only allowed to take temporary jobs in cities under strict government control (Ip, 1995). Temporary workers, mostly rural labourers, would only be employed for a short period of time such as one year. Their life would be filled with insecurity because they could not enjoy the same fringe benefits as provided for permanent employees. They would have return to their original place after the expiration of their temporary labour contract. Under this situation, Ip (1995) contended that temporary workers were not only suffering from economic exploitation but also, due to the household registration system, they were always able to achieve inter-strata upward mobility.

All in all, while enduring all the humiliations of the countryside, peasants were seeking a chance to become permanent workers and took this as a way of keeping the hardships of peasant-hood at bay. Hence, parents recruited to GA, especially those who had been peasants presented “get a permanent job” as an expectation for their child’s future. Therefore, “get a permanent job” and “leave the agricultural life” were actually two different manifestations of the same goal: “becoming an urban registration holder.” This was actually social mobility of a higher social status.

*Personal preferences are not considered*

Along with “permanency”, another feature underlying the unified job-assignment system was that “personal preferences were not considered”. The Central Labour Bureau directly and completely controlled the assignment of jobs to qualified individuals. Rejection to an assigned work-unit or job could lead to severe punishment and once a worker was employed, he/she could not resign or seek another job (Han and Monshima, 1992). In view of such a rigid situation, individuals rarely thought about their preferred work-unit or occupation because their preferences would not be considered. Therefore, parents in GA did not provide me with specific jobs that they expected their children to do, children did not raise any dream occupations either. So, this social context constrained their expectations and aspirations, since their personal preferences made no sense in this system.

### ***Educational system***

The educational system that ran through the childhood of children born in the 1960s was an open one for primary and secondary schools. But tertiary education was not entirely available to the masses as entrant-selection for college or university was based on a recommendation system. Moreover, educational opportunities for peasants and workers whom the Chinese Communist Party was going to rely on increased dramatically during the Maoist era (Hawkins, 1983). Additionally, as the educational policy promoted low costs for primary and secondary schools, as well as free higher education (Guan, 2000), the educational opportunities for lower class families increased. Thus, rural inhabitants could gain hope of a better life for their children.

#### ***Recommended-enrolment in higher education***

Before the NCEE was restored in 1977, university entrants were selected by recommendations from communist cadres (Vogel, 2011). Thus, the local CCP cadre's children, regardless of their educational achievements, would be recommended to study in university while villagers had little hope that they could inspire to participate at these levels. The accounts of the child in F4 suggested the inequalities in higher education at the time. She said that:

“When China was under the command economy, if a university quota had been assigned to my village, the child from a cadre family would get the quota without doubt as he/she could get recommendation from cadres, no entrance examinations were needed at all. So we always said that ‘doing well at maths, physics and chemistry is not as good as having an influential father.’”

This might had restricted parents' expectations about their children's higher education. Thus, during the interview, only two families said explicitly that they expected their children to receive higher education while parents of these two families were not members of the Communist Party.

### ***The Cultural Revolution***

#### ***A barrier for those in the wrong class***

As a step of the state socialization process, Mao Zedong and other leaders of the CCP had made efforts to reduce the elements inherited from Confucian society. In contrast to the Confucian thought which claimed that educated people should be respected, Mao viewed intellectuals as counter-revolutionary and bourgeois (Fouts and Chan, 1995). Mao's discrimination against educated people reached its climax during the Cultural Revolution,

when the prevailing attitude in society was “study is useless” and intellectuals were treated with hostility by the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (Zhou et al., 1996).

It was interesting but not surprising to find that, parents recruited for GA regarded education and intellectuals with constant favour regardless of the injunctions of the Cultural Revolution. The mother in F4 whose husband was severely attacked by revolutionary rebels and herself sent back to the countryside during the CR also expressed her positive attitude toward knowledge and study. She said that:

“I always believe that learning is a good thing. People were not encouraged to go to school during the Cultural Revolution, but I kept motivating my children to study hard.”

The child in F3 also elaborated how his parents consistently supported his study:

“Even during the turbulent time when study was not advocated, my parents still encouraged me to learn, to go to school.”

These accounts reflected that Confucian thoughts had shaped the cultural values of Chinese people, and it could not be removed in a short time. Fouts and Chan (1995) also argued that the underlying Confucian thought regarding education remained basically unchanged no matter how hard Mao and his followers tried to alter the Chinese educational system. Parents in Generation A were mostly in their early middle-age when the Cultural Revolution erupted during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and had already formed a belief that education was important as the sole route for lower class people to achieve upward social mobility. Thus, they could hardly reverse their ingrained attitudes toward education. So parents firmly expected their children to acquire knowledge and receive formal education.

### **Family background**

Another prominent topic is the impact of family context on parents’ expectations for their children. Two mutually exclusive subcategories occurred in this category: family economic condition and parental educational attainment.

#### ***Family economic condition***

Parents in GA had all mentioned their family economic conditions when they stated their educational expectations for their child, either directly or indirectly. Education had never been entirely free in China, so it was not surprising that Chinese parents would take family

economic conditions into consideration when they decided whether to support the child's studies or not. For example, the father in F1 mentioned that family economic condition was an important factor that had determined how much he would be supportive of the child's education: "I would aid his study based on my economic ability." The mother in F2 also commented that:

"Whoever wanted to go to school, I would support him/her considering what my family's economic condition at the time could afford for their schooling."

Two themes were running through this sub-category: one is living expenditures and the other is the utilitarian value of having children in the work force.

#### Living expenditures

During the Maoist era, tuition fees were not a major educational cost because educational policy at the time held low schooling costs for both primary and middle schools, and free higher education alongside a maintenance grant (Guan, 2000). The account of the father in F1 referred to this phenomenon. He said that:

"When he was in school, we only had to provide him with foodstuffs while tuition was not a big deal. We did not spend much money for his college either, since living allowance was supplied to college students."

Tuition fees were not the issue that concerned parents the most when they decided whether to support the child's education or give it up. I think what concerned parents, especially those who were peasants, were whether they could provide sufficient foodstuffs in light of the failure of crops and wages assigned by the production team to each rural household leaving barely to pay for each family member to be sufficiently fed and clothed (Lu, 2002). Thus, students' living expenditures were a heavy economic load for rural households. For instance, the child in F3 said that:

"When I was in senior secondary school in 1976, the monthly cost of living was seven *yuan*. But my family was too poor to afford for it since we were not sufficiently fed and clothed at the time. At last, I left my home village and moved to a middle school in the town where I have a relative, so that I could save the seven *yuan* by living in my relative's place."

### *Utilitarian value of having children in the work force*

In rural China under the command economy, the family income of rural households was determined by farm work that all family members had completed for the production team. Therefore, the number of workers a rural household had determined the family income. Under this system, the more time a child spent in school, the less farm work the child could do, thus, lowering the income the child could earn for the family.

Kaitçıbaşı (2007) argued that in less developed countries or rural areas where children's material contribution is substantial, their work is seen as important by parents and the absence of their work is considered a loss of utilitarian value to the family. So, if parents in rural households prioritized the child's utilitarian value, they would be less supportive of the child's education. In contrast, if parents prioritized education, they would accept the absence of their child's contribution to the family work force. The father in F3 assigned great importance to education and he insisted that the child receive higher education. When he talked about the father's educational expectation for him, the child elaborated that:

“When I was in school, not only did I need to attend classes, but also I had to do farm work after school. However, in order to spare more time for my schoolwork, my father would do his best not to get me involved in farm work. He told me that if I study then I do not need to work on the farm.”

Nonetheless, in view of education being the path to upward social mobility, parents might think that an educated child would be in a better position to fulfil his/her utilitarian value in the long term (Hoffman, 1988), so that they would support their child's study.

### ***Parental educational attainment***

#### *Limited knowledge of the educational system*

Luo (2004) indicates that any rural registration holders who had gained admission to a specialized secondary school<sup>14</sup> (*zhong zhuan*), or gained admission to an academic senior high school and subsequently enrolled in a college or a university, would be assigned a job after graduation and would be conferred urban *hukou* status simultaneously. Therefore, a specialized secondary school became the minimum educational level to be achieved if a rural resident aspired to get a permanent job in urban areas.

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<sup>14</sup> When a student has completed the junior secondary school, he or she can either upgrade to the normal senior secondary school (*gao zhong*) or the technical secondary school (*zhong zhuan*). I have classified the two kinds of school into the same level as senior secondary education.

While, none of the parents recruited for GA mentioned the specific educational level that would realize their expectations for the child, as they had no idea of the specific educational level they expected the child to achieve. For example, the father in F1 said:

“I had not considered which educational level I wanted him (the child) to achieve”.

The mother in F4 also expressed the view that she was not able to give her child an advice about educational achievement. She expressed a view that her lack of higher education prevented her from doing this:

“But in terms of which educational level I expected her to achieve, I really had no idea about it.”

Parents’ limited knowledge of educational system was stressed by both parents and their children to explain the absence of parents’ requests for specific educational levels. As shows in Table 4.1, because the educational experiences of parents recruited for GA were limited, they had no basis for deciding which educational level their child should achieve. For example, the child of F1 said that:

“My parents were not familiar with the school system, because they did not have much school experiences. So they just encouraged me to study hard, to do my best.”

The mother in F2 also stressed that as she had little school experience, she did not know how much education her children should receive in order to get a job and leave the peasant life. Thus, getting out the rural areas was an important expectation of her for the child.

#### Achieve more than parents

Parents in F5 had more education than the other parents recruited for GA. During the interview with the child of F5, he stressed that his parents expected him to achieve a higher level of education than theirs:

“I took the NCEE during the second year in the high school. But my exam result just passed the line for the technical secondary school... My father suggested me to take the NCEE for a second time and try to get an offer from the college or university. This was also because they expected me to have a higher educational level than theirs, as he himself and my mother had already completed the technical secondary school.”

This account revealed that parents wished a better achievement for their children in comparison with their own achievements. Such expectation was closely related to the conservative views in terms of parent-child relations, which claimed that children were the continuation of their parents' life (Zhu and Chen, 2000). Parents expected their children to achieve more than they reflected their dissatisfaction with their own life and their tendency to rest their hopes for a better life on their children.

### **Summary**

In this section, I indicated that both social context and family background had influenced the educational expectations of parents in GA. First of all, parents' constant support for their children's study reflected their deeply ingrained cultural values that had been predominantly influenced by Confucian philosophy, within which study is highly praised and educated people are well-respected. Moreover, parents of GA agreed that education was the main route for their children to "leave the peasant life" and "get a permanent job". Parents' reliance on education was further promoted by the Maoist open educational system which provided schooling opportunities for the masses including children from rural households or other lower class families. However, the recommended-enrolment system in higher education in the Maoist era impeded people from lower class families to aspire to tertiary education. Additionally, family economic conditions and parents' educational attainments were raised by parents in GA as important factors determining their expectations for their children's education.

### **The Realization of Parental Expectations for their children**

Children recruited for GA, except the child in F2, have achieved upward inter-generational social mobility from the perspective of their higher educational attainments and higher prestige jobs. In the preceding sections, I have introduced parents' expectations for the child and explained the factors shaping parental expectations. In this section, I will explore and discuss how parents of GA treated their child due to their varied expectations, and analyse the impact of parents' expectations that their child achieve a higher social status than they.

In this section, the five families recruited for GA are classified into 3 groups respectively, they are: F3 and F5; F4, F1; and F2. Such a classification is made in light of the varied parental expectations in each family. Table 4.3 shows that, F3 and F5 are the two families which requested a specific level of education for their child, getting into college or university, and insisted on this goal. In contrast, the other three families had no specific

expectations of educational level for their child. Thus, I classified F3 and F5 into one group. As F4 took the goal of leaving the peasant life and getting a permanent job as compulsory for the child, while parents in F1 and F2 did not insist on this expectation, F4 is identified as a separate group and its situation will be investigated separately. See Table 4.5. Inter-family and inter-group comparison will be made in the analysis.

Table 4.5 The group classification of the five families recruited to GA

| Group Division | Group One | Group Two | Group Three |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| Family Number  | F3 & F5   | F4        | F1 & F2     |

### **Group One: Family 3 and Family 5**

#### ***Background information***

The child in F3 was of rural origins while the child in F5 was of urban origins. Both of them had taken the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) twice after it was restored in 1977 and had achieved a higher social status than their parents.

#### **Family 3**

In F3, the mother was illiterate and the father completed primary school. They were both peasants (29.3), thus they belonged to the peasantry class during the Maoist era and the political identity of this household was “poor peasant”. The child was born in 1961 and he is the big brother in the family. In 1979, he took the NCEE for the first time, but failed. After one year’s revision, he took the NCEE again. Afterwards, he successfully enrolled in a technical secondary school specializing in teacher-training. Following three years’ study, he was assigned to an elementary school as a school teacher (59.8). Simultaneously, he became an urban resident. Although this was his first job, he had already achieved a significant upward social mobility compared to the social status of his parents. He did very well in his first job, hence got promoted and became a middle-ranking official (67.1) in the same school a few years later. When I interviewed him in 2010, this middle-aged man had already been a high-ranking official (69.1) in the city government for several years.

#### **Family 5**

In F5, both the mother and the father were technical secondary school graduates. Following their subsequent job assignments, they became teachers in a secondary school (72.9) in 1958. Thus, they belonged to the intellectual stratum, based on the “two classes

and one stratum” social structure during the Maoist era. Due to the Cultural Revolution’s attack on “intellectuals”, the father was forced to work in a factory as a mechanic. The child is the only son of F5. He was born in 1964. He also took the NCEE twice. He got a college diploma in 1983 and then was assigned to teach in a senior secondary school (72.9) eventually. As time passed by, he realized the importance of an academic degree in climbing up the hierarchy of professional titles. So he took a correspondence course in 1990 and got a Bachelor’s degree in 1993. Although this child had been in the same occupational status as that of his parents (in spite of the father’s demotion during the CR), his status on the professional hierarchy was much higher. In addition, his educational level is much higher than his parents’. Therefore, I considered that upward inter-generational social mobility had been achieved by this participant.

### ***Parental involvement in children’s education***

My research results revealed that when parents had specific educational expectations for their child, they would be actively and constantly engaged in activities promoting their child’s study, so that they could ensure that the child was doing what they expected him/her to do and realize their socialization goals. According to the interviews, communication and participation were the two themes categorizing parental practices and activities promoting children’s educational achievement in F3 and F5 of Generation A.

#### *Communication*

The primary technique parents in F3 adopted to realize their educational expectations was by constantly communicating to the child their expectations and the goals they expected him to attain. Two types of parent-child communication in this regard were identified: encouragement and threats.

#### *Encouragement*

During the interview, the child of F3 felt thankful to his father for encouraging him to study hard. He told me:

“I would not even have a sense of study without my parents’ consistent encouragement.... My father always told me stories of people who had achieved a better life through study in order to encourage me to work hard in school. He also said that if I did not study, I would always be poor and attract social discrimination.”

The above quote indicates that it was the father’s consistent encouragement in daily life that established his initial commitment to study and internalized the great value of

education. The effect of the father's encouragement became even more significant to the child's educational achievement during the Cultural Revolution, when formal education was disrupted and the prevailing attitude was "study is useless," as explained in Chapter 2. The child of F3 claimed that he was not affected by the abnormal atmosphere at the time thanks to his parents' continuous encouragement of studying. He said that:

"Although studying was not advocated during the Cultural Revolution, my parents still encouraged me to work hard by saying that 'knowledge is always important no matter what other people say'."

The child's account implies that, the father of F3 shielded the detrimental social influences from the child during the CR. First of all, his attitudes toward education were not altered by the prevalent attack on intellectuals or defiance of knowledge during that time. In addition, he successfully prevented the child from being impacted by the social norm that he did not accept. What is more, from the perspective of children's socialization process, because the child was still young when the CR occurred, he was dependent on his parents and was subjected mainly to their influence rather than that beyond family boundaries (Liu, 1999).

At this point, the father of F3 was identified an authoritative parent considering that he was both demanding, having clear expectations and responsive (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby and Martin, 1983; Hackett, 2003). Specifically, the father was highly involved in the child's life and tended to communicate with him actively and openly. He chose to manage the child's behaviour through reason-based strategy, i.e. encouragement, rather than using punitive discipline methods. However, he became more like an authoritarian parent considering the strategies, i.e. threats, he used to discipline the child's behaviours later when the child grew up. Moreover, in this process, the father tended to give no space for being disappointed or disobeyed by the child, and he did not engage with the child's wishes or encourage parent-child negotiation. I will discuss this in the next section.

### Threats

Another mode of parent-child communication regarding the child's study was through posing threats to the child. The findings have suggested that threats were implemented by the father of F3 to communicate his expectation for the child's education and to promote the child's better educational achievement. The child of F3 told me two episodes pertaining to his experiences of being threatened by his father who was thus an authoritarian parent:

“During the high school years, whenever my examination results were lamentable, my father would threaten me by saying that ‘if you cannot get into a college, I will abandon you and I will never let you in the house!’”

In fact, the child failed to get into a college for the first time when he took the annual National College Entrance Examination (NCEE). Then he father was very angry and asked him to take the examination again without listening to the child’s wishes. Thus, after one year’s revision, the child took the NCEE again. Afterwards, he successfully enrolled in a technical secondary school specializing in teacher-training.

Besides the fact that the father’s expectations were compulsory for the child rather than an option, the father’s use of threats also indicated his strong power over the child in directing the child’s behaviours, leaving the child with limited autonomy at the same time. Thus, he accepted to do what his parents asked him to do, instead of doing what he wanted for himself. Moreover, since the child was an adolescent at the time, he was still emotionally and economically dependent on his parents. This specific life stage restricted the child’s autonomy while strengthening his parents’ power. When the parent-child relationship is viewed as one in which the parent has a great deal of power in all areas of the child’s life due to the parent’s possession and control of the material and emotional supplies needed by the child, the parent can potentially enforce any view or behaviour on the child while the child cannot readily ignore the parent’s will due to his/her lower power position at home and total dependence on the parent (Hoffman, 1960).

### *Participation*

Throughout the course of the Cultural Revolution, formal education in schools was either stopped or seriously disrupted due to political movements prevalent in the society. The slogan that “study is useless” was prevalent throughout the CR. Intellectuals were attacked terribly over the course of the CR and they were treated with suspicion and hostility. Under this situation, the parents in Family 5 did not disregard their child’s study. They participated in the child’s study by making efforts to create an appropriate study environment for the child and by teaching the child at home to compensate for the absence of a school education.

### *Create an appropriate study environment for the child*

During the CR, the child of F5 was basically not allowed out of the house to stop him playing with children from working-class families, who the parents of F5 believed did not

value education at the time. The mother expressed how she created an appropriate home environment for the child's study during the Cultural Revolution:

"We rejected the saying that knowledge is useless, which was prevalent in the society during the Cultural Revolution. We all believed that people would not have a way out if they were not well-educated.... I bought my son many books in order to keep him studying at home and prevent him from playing out with children from working-class families. So the home environment for my son was always good for his study, no matter how severe the abnormal social situation was outside my family."

#### Teach the child at home

In addition to creating a good home environment for the child, parents in Family 5 also actively educated him at home. From the mother's account, her participation in the child's study improved the child's school performance:

"I would give my son some reading and writing or mathematics problems to do every day before going to work.... I also bought a radio to help him study English. Thus my son always got very good results for English examinations and he usually came to Top 3 in his grade in the final examinations each year."

The mother also benefited from her educational experiences. She could teach the child herself at home when schools stopped delivering formal education during that time. She commented that:

"During the CR, schools stopped delivering formal education, although some of them were re-opened afterwards.... I found that my son's textbooks were neither complete nor scientific. Their teaching materials turned to be even worse than those I used many years ago. So I gave my son the old textbooks that I had used in school and I taught him by myself at home."

#### Make decisions for the child

Each child in F3 and F5 had taken the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) twice and it was the second time that paved the way for their upward social mobility. The findings suggest that without parents' efforts in making decisions about their children's education, they would not have been as successful as they were. Thus, making decisions for the child is identified as another aspect of parental participation. However, the decision-making processes within F3 and F5 were different due to the parents' different parenting styles. I explain this below.

In Family 3, the child was asked to take the NCEE again since the result of the first one did not even pass the line for technical secondary school, which was the minimal academic level requested if one wanted to be assigned a job in the city. This absolutely did not satisfy the father of F3 who insisted that the child should attend higher education. Therefore, the father made a firm decision that the child must take part in the NCEE again. The child stated that:

“In 1979, I failed my first NCEE. Afterwards, my father became much stricter with me and he kept warning me that I would be abandoned if I failed again.”

The child compliantly agreed with his father to take the next year’s NCEE. I asked him about his feeling in face of his father’s demands at that time. He replied:

“I had no idea.... I had to insist on the route of studying to make a better life because my dad always told me that people could get rid of this hardship through study.”

The father of F3 was an authoritarian parent, who allowed little autonomy for the child in making decisions regarding the child’s education. At the same time, what the child faced from his father’s coercive instruction was to obey him in silence. This could be partially because the child had realized that the father had power over him and his own powerlessness as a child, although I did not ask him about this during the interview. Moreover, this indicates the impact of the traditional Chinese culture emphasizing filial piety, which justifies absolute parental authority over children and it demands that children unconditionally obey their parents (Kelley and Tseng, 1992, Lin and Fu, 1990). However, the above account revealed that the hardships in agricultural life, which was mainly resulted by social policies, impelled the child to insist on studying because he wanted to leave these hardships behind. Therefore, in F3, the decision-making process and outcome in terms of the child’s education was determined jointly by parenting style, the child’s autonomy and social context.

It is also worth noting that, despite the authoritarian strategies that the father of F3 used to discipline his child and to make decisions for the child, the father’s expectation for the child’s education, i.e., get into a college, was realized eventually. If the father did not insist on his child going to college, the child might give up taking another NCEE. Thus, this case suggests that it is sometimes necessary for parents to be demanding and insist that their expectations for their child’s education be fulfilled, provided that such expectations do not harm the child.

In Family 5, the child passed the line of technical secondary school after his first NCEE. He actually was quite happy with the result since he did not think there was any difference between technical secondary school and college or university at the time. But his parents were not satisfied with such an exam result because they expected their child to get into a college or university. So, the father suggested the child take the NCEE again. Different from the father in F3, the father in F5 did not make his wish a command. Instead, he used reason-based strategies to persuade the child to take the NCEE again. He encouraged verbal communication with the child and shared with the child the rationales behind his request. The child said:

“My father talked over the exam result with me and he then suggested that I could take the NCEE for a second time, because he expected me to achieve a higher educational level than the technical secondary school. And he believed that I could do better. I thought about his suggestion and agreed with him afterwards.”

The father in F5's his relatively high level of monitoring in the child's study, and his employment of non-coercive, negotiated discipline suggests he was an authoritative parent. Although the child had autonomy in decision-making in authoritative family, authoritative parents like this father still see their child as obedient children as they tend to persuade their child to follow their advice and guidance. But they are different from authoritarian parents with the strategies that they use to make decisions for the child. That is, the former do not negotiate with their child in decision-making, while the latter do leave their child some space for negotiations.

Moreover, parent-child negotiations were an ongoing process in F5 and not a once-off event. This is embodied in the mother's account, she said that:

“Frequently, I told my son that he had to make his own life and we could not always control his behaviours. I also told him not to depend on parents economically. I encouraged him to complete his own affaires independently.”

Simultaneously, this account suggests the mother's authoritative attitude toward his son.

#### **Group Two: Family 4**

##### ***Background information***

In F4, the mother completed junior secondary school in 1956 and was subsequently recruited by a cooperative to work as a sales clerk (42.1). Her husband, who had completed

senior high school and used to work in the town, was attacked and sent down to the village because he was labelled “a right winger” or “the rightist” during the CR. The mother followed her husband to the village. Otherwise, if she wanted to retain her job and continue living in town, she had to divorce her husband. At last, she resigned her job and went down the village because she did not want to end the marriage.

The child in F4 was born after her parents were sent to the countryside. She was the fourth child of the family, born in 1962. She enrolled in the senior secondary school in 1977, when the NCEE was restored. After three years’ study, she took the NCEE for the first time in 1980, but failed. She took the NCEE for a second and a third time, but failed again. She explained that the failures were mainly due to her illness. Although she could not be assigned a job by the state directly without an appropriate academic degree, she successfully got a place in a bank as an accountant (66.4). So she left the countryside, became an urban resident and moved to a higher SES than her parents.

#### ***Parental involvement in children’s education***

Similar to the parents in F3 and F5, the mother’s expectation of her child’s future in F4 was compulsory, although she did not demand that her child get into a college or university. Instead, she hoped the child could do her best in study.

The data revealed that, the mother of F4 frequently communicated the value of education to the child through non-coercive encouragement. She was very interested in the child’s study and she constantly encouraged the child to study hard and get a better life. This suggested that the mother was an authoritative parent. She was both demanding and responsive. Moreover, during her interview, the mother stressed how she strove to get an educational opportunity for the child subject to both family poverty and political attacks. This in turn reflected her consistent support for her child’s study. I will explain this below.

#### ***Fight for the child’s opportunity to go to school***

Poverty made rural students an inferior status in accessing education. Previous research suggests that children from households that are both poor and credit-constrained are 3 times more likely to drop out of school (Brown and Park, 2002). In F4, poor economic condition was the major obstacle for the child to continuing senior secondary education. But her mother was not held back. During the interview, the mother in F4 described how she fought to maintain the child’s study opportunities:

“My husband rejected my daughter’s request to go to high school because we were too poor at the time. So I begged him to at least give her a chance to take the enrolment examination.... When my husband saw my daughter’s offer from the high school, he continued to reject it. And my parents-in-law did not allow my daughter to enrol in the high school either, due to the family’s severe poverty. I struggled again and again. I thought that my daughter’s future would be ruined if she cannot go to school. So I made up my mind to support her studies, in spite of the rejection from other family members and our poor economic conditions.”

The child also expressed how grateful she was to her mother for the efforts her mother had made for to study:

“We did not have money, so I was not allowed to go to school, by my grandparents in particular. They expected me to stay at home and work on the farm. They said that if I insisted on going to school, they would not offer me food. My mother did not yield to them. Rather, she found another place to cook for me and my other siblings who were at school. What a great woman my mother was! I attribute all my successes to my mother.”

Along with the poor family economic conditions, the child was not encouraged to go to school also due to her father’s political identity as “a right winger”, thus a “bad origin”. During that time, schools would prioritize children of “good origins”, such as poor peasants and workers, while children of “bad origins” were discriminated against, thus had less privilege in accessing limited educational opportunities (Tang and Parish, 2000). As a result, the village cadres tried to persuade the mother to give up her child’s high school offer. But the mother did not give in. She said:

“I was ill-affected by the village cadre, who asked me to give up my daughter’s high school offer. So I went to argue with the government officials who were in charge of education at the time.... After some efforts, I successfully retained the offer for my daughter.”

However, the mother did not actively participate in the child’s study at home, such as helping with her homework, nor did her husband. During the interview, the child of F4 explained their lack of involvement activities in her study:

“My father had never done any farm work before he was sent to the village. He experienced a lot of difficulties working on the farm. So he had little time or energy

to care about me and my siblings, although he was actually able to teach us by himself since he had a complete secondary education. My mother was ill during that time, so she could not look after us either.”

Research has found that after controlling for wealth and expenditure levels, educated parents in China are more likely to educate their children at home (Connelly and Zheng, 2003). Both the parents in F4 were well-educated. Thus, they were both able to teach her. But they did not actively participate in the child’s study. The above quote indicates that, in fact, F4 parents’ participation in their child’s study was held back by their limited energy due to heavy farm work and health issues. This suggests that parents do not offer help to their children in terms of their study does not necessarily mean that they are not interested in their children’s education or they have low expectations for the children. Instead, this could be because of other objective factors that they cannot overcome despite their efforts, such as poor health. This echoes the previous research result suggests that parents’ interest in their children’s education is not reflected in the amount of time they spend tutoring their children on academic matters (Schneider and Lee, 1990). As for F4 in my study, the mother’s strong willingness to keep her child in school and the efforts she made to fight to set the child an opportunity to go to school had already shown her interest in the child’s education.

### **Group Three: Family 1 and Family 2**

#### ***Background information***

Parents in F1 and F2 were all peasants. As shown in Table 4.3, they all expected their child to leave the agricultural life, get a permanent job and they had no specific expectations of educational level for the child. Different from parents in the other three families sampled into GA, they considered their expectations optional, which means that they did not force the child to actualize their hopes. This in turn suggests that, parents in F1 and F2 were less demanding than the parents in the other three families in GA. But this does not necessarily mean they are not authoritarian parents.

#### **Family 1**

In F1, the mother’s educational level was less than primary school and the father had finished elementary level education. They were both peasants (29.3), belonging to the peasantry class during the Maoist era and were notified of their political identity as “poor peasant”. The child was born in 1966 and is the big brother of the family. In 1985, he took

the NECC and successfully got an offer from a university. When he graduated from the university with a Bachelor's degree, he was assigned to work in the city and simultaneously became an urban resident. He fulfilled his parents' expectations and got a higher socio-economic status than his parents.

#### Family 2

In F2, the mother was illiterate while the father completed primary school. They were peasants (29.3) and belonged to the peasantry class during the Maoist era. The child was born in 1963 and is the big sister of the family. She took the NCEE directly after high school, but failed. Afterwards, she enrolled in another high school, which was a boarding one, to prepare for the next year's NCEE. However, she dropped out of school because she was homesick. Her parents were not happy with this decision. But in the end, they accepted her leaving with regrets. Since then, the child has been a peasant like her parents. Thus, she failed to fulfil her parents' expectations because she did not leave the countryside or get out of farm work.

#### ***Parental involvement in children's education***

For the parents in F1 and F2, although their educational expectations were optional, they were also very involved in their children's education, especially when the children were pupils. This implied that the parents were less demanding and very responsive. But this type of parenting does not fit the Western model of permissive parenting style (Maccoby and Martin, 1983), because parents in F1 and F2 still used strict parental control, and they did not tend to have warm accepting attitudes toward their children. In contrast, they sometimes were very strict and controlling, and they would still use their authority to guide their child's behaviours. In F1, for example, when the child was in elementary school, the parents used to monitor the child's school performance and manage his behaviours. The child said to me:

“My parents used to hit me when I did not do well in school exams. However, they would not praise me but take it for granted when I got good exam results. During that time, the school teachers were living in the same village with us. So whenever I did badly in my exam, they would tell my parents and my parents would definitely abuse me!”

In view of the child's above account, I considered the father of F1 an authoritarian parent who was characterised by using punitive discipline methods rather than using reason-based

strategies in parenting (Baumrind, 1991). Although controlling and authoritarian strategies have been found to be associated with child behavioural and adjustment problems in Western children, it may be valued in Chinese society for its positive association with adaptive outcomes in Chinese children (Chiu, 1987), due to the emphasis on parental authority and the child's obedience in traditional Chinese culture (Chen et al., 1997). For example, it has been found that Chinese parents are more controlling and authoritarian and less authoritative than North American parents, but Chinese children turned to perform better on academic achievement than their North American counterparts (Dornbusch et al., 1987). As for the child in F1, his well self-direction in study and good school performance at least partially demonstrated that his parents' controlling and authoritarian child-rearing strategies did not impact on his academic achievement negatively.

However, the father did not need to be so strict like this in the child's study when the child grew up because, as explained by the father, the child had already formed a strong "*hao xue xin*" during his childhood, so he did not need to *guan* him as much as when he was a pupil. "*Hao xue xin*" is a Chinese notion which is literally translated as "heart and mind for wanting to learn" and this notion is usually used to describe one's desire to learn or passion for learning (Chao and Tseng, 2002). The word "*guan*" is an indigenous definition of parental control, it means "to govern" when it is translated literally (Tobin et al., 1991). In other words, , they became less likely to be involved in the child's study. The child of F1 elaborated on the lack of his parents' involvement in his studies:

"I was very independent and I always made my own decisions. I never asked them for advice on my study as they did not know much about schooling. My parents, at the time, only cared about my basic necessities, such as food and housing."

Such a change within the father's parenting strategy suggests that parenting style is to a certain extent determined by parent-child interactions and power negotiations. In other words, a parent's parenting style is dynamic and changing, but not static. In F1, this implies that the father's parenting style moved from authoritarian toward authoritative along with the child's growth. Also, the father gradually assigned autonomy to the child, enabling the child to exercise agency to make his own decisions regarding his education. The child's autonomy in decision-making became much more obvious when he was about to go to college. Concretely, when the child got an offer from an agricultural university, the father

was not very happy with his choice of university, but he was not against the child's choice. The father said that:

“I did not want him to enrol in an agricultural university because I was afraid that he would continue working within the agricultural area. How could I agree to him being a farmer after years of higher education? But I did not say anything to him, nor did I stop him enrolling in this university.”

The above account suggests that, although the father did not agree with his child, he still supported him. In other words, the father gave the child space to disappoint him. Thus, his attitude became quite different from that he held when his child was a pupil. This further demonstrates that a parent's parenting style is dynamic rather than static, since parent-child interaction changes with children's ages and stages of a child's development (Maccoby, 2000). In F1, the child achieved more autonomy in decision-making as he grew older and gained more power to make decisions on his own.

Moreover, in terms of the reason why the parents of F1 did not engage in involvement activities in his son's study, the father's account below indicated that it was basically due to his and his wife's lack of school experiences. Thus, they could not offer the child advice and help about something they did not know. This meant that they had high expectations for the child, but they did not know how to help their child achieve them. The father said that:

“Since I had little school experiences, I could not teach him or give him advice. I would only ensure that he was sufficiently clothed and fed.”

However, the parents consistently encouraged their child to focus on studies through telling them to study hard. This was probably the only thing they could do for the child in order to actualize their educational expectations. The child said:

“They did not know anything about education. During that time, they just asked me to make the effort, to study hard. They just encouraged me like this, since they were not able to teach me personally.”

Whether the parents would be more involved in their child's study if they had more educational experiences? Would they be more adult-centred in decision-making if they knew more about the educational system, thus avoid being authoritarian in parenting? I did not ask them these questions. But I found that the child's well self-direction in study and high educational aspirations made his parents trust him and allow him to behave

autonomously and independently. In terms of the child's educational aspirations, he said that:

"I always dreamed of getting into college ever since I was a child. I knew that a college degree would bring me a job and a different life, which is better than the one in the countryside.... When I was in college, I thought about taking part in the entrance exams for postgraduate schools instantly...."

In contrast to the child in F1, the child in F2 did not expect much education for herself. Thus, she did not like to continue studying when she was homesick. So she dropped out school in the end. During the interview, the child in F2 expressed her reluctance in studying:

"In the beginning of school, I was quite into study and I performed well too. However, I gradually reduced the attention I gave to study.... When I saw my neighbours were not in school, I felt much more unwilling to go to school."

When she told her parents that she wanted to give up school, at first, her parents were really angry with her. They even physically punished and threatened her, in order to push her to continue with studies. So at this point, the parents were mainly using authoritarian strategies in parenting. However, they accepted the child's request to give up school in the end. This makes them child-centred parents. Furthermore, this implies the dynamic feature of parenting styles that are influenced by parent-child interactions and power negotiations. In concrete terms, although the parents wanted to manage the child's behaviour by asserting power over the child, the child became self-determined despite this. At last, the parents had to give up their expectations and allow the child to make her own decision. During her interview, the mother in F2 said that:

"She cannot complain with me since I asked her to continue with school, but she rejected this. I even hit her because I was so angry. But she would not obey. What else I could do? I had to face the reality at the time. So I finally accepted it. I told her it was ok not to go to school but she had to work hard on the farm."

Therefore, the power outcome of parent-child power negotiation determines who makes the final decision. When conflicts occur between parents and their child, they negotiate and renegotiate to reach an agreement. It was the child who made the final decision regarding her education in the end in F2, even though it appeared that her parents had power over her at first. In this process, the parents were disappointed by the child but they did not force the child to be obedient. This means that they supported their child even if

they did not agree. However, this is not about permissive parenting defined in the Western model, because the parents in F2 did assert authority to the child and they even used physical punishment. So I suggest child-centred parenting style in my study. Parents who are child-centred will still use their authority to guide their child's behaviours but the decision would in the end be the child's. This means that child-centred parents allow themselves to be disappointed or disobeyed. But they will not be permissive in an unstructured way. What is more, Confucian filial piety is challenged in F2 since the parents' authority over children waned and the child did not obey her parents unconditionally. This further demonstrates that the notion of power is not simply a matter of the exercise of control over others, it is rather a complex phenomenon which is constantly negotiated and renegotiated between social actors (Dominelli and Gollins, 1997). In concrete terms, parental power over children is dynamic and the relation of power between parents and children rests on a continuous negotiation of their individual agency (McDonald, 1980).

In F2, although the parents expected their child to attend higher education, whereby to live a better life as the other parents in GA, the child failed to fulfil this goal. In other words, the parents' high educational expectations were not realized due to the child's reluctance to stay in school. Her reluctance of staying in school was mainly due to she felt isolated away from home. This was partly about lack of educational opportunities close to home in rural areas. Would this child stay in school and go on with her study if she was in a school which was near her home? I did not ask this question during her interview as I did not want to let my interview answer any of my questions created according to my hypothesis. But this issue can be explored in future.

Moreover, this suggests that children's educational achievements were simultaneously determined by the interaction between parents' agency and children's agency. That is to say, although parents have high expectations for their child's education, the child could end up unsuccessful in educational achievement because of the child's individual aspirations. In F2, would this child stay in school and go on with her study if her parents continue to insist on sending her back to school? I could not find the answer to this question from their life stories. But this case suggests that probably child-centred parenting sometimes will fail to enable children to obtain the educational achievements that they were able to get.

### **Summary**

I examined the mechanisms through which parents in GA realized their expectations. Primarily, I indicated that parents' involvement activities in their children's education

included communicating the value of education to their child, participating in their child's study at home, making decisions for the child's education and striving for educational opportunities for the child. Moreover, I indicated that sometimes parents did not offer support or advice to their children on their education because there were reasons other than their educational expectations, e.g., poor health, political interference or they had limited school experiences, and they could not offer help or advice to their children about something they did not know. In addition, I argued that the impact of parents' educational expectations upon children's academic achievement was a negotiated result of parent-child power relations as these determined who would make the final decision regarding children's education.

## **Chapter 5 Findings: Generation B**

### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the participants recruited for the cohort referred as Generation B. The families recruited for Generation B depict those families in which parents had their first child in 1980-1989. This chapter comprises four analytical sections. The first section presents the composition of the sample and the family context of the five families recruited as well as the relevant social background behind this cohort. It also illustrates the inter-generational social mobility that had already occurred in each family and explains the social elements that might promote such social mobility. The second section outlines and compares the level of parental educational expectation (LEX) for the five families. I point out that all parents in Generation B had high educational expectations for their children. The third section interprets the factors shaping parents' educational expectations for their children. Two types of influencing factors were derived from the data: social context and family context. Each type contains complementary sub-categories and each sub-category comprises several themes. In the fourth section, I interpret the mechanisms through which parents realized their educational expectations for their children. The research results indicated that communication and participation as the two major mechanisms through which the parents in Generation B made their expectations of their child's education come true. I also noted the importance of parent-child interaction in deciding children's educational outcome.

## Sample and Background Information

Table 5.1 The demographic information for the participants recruited to Generation B

| Demographical Index |                             | Family 6                       | Family 7                         | Family 8                         | Family 9                          | Family 10                       |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Child's             | Birth year                  | 1988                           | 1986                             | 1983                             | 1987                              | 1988                            |
|                     | Birth order                 | first                          | only                             | only                             | first                             | only                            |
|                     | Birth place                 | Rural                          | Urban                            | Urban                            | Urban                             | Urban                           |
|                     | Gender                      | Female                         | Female                           | Male                             | Female                            | Female                          |
|                     | Education                   | Bachelor's degree              | College Diploma                  | Doctoral degree                  | Master's degree                   | Bachelor's degree               |
|                     | Occupation (Prestige score) | University Student: third year | Elementary school teacher (59.8) | Electrical engineer (84.9)       | Postgraduate Student: Second year | University Student: fourth year |
| Father's            | Birth year                  | 1964                           | 1962                             | 1956                             | 1962                              | 1962                            |
|                     | Birth place                 | Rural                          | Rural                            | Rural                            | Rural                             | Rural                           |
|                     | Education                   | Senior secondary (technical)   | Senior secondary (technical)     | College Diploma                  | Bachelor's degree                 | Bachelor's degree               |
|                     | Occupation (Prestige score) | Low official (63.0)            | Accountant (66.4)                | Secondary school teacher (72.9)  | High official (69.1)              | Middle official (67.1)          |
| Mother's            | Birth year                  | 1963                           | 1962                             | 1956                             | 1962                              | 1963                            |
|                     | Birth place                 | Rural                          | Rural                            | Rural                            | Rural                             | Urban                           |
|                     | Education                   | Senior secondary               | Junior secondary                 | Senior secondary (technical)     | College Diploma                   | Junior secondary                |
|                     | Occupation (Prestige score) | Peasant (29.3)                 | Textile operative (49.9)         | Elementary school teacher (59.8) | Middle official (67.1)            | Accountant (66.4)               |

Five families were recruited for Generation B (GB). The families in GB depict those families in which parents had their first child in 1980-1989. The total number of participants recruited for GB was fifteen, among which five were children and ten were their parents. As Table 5.1 shows, the five children recruited for GB were born in 1988, 1986, 1983, 1987 and 1988. Thus, they were born after the introduction of the one-child policy in 1979. This dictated that an individual urban family is allowed to have only one child (Hesketh et al., 2005). In rural areas, a second child was generally allowed, especially if the first child was a girl (Goodkind, 2004). Among the five children recruited for GB, those in Family 7 (F7), Family 8(F8), Family 9(F9), and Family 5 (F10) were born in urban areas as only child in

his/her family except F5. For Family 5, the child is the elder sister in the family. Because of her severe illness when she was a baby, her parents were allowed to have a second child. In contrast, the child in Family 6 (F6) was born in the countryside, and she was the elder of two children in the family.

### **Parents changed their rural household registrations to urban ones through higher education**

As it show in Table 5.1, parents recruited for GB, except the mother of F10, were all born in rural areas and held rural household registration. However, they were neither peasant nor lived in the countryside when I interviewed them, except for the parents of F1. That is to say, these parents had changed their rural household registrations to urban ones and had successfully emigrated from the countryside to the city. These had actually realized the dreams of the parents in Generation A. The findings revealed that this *hukou* transformation was achieved through education, higher education in particular. And they benefited from the restoration of the NCEE and the expansion in educational institutions during the post-Maoist era.

### ***Higher education enrolment during the Cultural Revolution***

Table 5.1 illustrates that parents recruited for Generation B were mainly born in the early 1960s, except for the parents in F3 who were born in the 1956. This means that parents of GB belonged to the same age cohort as the child participants recruited for GA. Thus, they had grown up under the same social historical context and experienced the same social event, the Cultural Revolution (CR).

Similar to the children recruited for GA, during the ten turbulent years of the CR, the parents of GB were supposed to be school students, whose school experiences were severely adversely impacted by the social interruptions of the CR. One of the educational policies adopted in 1966 by Maoists to prepare a fresh start for the CR was closing all secondary and tertiary level institutions, although most primary schools continued to operate as usual. Urban elementary and secondary education was disrupted for at least six years and most universities were closed for six years as well (Giles et al., 2008). Also, the state council announced the abolition of the NCEE system in the same year and it was not restored until 1977. Upon re-opening of tertiary level educational institutions in 1972, a new method of enrolment based on a system of recommendation and selection was adopted (Shen, 1995). The major criteria for college admission became class background, party loyalty and political performance rather than academic achievement (Shirk, 1982).

Thus, a common phenomenon that prevailed in the society was that students who formed the largest proportion among all university students were mostly children from cadres or other social elites who were usually members of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and had good political origins, such as workers, peasants and soldiers. Therefore, formal education, especially tertiary education, lost its function as the major mechanism or equal opportunities whereby rural registration holders could achieve upward social mobility (Lu, 2004: 71).

For admission to universities, a rural youth had to at least get a recommendation from the lower level cadres in the local production units (Meisner, 1999). Under this situation, although they knew there was a chance of receiving post-secondary education, rural youths without political privileges dared not to expect that the chance would come to them. This was thoroughly embodied in the words of parents recruited for GB. For example, the father of F8 mentioned that:

“When I enrolled in the junior higher school in 1971, I knew that one could go to a senior high school and then to a university. But these opportunities would never reach my family. Because, you know, only those students whose parents were cadres would be recommended to receive higher education.”

This father was born in a rural family and both of his parents were poor peasants without any schooling experiences. Although he belonged to the poor peasant class which was considered as a good one, he did not expect to be selected as an entrant to a university since there was no means for him to be recommended.

The same attitude was expressed by the father of F4, who said that:

“Before the NCEE was restored, college entrants were selected basically based on recommendations. I was quite aware of the fact that as a child of an ordinary peasant family, I could hardly be recommended for a college.”

Thus, parents recruited to Generation B who were secondary school students during the Cultural Revolution had ambitions for getting into tertiary educational institutions. But they did not expect to realize these due to the recommendation-based system for college entrance admission. Lu (2004: 70-71) has argued that the routes for upward social mobility were largely blocked during the Cultural Revolution, because technical secondary schools and higher education were the major route whereby people could achieve social mobility. He further indicates that until the end of the 1970s, only 4% of all senior secondary school

graduates had the chance to be sent to college or university based on recommendation. However, people who could not get into college or university based on recommendation at the time finally got a chance to realize their expectations of receiving higher education when the NCEE was restored in 1977, like the parents in F6 and F9 in this study.

### ***The Restoration of the NCEE after the Cultural Revolution***

The Cultural Revolution ended with the death of Mao and the downfall of the “Gang of Four” in October 1976. With the return of Deng Xiaoping as a higher-level Party leader and taking charge of scientific and educational work, the NCEE was restored in 1977. After more than ten years when there had been no selection based on academic preparation, academic merit again became the primary criterion for selecting college entrants. Based on the re-institutionalized NCEE, every high school graduate was admitted to college regardless of their class origins and the NCEE was justified by the argument that “everyone is equal in front of test scores” (Shen, 1995: 79). This was the first time that college entrants were selected entirely on academic merit measured by unified entrance examinations in contemporary China (Vogel, 2011).

Alongside the increased fairness of access to higher education was the large scale expansion in higher educational institutions. According to the statistics (China Statistical Yearbook, 1996), the number of institutions of higher education increased by 164 from 1970 to 1978 and rose significantly to 1016 by 1985. At the same time, the number of technical secondary schools increased from 1087 in 1970 to 2760 by 1978. Along with the development in education was the increased opportunity for people who were born around 1960s to achieve social mobility via education and the unified employment system. Lu (2004: 85) assumed that there were about 5 million university graduates during 1980-1991, while students graduating from technical secondary schools numbered more than 10 million. These graduates were assigned jobs in accordance with the national plan.

Under the aforementioned circumstances, some of the parents recruited for GB had completed higher education and been assigned a job by the state. Consequently, they successfully migrated to urban areas through their own efforts during the 1980s. Those who either did not pass the NECC or did not take the NCEE also managed to get a job in a non-state-owned factory or enterprise as the job market became much more open in the post-reform era. But their average socio-economic status or educational attainment was lower than those who obtained a state-assigned job. See Table 5.1.

## **Inter-generational social mobility**

### ***Inter-generational mobility of educational level***

During the interview, parents and children recruited for GB were asked to identify their educational attainments. As it shows in Table 5.1, the child in F2 had obtained a college diploma and the child in F3 had achieved a doctorate. The other three children were undergraduate or post-graduate students: the child in F1 was a third-year university student, the child in F4 was in the second year of postgraduate study and the child in Family 5 was a fourth-year university student. Parents of GB all had obtained a certain level of education, from junior secondary to a BA. But within each family, the child had achieved a higher educational level than the parents. That is to say, inter-generational mobility of education occurred in each of the five families recruited for GB.

To a large extent, children's higher educational achievements than their parents' average could be attributed to the educational system reforms that had been launched by the CCP government from 1978. These system reforms had significantly improved the national standard of Chinese education on the whole.

Most importantly, the nine-year compulsory education introduced in 1985 guaranteed the right of school-age children to six years of elementary school and subsequently to the three years of junior secondary school. From 1985 to 1995, the primary school enrolment rate of school-age children increased from 96% to 98.5%. Even more significantly, the percentage of elementary school graduates entering junior secondary schools increased from 68.4% to 90.8%. Additionally, while children of GA would be assigned a job as long as they completed the technical secondary school, the situation for the children of GB changed as they could not get a job without an academic degree especially after the 1990s when China embarked on high education expansion. A BA for example, emerged in the labour market as a prerequisite for a job in the post-reform era. Thus, most of the children in this cohort chose to enrol in the normal senior secondary schools and take the NCEE to get into college or university, rather than enrol in technical secondary schools and to join the labour market. From 1985 to 2010, the percentage of junior secondary school graduates entering senior secondary schools increased from 41.7% to 87.5%.

As it show in Table 5.1, all the children recruited for GB had received higher education as they were either university students or had already completed higher education. Generally speaking, the rapid expansion in higher education from 1999 was a major factor contributing to children's educational achievements because it significantly increased the

availability of higher education to children who were born after the 1980s. The number of regular institutions of higher education increased from 598 in 1978 to 1,075 by 1990. In spite of the slight decline from 1075 in 1990 to 1041 in 2000, the number of regular institutions of higher education was more than doubled to reach 2,358 in 2010 (China Statistical Yearbook, 2011). These figures reflected the dramatic expansion in higher education during the post-reform era. Such dramatic expansion in higher educational institutions in China created much more opportunities for children of GB to get access into higher education than the opportunities that were available to their parents' generation.

I use the index of the College and University Entrance Admission Rate to elaborate the increased opportunities of enrolling in higher education since 1977. See Table 5.2. As children recruited for GB were born during the late 1980s, they would participate in the NCEE after 2005. Table 5.2 shows that the number of NCEE participants increased by nearly five times from 1985 to 2005. Simultaneously, the number of admissions in 2005 was eight times greater than that of 1985. Moreover, Table 5.2 shows that from 1977 to 2009, the admission rate increased from 4.8% to 62%, which means that more than half of the NCEE takers would be admitted by a college or a university nowadays. These figures together reflected the significant increase of access to higher education. From a macro-perspective, it could partially explain why children recruited to GB all had received higher education and all had obtained higher educational achievement than either one or both of their parents. Thus, I conclude that parental expectations for their children's higher education are more likely to be met if the context is one facilitating social mobility.

Table 5.2 College and University Entrance Admission Rates: 1977-2009

| Year | Participants in NCEE | Admission | Admission Rate (%) |
|------|----------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| 1977 | 5,700,000            | 270,000   | 4.8%               |
| 1978 | 6,100,000            | 402,000   | 7%                 |
| 1979 | 4,680,000            | 280,000   | 6.1%               |
| 1980 | 3,330,000            | 280,000   | 8%                 |
| 1981 | 2,590,000            | 280,000   | 11%                |
| 1982 | 1,870,000            | 320,000   | 17%                |
| 1983 | 1,670,000            | 390,000   | 23%                |
| 1984 | 1,640,000            | 480,000   | 29%                |
| 1985 | 1,760,000            | 620,000   | 35%                |
| 1986 | 1,910,000            | 570,000   | 30%                |
| 1987 | 2,280,000            | 620,000   | 27%                |
| 1988 | 2,720,000            | 670,000   | 25%                |
| 1989 | 2,660,000            | 600,000   | 23%                |
| 1990 | 2,830,000            | 610,000   | 22%                |
| 1991 | 2,960,000            | 620,000   | 21%                |
| 1992 | 3,030,000            | 750,000   | 25%                |
| 1993 | 2,860,000            | 980,000   | 34%                |
| 1994 | 2,510,000            | 900,000   | 36%                |
| 1995 | 2,530,000            | 930,000   | 37%                |
| 1996 | 2,410,000            | 970,000   | 40%                |
| 1997 | 2,780,000            | 1,000,000 | 36%                |
| 1998 | 3,200,000            | 1,080,000 | 34%                |
| 1999 | 2,880,000            | 1,600,000 | 56%                |
| 2000 | 3,750,000            | 2,210,000 | 59%                |
| 2001 | 4,540,000            | 2,680,000 | 59%                |
| 2002 | 5,100,000            | 3,200,000 | 63%                |
| 2003 | 6,130,000            | 3,820,000 | 62%                |
| 2004 | 7,290,000            | 4,470,000 | 61%                |
| 2005 | 8,770,000            | 5,040,000 | 57%                |
| 2006 | 9,500,000            | 5,460,000 | 57%                |
| 2007 | 10,100,000           | 5,660,000 | 56%                |
| 2008 | 10,500,000           | 5,990,000 | 57%                |
| 2009 | 10,200,000           | 6,290,000 | 62%                |

Source: <http://edu.people.com.cn/GB/116076/10996530.html>.

### ***Inter-generational mobility of socio-economic status***

Table 5.3 illustrates the disparities between parents' and the child's socio-economic status (SES) for each family. As the mixed "market-socialist" economy prevalent in the post-reform era had eroded the Maoist "two classes and one stratum" social structure, the SES of the participants in GB illustrated in Table 5.3 were set according to Lu's (2002) ten social strata and the corresponding five socio-economic statuses (See Chapter 2). Moreover, a structure of discrimination based on political origins created during the Land Reform campaign was officially discontinued after 1978 (Unger, 1984; Zhou, Tuma et al., 1996). So

the children recruited for GB had never been assigned a political identity in accordance with the political origins of their parents, and they were not affected by such political identities either.

Table 5.3 Socio-economic status of participants recruited for Generation B

|        | Family 6            | Family 7            | Family 8            | Family 9            | Family 10           |
|--------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Father | Lower-middle status | Lower-middle status | Middle status       | Upper-middle status | Upper-middle status |
| Mother | Lower status        | Lower status        | Middle status       | Middle status       | Middle status       |
| Child  | N/A                 | Middle status       | Upper-middle status | N/A                 | N/A                 |

Note: N/A=Not Available.

In Table 5.3, “N/A” indicates that the child was still a student when I conducted the interview, so I did not define their SES in this study. In contrast, the child of F7 and F8 were working and both of them had achieved a higher SES than that of their parents. Thus, these two had obtained upward inter-generational social mobility. The findings also revealed that education was an engine of their social mobility.

### Summary

All the children recruited for GB had received higher education as they were either college students or had already completed higher education. They had obtained higher educational levels than their parents. In part, I attributed children’s higher educational achievements to the educational system reforms that had been launched by the CCP government since 1978, including the universalization of the nine-year compulsory education which had guaranteed the right of school-age children to six-year elementary school and subsequently to the three-year junior secondary school, and the rapid expansion in higher education which had significantly increased the availability of higher education opportunities for children who were born between 1980-1989.

The children of GB who had already entered in the labour market had achieved higher SES than that of their parents. Thus, they had obtained upward inter-generational social mobility. The findings also revealed education was an engine of their social mobility. I now examine the role played by parental expectations for this cohort.

## Parental Expectations for Their Children

Different from the parents recruited for GA, when parents of GB were invited to talk over their educational expectations for the child, they would tell me the explicit educational level that they expected their child to achieve. In this section, I will firstly outline the level of educational expectation (LEX) for each of the five families recruited for GB, and then I will elaborate parents' accounts about their expectations for their child's education.

### The level of parental educational expectations

During the interview, parents of GB referred exact educational levels that they expected their child to achieve. So it is possible to categorize and compare their educational expectations for their child in the present thesis. See Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 The level of parental educational expectation to Generation B

| Generation B | F6 | F7 | F8 | F9 | F10 |
|--------------|----|----|----|----|-----|
| LEX          | BA | BA | BA | BA | MA  |

Among the five families recruited for GB, the parents of F6, F7, F8 and F9 all expected their child to obtain a BA, while the parents of F10 expected their child to get a MA. Educational levels that are lower than a BA or higher than a MA were not favoured by any parents in this cohort. None of the parents in GB expected their child to obtain a doctorate. Nevertheless, it was apparent that they all hoped that their children would enrol in higher educational institutions (HEIs)<sup>15</sup>. The next section will illustrate that, such expectations were held by parents when the child was born or at school. As the five children recruited for GB were born in the 1980s and they reached school-age during the 1990s, I consider their parents to have held high educational expectations for them. This is mainly because Chinese higher education was still an elite higher education that few in the population could achieve during the 1980s and 1990s.

Early in the 1970s, Trow (1974) proposed an internationally recognized model underlying a phased development of higher education based on the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in higher education, which represents the percentage of the total higher education enrolments among the population who are in the age of attending higher education in a country. He suggested that development in higher education covered three different

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<sup>15</sup> According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, higher education institutions (HEIs) comprise: (a) institutions providing postgraduate programs, (b) regular institutions of higher education, (c) adult institutions of higher education, and (d) other private institutions of higher education.

phases: the first phase is elite higher education if the GER is less than 15%; the second phase is mass higher education if the GER is between 15% and 50%; and the third phase is universal higher education if the GER is more than 50%. Trow (2006) defined and explained the three forms of higher education: (1) elite higher education aims to shape the mind and character of a ruling class and educate them for a preparation of elite roles; (2) mass higher education transmits skills and prepares for a broader range of technical economic elite roles; (3) universal higher education is education for the whole population and make them adapted to rapid social and technical change. A further point raised by Trow (2006) was that, although he saw the three phases of higher education as sequential, he did not consider it as inevitable that the later stages would completely replace the earlier ones.

Because the gross enrolment rate in Chinese higher education was no more than 10% by 1998 (See Table 5.5), it was still elite higher education according to Trow (1974).

Table 5.5 Gross enrolment rate of Chinese higher education

| Year                 | 1978  | 1988 | 1998  |
|----------------------|-------|------|-------|
| Gross enrolment rate | 1.55% | 3.7% | 9.76% |

Source: *People* (2012). Available at: <http://hi.people.com.cn/edu/n/2012/0831/c231202-17428498.html>.

### **Detailed descriptions of parental educational expectation**

The parents of GB expressed the exact educational levels that they expected their children to achieve during their interviews. For example, they told me when they had started to expect the child to get a BA or a MA and why they held such expectations. So in this section, I will provide thick descriptions of parents' own words about their educational expectations for their child in order to give voice to them. Children's accounts will be presented as a supplement to their parents' accounts.

#### **Family 6**

“When she was a kid, I hoped that she would never do any farm work and live a better life than me. So I always expected her to enrol in a university as once she got a degree, she would never need to do any agricultural work. In terms of the educational level, I considered a BA as satisfactory for me. But I never said which university I preferred before, I just thought that I would be happy as long as she enrol in a university, get a job and build a family.” (Mother)

F6 was the only rural household recruited for GB. The mother of this family had always been a peasant. During her interview, she emphasized her strong desire that the child could leave the agricultural life as she had. She expressed that a BA was her expectation for the child's education, while she did not have any request of specific universities.

#### Family 7

“When my daughter was a school student, I expected her to get a BA in the future. But this should be played by ear as it is always possible that children cannot fulfil parents' wishes. Also, too high a standard will give the child too much pressure. It is like, even if she did not get a BA in the end, she cannot find her position in society?”  
(Father)

When I conducted the interview, the child of F7 had already graduated from a college with a diploma for more than a year and she was an elementary school teacher. This means that she failed to realize her father's previous educational expectation of a BA for her. The father clearly expressed his view that although he expected the child to achieve a BA, there were possibilities that the child could not realize his wish. Thus, when the child of F7 get a College Diploma rather than a Bachelor's degree (BA), the father did not push the child to attend further education and obtain a BA. But this was not because the father respected his daughter's decision although he did not want to. Rather, this was due to the father expected his daughter to get a job as soon as she graduated from the college. In other words, when the child enrolled in the college, he changed his own mind regarding the educational level that he expected his child to obtain afterwards, but without discussing it with the child. Thus, I still considered this father as an authoritarian parent because he did not acknowledge parent-child negotiation in decision-making and allowed little autonomy to the child in his parenting. I will discuss and explain this later in this chapter.

#### Family 8

“When my son was in secondary school, I expected him to attend a good university within Henan province. I had considered neither a Master's degree, nor a doctor's degree.” (Mother)

“When he was a student in junior high school, I just expected him to enrol in a university no matter whether it was a prestigious one or not, and I had no idea about Master and doctoral degrees at all. All I knew at the time was the top two universities in China, Tsinghua University and Peking University. And certainly, I

hoped my son could enrol in one of the best universities. When he was in high school, I began to gather information about Chinese universities in order to choose the most appropriate one for him. Then I set up the top 20 universities in China as the goal.”

(Father)

Parents of F8 not only told me their educational expectations for the child was a BA, but also expressed their preferences for a prestigious university. The mother expected the child to attend a “good university”; the father added the Top 20 Chinese universities into his “wish list” and gave Tsinghua University or Peking University the greatest priority. This is a new theme to GB as none of the parents in GA referred their preference for prestigious universities.

In China, an individual's educational status has long been evaluated along two dimensions, namely the vertical and horizontal dimensions (Zhang, 1997). From the vertical dimension, educational status is indicated by the level of an academic degree, such as a BA or a MA; while, from the horizontal dimension, academic degrees of the same level are further ranked by the prestige of the degree awarding educational institution. That is to say, a Bachelor's degree obtained from a prestigious university is considered more valuable than one from an ordinary university as in other places.

Yet a few studies have indicated that the horizontal differentiation of academic degrees significantly impacts on an individual's initial occupational status and his/her intra-generational social mobility (Luo, 2011, Lu and Yang, 2011). In the job market, graduates from prestigious universities are privileged, because employers of graduates tend to rank the degrees on offer on the basis of the institution (Marginson, 2006). Most significantly, some recruiting units claim that they only accept CVs sent by candidates from prestigious colleges or universities. Recruiters believe that these candidates are highly qualified, so that they can represent the high standard of the recruiting units (Hu, 2003). Moreover, Hu (2003) contends that even if ordinary college graduates are working with people who graduated from prestigious colleges in the same unit, there is a wide gap between their salaries. For example, in 2003 in a Communication Corporation in Wuhan province, the monthly salary of a worker who had graduated from well-known universities was 3000 *yuan* while those who were graduates from ordinary universities had one of 2000 *yuan*.

But during the interview, I did not ask the parents in F8 why they expected their child to enrol in a good or prestigious university. I took-it-for-granted that it was because they

knew that a Bachelor's degree obtained from a prestigious university was considered more valuable than one from an ordinary university. This could be a weakness of my study. The parents might have other considerations rather than the degree's value in the labour market.

#### Family 9

"She should have started to work after her graduation from the university. I had never encouraged her to apply for the postgraduate study." (Mother)

"A Bachelor's degree was considered pretty well in my parents' point of view. But I always wanted to obtain a doctorate." (Child)

"For generations of my family, she is the only descendant who has graduated from a key university with a BA. This is quite excellent since there are only a few of the population can obtain what she has already achieved. So I think she is good enough as a student and I am very satisfied with her educational attainment." (Father)

Similar to the above 3 families, parents in F9 also expected the child to achieve a Bachelor's degree. But she was already a second year postgraduate student when I interviewed her. Thus, the decision-making process regarding the child's education in F9 was child-centred, as the parents allowed the child to apply for the postgraduate program after she had obtained a BA awarded by a prestigious university. They were permissive parents as they did not force their child to give up postgraduate education and get a job, although they wished her to do so. They changed and adapted to their child's wishes. The negotiation and interaction between the parents and their child regarding the child's education will be illustrated in section three of this chapter.

#### Family 10

"When she was in high school, I expected her to enrol in a university and get a BA.... Girls are different from boys because, you know, girls need to get married at a younger age than boys. I know I am a little conservative.... But in face of the grim employment situation in the current society, now I encourage her to get a Master's degree." (Father)

The father stated the changing process of his expectation regarding the child's education. Initially he just expected the child to obtain a BA. Then he raised his expectation to a MA due to the grim employment situation. Thus, it indicates that the parent's expectation was

adaptable but a not constant one. It is also noteworthy that the father’s educational expectation was impacted by the child’s gender. I will explain this in the next section.

### Summary

During the interview, parents of GB referred exact educational levels that they used to expect their child to achieve. Among all the five families recruited for GA, parents of F6, F7, F8 and F9 respectively all expected their child to obtain a BA, while parents of F10 changed their views to expect the child to get a MA. I consider these parents held high educational expectations for their children.

### Factors influencing parents’ educational expectations

In terms of the factors influencing the GB parents’ educational expectations for their children, two categories were identified: social context and family context. Each of the two categories contains complementary subcategories and some of the subcategories comprise several themes. An outline of the themes is shown in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6 Factors influencing parental educational expectations in Generation B

| Category       | Sub-category                         | Theme  |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Social Context | The labour market                    | A degree is an essential prerequisite for employment |
|                |                                      | The severe employment situation                      |
|                | The devaluing of well-educated woman |  |
| Family Context | Parental gender bias                 | A concern for marriage for girls                     |
|                |                                      | More conservative for girls than for boys            |
|                | Parental educational attainment      | Making parents’ dream come true                      |
|                |                                      | Be better than parents                               |
|                | Family economic condition            | Tuition fees   |
|                |                                      | Alleviate the economic burden                        |

#### Social Context

As for GB, the social context was a significant factor that shaped parental educational expectations for their children. Under the category of social context, there two sub-

categories: the labour market and the devaluing of well-educated woman. Under the category of family context, the two sub-categories are gender bias and child's role.

### ***The labour market***

This sub-category stressed the situation in the Chinese labour market that emerged with the market-oriented economic reforms that began in 1978 and re-emphasized in 1992. Prior to the implementation of the economic reforms, the labour market was unified by a centrally-administered allocation system and the labour policy at the time had the explicit objective of guaranteeing employment to all workers. According to this system, students who graduated from either technical secondary school or tertiary schools would be secured a job by the state after graduation. But there was no freedom in job hunting under this rigid labour policy and once a person was employed, he or she could not resign or seek another job (Ip, 1995). Since the economic reforms began in 1978, the Chinese labour market has undergone a set of remarkable transformations. Most importantly, the job-assignment system was dismantled and it was replaced by a mutual employment selection system in 1998. This mutual employment selection system allows job hunters to make their own choices over the work-units they will work for and employers to carry out recruitment according to their own principles. In 1998, the first batch of college graduates entered in the labour-force through this mutual employment selection system (Sun, 2010).

### ***A degree is an essential prerequisite for employment***

Most of the parents recruited for GB perceived their children's higher education as an essential prerequisite to obtain a worthwhile occupation. That also indicates that these parents merely recognized the vocational aspect of the concept of education (Winch, 2002). In most of the interviews, occupation was the first motive to appear. For example, the mother of F7 stressed the necessity of an academic degree for a person in the current labour market. She said that:

“One must complete a certain level of education if he wants to get a job nowadays. I will constantly support my child's study. Otherwise, she (the child) will not even have an opportunity to take part in recruitment exams held by working units without an appropriate academic degree.”

As it shows in Table 5.1, the child of F7 got a college diploma while her parents expected her to obtain a BA. But the father did not encourage the child to upgrade to a university. Instead, he pushed her to find a job as he believed that the final objective of schooling is getting a job. The father said:

“After her graduation from college, I insisted that she should look for a job. Then my daughter got a temporary work in a private educational institution, as a teacher. Her performance was satisfactory to the school at the time. But she was rejected in the end, because this job required the candidate to have a Bachelor’s degree while she just had a college diploma. She was very upset then, so she intended to take the upgrade examination for a university. But I asked her to look for other working opportunities rather than returning to school. This is because, you know, one has to find a job under any circumstances. So I thought that it was better to begin job hunting earlier rather than later in view of the severe situation in the labour market.”

Moreover, this theme was addressed explicitly by the father of F10. When I asked him for his opinion about the meaning of schooling to a person, he replied by saying:

“I think schooling can dramatically change a person’s life. For example, if one does not attend higher education, then he can only become a temporary wage-labour or establish a small private business. But one who has received higher education will have more working opportunities, such as working in foreign companies or becoming a civil servant... My daughter is an undergraduate student now and she has already taken the entrance examinations for postgraduate study. I encouraged her to do so because I thought that when she has obtained a MA she will have wider options for employment.”

Along with the market-oriented transformation of the Chinese labour market and the emergence of knowledge-based economy during the 1990s, the rate of return to schooling in China experienced a substantial rise (Chen et al., 2003). Based on the data collected in 1995 from urban labour within eleven provinces and cities in mainland China, Lai (1998) estimated the rate of return to schooling for urban labour. He indicated that the rate of return to schooling had increased from 3.8% in 1988 to 5.73% in 1995. It illustrates the increased value of education for a person in the labour market during the 1990s. It could also explain why parents of GB insisted that an academic degree was the key factor determining their child’s career.

#### *The severe employment situation*

The child of F10 was still a university student when I interviewed her. She was expected to get a BA when she was a high school student; but her parents then changed the expectation from a BA to a MA. They directly referred to the severe employment situation as a factor that had altered their educational expectations for their child. The mother said:

“I encourage her to apply for the postgraduate study. Nowadays, there are too many graduates with Bachelor’s degrees. So, in order to be competitive in the labour market and get a good job, she must obtain a higher academic degree.”

Due to the evolution of the labour market and the expansion in higher education, the problem of the employment of university students has received extensive attention. Zeng (2004) investigated the employment situation of university students in 2003. The results of Zeng’s study illustrated that difficulties in the employment of university students had indeed occurred. Fundamentally, it reflected the downward trend of the employment rate of graduates as a result of the discrepancies between the growth rate of the demand for university students and the growth rate of the supply of university graduates. For example, the employment rate of post-graduate students decreased from nearly 99% by the end of 1990s to 95% in 2001. The employment rate of university students was 90% by the end of 1990s, but it dropped to 80% in 2001. Most significantly, the employment rate of college students with a college diploma rather than a BA decreased from 80% in the late 1990s to 50% in 2001.

### **The devaluing of well-educated woman**

The devaluing of women with successful careers or whose educational levels are very high is quite prevalent in the current society. These women are often called a “strong woman”. This title not only portrays a woman is as tough as men, but also implies that she is lacking certain qualities of women, such as being a good wife and a devoted mother. Zhou (1997) argues that, regardless of praise or censure, this title contains elements of prejudice or misunderstanding against talented women. He attributes the on-going prejudice or misunderstanding against women in post-reform Chinese society to men’s socio-psychological imbalance derived from the role transformations, in which people no longer embrace traditional views of men and women, yet have not become comfortable with alternative images of the sexes.

In traditional Chinese society, the major role women undertook was the family role and they were not allowed to participate in any work outside the family. Women’s values were largely realized through and embodied in their family life, such as “serve the husband and educate the children” (*xiangfujiaozi*). This means that market work on the one hand and family care and domestic work on the other hand were the respective distinct domains of men and women.

Great changes have taken place in the traditional women's role due to the increasing labour-force participation of women after the Women's Liberation Movement in the middle 20th century and the social, political and economic reforms implemented in the past several decades. The Chinese government's deliberate efforts to improve women's status by ensuring equal employment opportunities have resulted in a dramatic rise in the proportion of women in the paid labour-force. Owing to the growing opportunities of social life participation, women have become a necessary component of the labour market. In 2010, a report published by the United Nations indicated that female employment rate in China had exceeded the international average rate of 53%. This means that among all the employed population in China in 2010, more than half were women. Moreover, the number of women receiving higher education has increased significantly in the past three decades. For instance, the percentage of female students studying in institutions of higher education was 23.4% in 1980, it increased to 33.7% in 1990 and rose to 41.0% in 2000 (China Statistical Yearbook, 2002). In 2010, the percentage of female students among all undergraduate students was 50.86% and the figure was 47.86% for post-graduate students (China Statistical Yearbook, 2011). These numbers illustrate that the range and quality of women's participation in public life have been significantly increased. Moreover, nowadays women who form more than 48% of the whole population in China become less reliant on men than they were in the traditional Chinese society. Specifically speaking, as in the old days the wife had to be supported by her husband, the growing employment of women makes them economically independent from their husbands (Jimang Wang, 2011). Consequently, women's status either in the family or in the public sector has altered considerably. In turn, women's value as an individual rather than an attachment to men has been highlighted.

The transformation of women's role turns to be a terrible shock to men. It induced a sense of being disgraced among males since they had already adapted to the traditional patriarchal society which was predominately influenced by Confucianism. In face of this circumstance, Qiao (2009) notes that the reason why men would like to accept the devaluation of highly educated women is that they want to protect their superiority to women and keep the tradition where women are powerless. Therefore, men are less likely to be fond of women who are remarkably successful in education or in their careers.

The mother of F9 pointed out that it is not good for a woman to achieve too high an educational level and she referred to the prevailing metaphor, “strong woman (*nv qiang ren*)”, for women who are well-educated.

“She (the daughter) should have found a job after leaving university. In the current society, a woman with too high an educational level is called a ‘strong woman (*nv qiang ren*)’. The life of ‘strong woman’ is always unhappy in my opinion. I do not think there are any males who would like to marry a woman with a Master’s or a Doctoral degree.”

The accounts of the mother in F9 revealed that she was well aware of the prevalent prejudice and discrimination against well-educated women. As a mother, there is no doubt that she will care about her daughter’s marriage and family life. So, when she noticed the inferior status of highly educated women in seeking a husband and the work-family conflicts these women have experienced in marriage, she tried to prevent her daughter from being a demonized “strong woman”. Therefore, a BA became her entire wish for the daughter’s education. And she hoped the daughter could join in the labour-force right after graduation.

### **Family Context**

The context within the family is another prominent category indicating factors shaping GB parents’ educational expectations for their child. It comprises three subcategories: parental gender bias, parental educational attainment and family’s economic condition

#### ***Parental gender bias***

The findings revealed that children’s gender shaped parents’ educational expectations. Specifically speaking, parents tended to hold lower educational expectations for girls than for boys, no matter whether the girl was the only child in the family or not. This was in contrast to the research findings derived from a survey conducted in 1998-99 with 1040 eighth graders in Wuhan, China, by Tsui and Rich (2002), who suggested that there were no gender differences in parents’ educational expectations for the single child in a family.

From the interviews with the parents in F9 and F10, I developed two themes: a concern for marriage for girls and more conservative for girls than boys.

#### ***A Concern for marriage for girls***

The parents in F5 realized the current unpopularity of highly well-educated women among men. They emphasized that achieving higher academic degree is a time-consuming process

which will cause a woman to miss her best marriage and childbearing time. The father of F5 expressed his concern about the child's marriage directly:

“Girls are different from boys because, you know, girls need to get married at a younger age than boys...”

Similarly, the mother of F5 said that:

“To be honest, I do not expect my daughter to obtain a doctorate because when she has finished the doctoral studies, she will be too old and she will miss the best time for getting married or having a baby. Plus, few men would like to marry a woman who is over 30 and has such a high educational attainment!”

Throughout Chinese history, woman's legal age for marriage has always been younger than for man. For example, in Tang Dynasty, men and women's legal age for getting married were 20 and 15 respectively. Much more recently, the new *Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China* issued in 2012 indicates that men cannot get married until 22 while women cannot get married until 20. Traditionally, women over the age of 23 and men over 25 have been regarded as behind schedule in marriage both by the family of origin and by the individuals themselves (Fowler et al., 2010). Nowadays, due to the prolonged time for receiving education, work-related stress and work-family conflicts, young adults, both women and men prefer to marry later when they are 26-29 years old. Moreover, 45.7% of the men investigated by Meng and Huang (2010) chose to get married after 30 years old while of the women, only 10.3% wanted to marry after 30.

According to the *Investigation Report on Chinese Marriage in 2010*, the major pressure on women regarding marriage was resulted from men's strict age requirement for women. The findings in this report revealed that more than 90% of men considered that women should marry before 27 years of age. Around 32% men thought that the best age for women to marry was 20 to 24 while more than half of the women considered that the best age for men to marry was 28 to 30. Apparently, age becomes a crucial factor impeding women's selection of mates.

The implications of women's mate selection preferences make the situation of well-educated women in the marriage market much more severe. First of all, women more than men prefer mates who show good earning abilities and who are well-educated. Thus, there has been greater tendency for women to marry upwardly in socioeconomic status than for men (Buss and Barnes, 1986). This finding generally holds across generations, cultures and

research paradigms (Feingold, 1992). Moreover, traditional Chinese culture highlights that a woman is supposed to marry a man who is in a higher social status than her. As a result, men who are of a lower social status are rejected by “strong women” (Li, 2011). Actually, it is not easy for talented women who are mostly in higher educational or higher income statuses to find a man of an even higher socio-economic status than their own. This means that the range of spousal choices is limited for highly-educated women compared to women who are not.

*More conservative for girls than for boys*

The parents of F10 mentioned the differences between girls and boys and referred their different attitudes to them on numerous occasions during the interview. Their accounts revealed that they were debating with themselves, on the one hand, because they as parents expected their child to be a successful person; but on the other hand, they worried about the daughter’s family well-being since they see women’s success in career as creating stresses in couple and parent-child relationships due to the lack of time to devote to family life. For example, the mother in F10 said that:

“To be honest, of course I wish my daughter become a successful person with a lot of achievements in education and career. But when taking into account her marriage and the happiness of her family life, I tend to be less ambitious.... If my child was a boy, I would not be worried at all since a career is more important for men than for women. I will absolutely send him out to the society and let him experience as much hardship as possible; otherwise, he cannot be a real adult. As for my daughter, I just expect a steady job for her and I hope she can spare more time with her husband and children. This will be the best choice for a woman, in my opinion.”

According to Callender et al. (2003), this is the “for ill” version of the effect of a growing trend to individualisation induced by women’s increasing participation in the labour market on family relationships. Research in the West has indicated that the growing participation of women in paid labour-force outside of the family failed to lessen people’s traditional sex-role prescriptions. Traditional sex-role prescriptions not only freed husbands from many daily household tasks, but also guaranteed support services to husbands provided by wives (Coverman, 1983). Consequently, most of the employed women are now experiencing a work-family conflict, which is linearly related to the total amount of time spent in paid employment and unpaid domestic work (Gutek et al., 1991). Research in the United States indicated that women’s increased time spent performing tasks linked to paid

employment did not significantly reduce the time they spent on domestic work. For example, Greenstein (1996) claimed that although married mothers were more than twice as likely to be employed full-time in the late 1990s as in 1970s, married men still did relatively little domestic labour. In addition, Demo and Acock (1993) argued that even though husbands of employed wives contributed more hours in household chores per week than husbands of non-employed wives, still husbands' efforts formed a small proportion of the total domestic responsibilities. Research in China offers a similar conclusion: although nowadays husbands are more likely to share the housework with wives than ever before, the latter still take on the most of this task within a family (Shanhua Yang, 2006: 122).

This means that women in the labour market nowadays have to bear a dual-burden resulting simultaneously from paid work in labour-market and unpaid domestic-work, thus they experience work-family conflict. Work-family conflict was deemed having a significant negative influence on an individual's quality of family life and life satisfaction (Higgins et al., 1992). Such pressure is even stronger when women have become mothers. Some fathers studied by Callender et al. (2003) in the UK believed that stresses resulted from their partners' labour-market participation in their family relationships arose from the latter's lack of time. Therefore, in consideration of the work-family conflict women undergo, parents tended to expect less educational or occupational achievements for daughters in order to make their life less stressful and enhance their life satisfaction.

### ***Parental educational attainment***

Making parents' dream come true and be better than parents are the two themes running through this sub-category. The first theme indicates that the educational level parents expected their children to achieve was the one they failed to obtain. The second theme stressed that parents tended to set their own educational attainments as the minimum requirement, and they always expected their children to obtain higher educational levels than they.

#### Making parents' dream come true

When the NCEE was restored in 1977, the father of F8 joined the exam as he aspired to attend higher educational institutions. However, he did not enrol in a college or a university successfully after taking the NECC three times in succession. Then he was recruited to be a junior middle school and became a teacher. After working for a few years, he took the entrance examination for adult higher education, and enrolled in a college and got a

college diploma. When I asked the father about his educational expectation for the child, he said that:

“I took the NCEE for several times before, but I failed them all. So, I did not manage to get into a university, nor to say obtain a BA. Considering that I can never compete with people who are in the same age with me, I have put all the hope on my son. I expected that he could fulfil my dream by attending a university and get a degree.”

The mother of F10 also said that she took the child’s life as a continuation of her own life. Thus, she wished her child to obtain what she did not have, higher education in particular. The mother elaborated how excited she was when the child received the letter of acceptance from the university:

“I was even more anxious than my daughter when waiting for the notice from the university. You know what, when I received the offer from the university, I was so excited that I could not sleep at all throughout the whole night. Now I could not describe my happiness with any words. I was happy because I had rested all my hope on her, as her life is like the continuation of my own life. She got the university offer that I had no way of obtaining. The feeling at the time was like my dream had at last been fulfilled.”

#### Be better than parents

During the interview, most of the parents directly expressed that they expect their children to be better than them. For example, the mother of F9 said that:

“I want my son to be better than me and my husband. I hope he can be an outstanding person in the future.”

Similarly, the mother of F6 said that:

“I have been a peasant and experienced the hardships of agricultural life. So I expect a better life for my children and I hope they can leave the countryside.”

To be specific, parents always tend to expect their children to achieve higher educational levels than they. The accounts of the father in F9 revealed that he took the educational background of his family as a standard to measure the child’s educational achievement. Whether his expectation is fulfilled or not is based on whether the child has done better than the other family members, including him. He said that:

“Among the generations of my family, she is the only descendant who has graduated from a key university with a BA. This is quite excellent since not every person can achieve what she has already achieved. So I think she is good enough as a student and I am very satisfied with her educational attainment.”

This account echoes the studies which have demonstrated the positive association between parent’s educational attainment and his/her educational expectation for the child (e.g. Stage and Hossler, 1989, Bowden and Doughney, 2012). Thus, it is possible that parents who have a doctorate expect their children to achieve a doctorate as well. It is also possible that parents who are not well educated expect their children to gain a doctorate since they want to make their own dream come true (Gofen, 2009).

### ***Family’s economic condition***

The parents in F9 expected their son to obtain a BA. They emphasized that the disadvantaged economic position of their family restricted the level of their educational expectation for the child. During her interview, the mother said that:

“I did not dare to expect my son to study abroad because I had no way to afford for the tuition fees.”

Moreover, due to the family’s poor economic situation, the parents in F9 cared about the opportunity costs of funding their son’s postgraduate studies. The mother said that:

“If he failed in the exam for postgraduate studies the first time, I would not allow him to prepare for the next year’s exam because I needed him to work immediately and alleviate the economic burden of my family.”

### **Summary**

In this section, I analysed the factors shaping parents’ educational expectations for their children. Two different categories were identified: social context and family context. Each of the two categories contains complementary subcategories and themes. In general, the category of social context indicates GB parents’ responses to employment opportunities in Chinese labour market and their responses to the prevailing societal gender bias against highly educated women. The family context category stresses GB parents’ gender bias against girls, their educational attainment and their family’s economic position.

## **The Realization of Parental Expectations for Their Children**

All the children recruited for GB, except the child in F7, had achieved the educational levels that their parents expected them to achieve, which means that they had realized their parents' expectations and achieved higher educational attainments than their parents. Moreover, as the child of F7 and F8 had already obtained a job with a higher prestige score than that of their parents respectively, they had achieved a higher socio-economic status (SES) than their parents.

In the previous sections, I indicated that parents recruited for GB held high educational expectations for their children and explained why these parents had such expectations. In this section, I will explore the impact of parental expectations on children's achieving higher educational attainments or higher SES than that of their parents.

The research results indicated that, basically, parents with higher educational expectations were likely to be involved in their children's study either through communicating the value of education to the child or through participating in the child's study at home. Thus, communication and participation were identified as the two major themes categorizing the activities conducted by parents of GB in order to make their expectations of their child's education come true. The findings also revealed that, under the aforementioned two themes, specific activities implemented by the parents in GB varied with the child's growth course. In general, I divide a child's educational career into three stages and proceed to discuss the findings accordingly in this section. The first stage is pre-school period. It represents the period of time from a child's birth to his/her reaching the school age. The second stage is school period. It represents the time when the child is a student either in elementary school, junior secondary school or senior secondary school. The third stage is college days, which covers the period when the child is a college/university student.

### **Pre-school period**

The slogan, "Don't let your child fall behind from the starting line", corresponds to the ordinary conviction of Chinese parents: wishing the son to be a dragon and the daughter to be a phoenix (*wang zi cheng long, wang nu cheng feng*). "Dragon" and "Phoenix" are two metaphors for Chinese parents' high expectations of their children. The slogan indicates that children's education is viewed as a race in contemporary China, of which the starting line is the early education; thereby, the slogan calls parents to become involved in their children's education as early as possible (Yang, 2012).

The early years of the childhood are a critical period for the development of human capital that lasts throughout the whole life cycle (Coneus et al., 2012). Yet, a few studies have indicated that pre-school education has significant and consistent positive effects on children's school performance and it also improves children's competence in the labour market. Thus, better parenting in terms of children's education in their early childhood and more structured parenting styles contribute to children's lifetime economic success (Cunha and Heckman, 2007).

In the current study, parents recruited for GB consistently explained that they became involved in the study of their children very early before these children had reached school-age. Based on my research data, I identified communication and participation as the two major themes addressing parents' pre-school involvement. These parental activities appeared to have facilitated children's academic achievement, as I describe below.

### ***Communication***

For GB, both parents' and children's interviews suggest that parents began to communicate the value of education and the importance of study to their children before the children went to school. For example, parents of F6 and F10 frequently told their children that:

“You should attend school in the future; otherwise you cannot become a successful person when you grow up.”

By saying this, parents tried to build a basic impression they expected their children to achieve in their studies. The child in F6 acknowledged the value of such parent-child communication regarding the value of education. She said that:

“As my father was working in a place far away from home, it was my mother who always stayed with me at home when I was a kid. Due to my father's absence, she had to do the farm work all by herself. I pitied my mother so much when I was watching her working in the farm, so I often offered myself to help her although I could not actually help doing anything as I was too young. But she never allowed me to even touch the soil in the farm. Instead, she kept telling me that farm work is lowly work that I should never involve myself in. At the same time, she told me that I must go to school and then go to college when I grow up, otherwise I would be working in the farm as hard as she was. Since then, I got to know that studying is always good for me and I simultaneously made up my mind to study hard when I become a student.”

Likewise, parents in F9 directly instilled their educational expectations onto the child's mind through day-to-day communication. Specifically, the child commented that her parents encouraged her to believe learning is a prestigious thing that one should definitely do:

“They usually said to me, for example, what a large amount of books my neighbour have at home, how well their colleagues' children have done by getting a place in such a good university and things like that. I could easily tell from such sayings that, they expected me to go to university. What I also learned from these words was that the more effort I make to study, the better future I will obtain.”

### ***Participation***

During the pre-school period, parents of GB also actively supported their children's studies at home, so that they could perform better later at school. For example, the child of F6 reported that her mother's participation in her studies during her pre-school period helped her pass the elementary school entrance examination:

“My pre-school education was provided by my mother. She bought many books for me and taught me how to read and write. Therefore, although I had not attended pre-school classes, I got a very good result in the entrance examination for elementary school.... Thanks to my mother's effort, otherwise I had no way to enrol in that school.”

In F9, the child's accounts concerned how strict her mother was with her studies before she got to school. She also suggested that parents' pre-school involvement in children's studies might benefit children by cultivating good learning habits:

“During the days before I enrolled in elementary school at 8 years old, my mother had been teaching me at home. She bought me books, taught me reading and writing. She also assigned me homework every day. I could easily recall that my mother was very strict with me in terms of my study even if I was just a pre-school child. If I had a mistake in the homework she assigned to me, she would ask me to re-write everything no matter how small the mistake was. However, I do not think she provided me with a lot of knowledge during that time. Instead, she helped me formed good learning habits, which had the greatest importance to me. For example, I am very strict with myself as a student and very active in learning as well.”

In a word, as perceived by both parents and children recruited for GB, daily parent-child communication established high educational aspirations in children. Also, I found that parental participation in children's studies promoted better school performance. Parents are the first and most important teachers of their children and it is necessary for parents to actively participate in their children's academic lives if they want their children to succeed in school (DePlanty et al., 2007). Previous studies have affirmed that parents' pre-school interventions benefit children's school achievement (e.g. Miedel and Reynolds, 1999, Englund et al., 2004).

Moreover, parents' high educational expectations and their early involvement in the study of their children indicated above also suggest that these parents were both demanding and responsive. Typically, they were highly involved in their children's life, e.g. teach children read and write, and they tend to communicate with their children actively and openly. Thus, these parents were authoritative parents according to the Western model of parenting styles.

### **The school period**

In this study, GB parents talked about the continuous efforts they had made in order to improve their school-age children's academic performance. Similar to the pre-school period, communication and participation were the two themes that arose from the part of the study's data.

### ***Communication***

During the school period, parents of GB continuously transferred the idea that study is highly valued to their children through parent-child communication in daily life. Also, parents' repetition of sayings translated as "schooling always has the first priority" to the school-age children implanted the importance of studying in their lives early on. Such themes overlapped with those derived from the pre-school period under the theme of communication. As for the school period in particular, I identified the theme "responding to children's exam results" from the children's accounts. Moreover, it is worth noting that when parents conveyed their values to their children through communication, the children were not just passive receipts of parental intentions. Rather, the children retained their power of individual agency. They would analyse their parents' words or attitudes and make choices in their responses according to their own needs and take purposive action to see their needs realized.

### *Responding to children's exam results*

Responding to children's exam results came to be a unique theme for the school period of children in GB. Taking examinations is an important aspect in the life of school students. The findings revealed that parents' various responses to students' exam results indirectly transferred parental expectations to the children, who were inclined to take cues from parental feedback on their exam results to decide what parents expected for them and to modify their behaviours accordingly.

The child in F6 and the one in F9 indicated that their parents' oral feedback on their exam results had motivated them to make progress in school. For the child in F6, the praise that she received from her parents continuously led her to become eager for a good academic performance:

“Whenever I got good exam results, my parents would praise me by words like ‘well done my girl’ or ‘you are mom’s best child’. I felt happy and proud whenever I was being praised like this. So I would study much harder in order to get more praise from my parents.”

In contrast to F6, the child in F9 made it clear that her parents' expectations for her were conveyed through negative feedback from her parents, especially the mother, when they were informed of the exam results:

“I had no idea of examination in primary school at first. So, I was the third in my class after the first exam I had ever taken as a student. My mother was very unhappy when she knew the result and she kept asking me who were the upper two. Her responses let me know that I should do better in school and I also felt that she would only be satisfied when I became the first in my class.”

The above accounts suggest that the mother in F6 was more likely to use “positive” and “gentle” reason-based strategies in disciplining and managing the child's behaviours than the mother in F9, who was stricter with her child's study. But the consequence was the same in the two families, i.e. the children got to know that their mothers expected them to perform well or even better in school. To a certain extent, such consequence suggests that open and active communication engaged by parents with their children about study might have positive impact on their school performance.

### ***Participation***

Parents' demands about school performance promoted them to engage in their children's studies by offering advice and academic support. For GB, one specific type of parental involvement had to do with choosing key secondary schools for children.

#### *Choosing key secondary schools for children*

In this study, parents' choice of better schools for their children constitutes another type of parental involvement activity facilitating children's academic performance.

The findings of my study revealed that parents' concern about school choice usually occurred when their children were about to attend secondary school. The child of F7 elaborated her experience of being sent to a key secondary school in a city far away from her home town. She indicated that her parents were one of the few cases who would think about sending their children to study in the city. And she also conveyed the view that she benefitted from being sent to a better quality secondary school in the city. She said:

“After graduating from the elementary school in my home town, my parents decided to send me to a secondary school located in the city as it has better academic quality than the one in my home town. During that time, few people would think about going to better schools in the city. But my parents were one of the exceptions. They insisted that the school in the city would provide me with better education and study environment. I agreed, although I did not like to.... As soon as the new term began, I realized the huge gap between me and the other students coming from elementary schools in the city. For example, they could read English articles very fluently but I could not. I attributed this gap to the poor quality of teaching in the schools in my home town.... I am glad that my parents decided to send me to the school in the city as the better teaching quality in that school helped me a lot with my academic performance and interpersonal skill.”

In order to send the child to the key secondary school in the city, the parents of F8, who also lived in a town far from the city, even gave up their previous jobs and moved to the city. The father of F8 said:

“We were living and working in a town far from the city. But we wanted my child to receive better education in the city. So when my son was about to attend junior secondary school, I changed my job and moved house to the city. Thus, he could

enrol in the key secondary school in the city centre and I could look after his life at the same time.”

*Parental behaviour control upon children*

It is noteworthy that, none of the participants recruited for GB mentioned about parental help with children’s homework or any other type of direct support in relation to children’s school performance. I considered that this might be because parents were unable to help with their children’s study when it reached a certain level. It might also due to parents were too busy with their own work. Thus, they could not spare time helping children with their study at home. However, this did not imply that these parents were not interested in how their children performed in school. In fact, parents tended to place a high level of behaviour control upon their school-age children, especially toward the issue of about intimate teenage relationship.

The issue of children’s intimate relationship at school has received wide attention from Chinese society. Previous research based on school students in China have indicated that intimate teenage relationship has significant negative impact upon middle school students’ educational achievement (Hu et al., 2012). Thus, Chinese parents have always been strongly opposite to school students’ being in love at school. For instance, the child in F6 talked about her mother who did not allow her to have a relationship at school:

“In my opinion, my mother used to be very strict with me. When I was at secondary school, for example, she asked me not to talk to boys in order to prevent me from having a relationship at school. She thought that having a relationship at school would definitely impact on my academic performance.”

A similar story was told by the child in F10. She said:

“I had a relationship when I was at junior secondary school. My parents were strongly opposed to it. And you know what, in order to separate me and my boyfriend, they took me out of the school I was at and sent me to another one in another province!”

The above two stories might reveal that, with regards to the issue of intimate teenage relationship, parents in F6 and F10 set clear boundaries to their children’s behaviours and tended to ask their children to do what they want without considering about children’s opinions. Moreover, these parents were high in psychological control, which indicates the relative degree of emotional autonomy that parents assign to their children (Gray and

Steinberg, 1999). From this perspective, parents in F6 and F10 were more inclined to be authoritarian parents, although they were more authoritative with regards to children's study both during pre-school period and school period. This suggests that parents' parenting styles are not static. Their parenting strategies and attitudes might be different toward their children in face of different issues. Thus, it seems that parents' parenting styles are changing along a continuum, so that they might be closer to one point of the continuum at some times and then move closer to another point of the continuum at other moments. Therefore, I suggest that it might be irrational to assign a parent into one specific category of parenting styles.

### **College days**

After they had finished secondary education, the children of GB all went to college or university as their parents had expected for them. Parents' motivation for being involved in the education of college students were differentiated according to the level of their educational expectations. The findings revealed that parents who expected a higher degree than a BA for the child kept being involved in the child's study during their college days. However, parents who were satisfied with a BA tended to reduce their attention to the child's academic performance once that had been achieved. Such a distinction implies that parents' educational expectations largely determine the effort that they would make in promoting their child's final educational achievements.

The parents of GB whose educational expectations were a BA, they reduced the attention given to their child's study at this stage as they felt their hopes had already been fulfilled. Therefore, they reduced the frequency of parent-child communication regarding the child's study. For example, the father in F8 said:

“I did not intervene in my son's study as often as before. I just asked him to pass each exam in the college. I did not even keep track of his school performance. I thought that my dream had already been met.”

However, parents who expected more than a BA for their child expressed their consistent efforts in encouraging the child to work hard in college. F10 bellowed this vein. The child of F10 was continuously encouraged to study hard when she was an undergraduate student as she was expected to get a MA. The mother of F10 said that:

“I always told her how difficult it was for an undergraduate student to get a decent job in the current society, in order to let her know that it was necessary for her to get a Master’s degree.”

However, parents’ direct participation in their children’s study was not mentioned as often as during the pre-school or school period. This was because, on the one hand, the colleges or universities in which their children studied were usually far away from their home city, so that they were not staying at home together with their parents. Additionally, considering their lesser educational attainments, parents confessed to their inability to help with children’s college work.

***Parent-child interaction in educational decision-making***

Interestingly but not surprisingly, the children of GB had higher educational aspirations than their parents’ educational expectations, except F10. Table 5.7 illustrates the disparity between parents’ educational expectations and their children’s educational aspirations for GB.

Table 5.7 Level of Educational Expectation (LEX) and Level of Educational Aspiration (LEA)

|     | F6 | F7 | F8        | F9        | F10 |
|-----|----|----|-----------|-----------|-----|
| LEX | BA | BA | BA        | BA        | MA  |
| LEA | MA | MA | Doctorate | Doctorate | MA  |

As I have mentioned, by the time the children in F6, F7, F8 and F9 enrolled in a college or university, the educational expectation of parents in the four families were fulfilled. However, as these children’s educational aspirations (MA or Doctorate) were higher than their parents’ expectations (BA), these children wanted to receive further education after their undergraduate study in order to achieve their aspired educational levels. Thus, there was a divergence between parents’ attitudes toward their children’s request of post-graduate study within the four families. Specifically, parents in F8 and F9 supported their child to apply for the post-graduate study while parents in F7 were not very supportive of the child. As for F6, since the child was still in her third year of university study, I did not get the data regarding the parents’ attitudes to her desire of obtaining a MA.

My research data revealed that the child in F8 and F9 made their own decisions to go on to postgraduate studies. Thus, their aspirations prevailed over their parents’ expectations to determine their educational achievements. In contrast, the child in F7 did not realize her

educational aspiration since she was being obedient to her father who expected her to achieve a BA. This different outcome in terms of children's development demonstrates the importance of the interaction between parents and their children. Within a family, whether the parent-child relation place the parents in conditions which allow their child space or gave them agency to assert their own agenda determines who has the final say regarding the child's life events.

With regards to the issue of parenting style, stories of families in GB suggest that the child's agency is enhanced if the parent has authoritative or child-centred attitudes within parent-child interaction. In contrast, if parents are authoritarian and give no space for them to be disappointed or disobeyed, they are more likely to have the final say regarding their child's life events. However, parent-child power relationship is not a zero-sum one in which if the parent has it, the child is without. Rather, it was a process of power negotiation and renegotiation, which constantly determines the exercise of individual agency for each party.

In F8 and F9, the parents supported their children to receive post-graduate education even though they disagreed with their children's wishes. This suggests that parents in F8 and F9 respected their children's aspirations and allowed themselves to be disappointed. After indicating their own opinions, these parents did not force their children to be obedient. In other words, they granted their children considerable autonomy and enabled them to exercise agency to make decisions independently. In contrast to the parents in F8 and F9, parents in F7 forced their child to follow their plans without caring about the child's own wishes. They requested obedience from their child and asked the child to follow their order without explanations. Thus, I identified them as authoritarian parents while parents in F8 and F9 were more child-centred. I shall discuss this below.

The Child in F8 was an electrical engineer (84.9) and had got a doctorate. His parents expected a Bachelor's degree for him, but he himself decided to apply for the postgraduate study when he had graduated from the university. The father said:

"I expected him to finish undergraduate study rather than get a Master's degree, not to say a Doctorate. He decided to apply for the postgraduate study by himself at the time. We did not turn down his request of achieving further education. I also decided to leave him to make his own choice of university or subject since I felt unable to give him any good advice."

At last, the child was successfully enrolled in a university as a post-graduate student. After two years' study, he got a job in a research institute in Shanghai as an electronic engineer, which was a position that one had no way to get with only a BA. But he was not satisfied with this achievement. After two years' of full time work, he joined a doctoral research project in Shanghai University and became a part-time doctoral researcher.

Similarly, the daughter in F9 was also supported to go further in education. She was a second year Master student when I conducted my fieldwork and she is now a doctoral researcher in a social science research institute in Beijing. There is no doubt that she has obtained huge upward mobility in education compared to her parents. Actually, the mother expressed her strong disagreement with her daughter's decision:

“To be honest, I did not support her to take part in the entrance exams for postgraduate schools from my heart. I hoped that she would start working as soon as she graduated from the university.”

Although the parents did not agree with their child's intention, they understood where she was coming from and supported her decision. Thus, they were child-centred. The father of F9 reported his view about the daughter's educational achievement:

“Although we had never expected her to do so, we still respected her own choice. Ever since she was enrolled in the postgraduate school, we could only give her some financial support and some simple supervision on her life. It is time for her to be independent I think.”

However, parenting styles were dynamic rather than static as revealed by my research data. Parents in F8 and F9 avoided asserting authorities or imposing restrictions regarding the decisions about whether their children should receive more education than they expected. But these parents used to have high levels of behavioural control and monitoring at the child's pre-school and the school period. During that time, they tended to have firm and clear expectations of their children. They wanted them to focus on study and perform well in school. They would also convey their expectations clearly to their children and asked them to display acceptance. The transformations of F8 and F9 parents' parental practices while their children grew up indicated that, their parenting styles changed along with children's autonomy. The interaction between parents and children and the parent-child power relationship in decision-making were dynamic but not static. Parents tend to have great parental authority or power over their young children. But when young children grow

up and enter adolescent or adulthood, they will become more autonomous or even self-determined. Thus, as revealed by families in my study, parents and children will have to change to accommodate each other over time.

Different from parents in F8 and F9, the father in F7 gave little agency to the child. Although the child of F7 aspired to attend postgraduate schools, he insisted on helping the child get a job rather than encouraging her to achieve postgraduate education. The father said:

“When she graduated from college, I asked her to get to the job fair and take part in the recruitment exams for various working units. I also bought a lot of books for her in order to help prepare well for these exams. But she was terribly bored as she actually wished to go on to postgraduate study. So she asked me if she can look for a job and take part in exams for further education at the same time. I rejected her request because I wanted her to focus on job hunting.”

The child could not help but follow her father’s instruction. Then she entered in the labour-force with a college diploma. The daughter commented on her parents’ parenting styles and she said that:

“When recalling my life experience, I found that every decision I made was closely related to my parents’ expectations for me as they always push me to realize the goals that they set for me. See, they asked me to study English even if I favoured literature; they forced me to work though I wanted to stay in school; they asked me to change my previous job because they did not like it. They even went to my previous working unit and brought me home, in order that they could supervise me preparing for the exams for other working units which they preferred. I do not like my current job, but my parents are quite happy with it, so I have to stay.”

The above statement indicated that the father in F7 put a high level of control upon the child and tended to ask the child to follow his orders without explanation rather than listening to the child’s point of view. Thus, the father was more like an authoritarian parent.

Corresponding to different parenting styles were children’s various responses. The child in F7, whose behaviours were always under control of her parents, was a passive one. She had little autonomy in decision-making. In contrast, the child in F8 and F9 were more autonomous. The more autonomous children were more likely to make their own decisions. However, it was not that the child in F7 did not want to be autonomous. In contrast, she

wanted to make her own decisions. But her parents were high in psychological control and low in autonomy granting. In face of her parents' great authority and power, she chose to accept whatever her parents asked her to do even though she was already an adult. Actually, the F7 child's obedience to her father's authoritarianism was not without relation to the emphasis on parental authority and the child's obedience in traditional Chinese culture influenced by Confucian philosophy. One of the main Confucian concepts is filial piety. It is an indigenous Chinese norm advocating that children should try to satisfy their parents and respect their elders in all circumstances (Kelley and Tseng, 1992). It also justifies absolute parental authority over children (Zhang and Bond, 1998). Thus, parents who are more conservative about their authority within the family are more likely to see their children's obedience as compulsory.

What is more, GB children's educational achievements and social status attainment might suggest that child-centred parenting style is particularly effective in enabling children to achieve their fullest potential in education when children expected higher educational level than what their parents expected for them. For instance, parents in F9 expected their daughter to achieve a BA while the daughter insisted on obtaining a doctorate. Although the parents did not support their daughter's choice from their heart, they gave the daughter enough autonomy to make her own decisions after some negotiations. As far as I know, this daughter is a third-year PhD student now. A counter-example is F7. The father of F7 expected his daughter to get a job immediately after graduating from a college with a diploma while the daughter wanted to attend further education and get a BA. But the father tended to be authoritarian without considering his daughter's opinion. As a result, the daughter failed to achieve her fullest potential in the educational system. Therefore, it might be safe to conclude that children's educational achievements are not determined either by parental expectations or children's individual aspirations. Instead, they were influenced by an interaction between parents and children, and the consequence of such interaction is to a large extent impacted by parenting style, which is also determined by a dynamic process of parent-child power negotiations. Nonetheless, other factors such as school experiences and peer influence also impact on children's education achievements.

### **Summary**

In this section, I explored the impact of parental expectations on children's achieving higher educational attainments or higher SES than that of their parents. In general, parents with high educational expectations were more likely to involve in their children's study either through communicating the value of education to the child or through participating in the

child's study at home. Thus, communication and participation were identified as the two major themes categorizing the practices used by parents of GB to realize their expectations of the child's education. Moreover, in light of that parents' academic supporting activities varied along their children's age, I divided a child's educational career into three stages including pre-school period, school period and college days and I discussed the findings accordingly.

Ever since the pre-school period, parents began to communicate the value of education and the importance of study to their child; thereby, building a basic impression that achievement in study is expected for the child and instilled their educational education into the child's mind. At the same time, parents also actively participated in their children's studies at home, basically through teaching them to read and write. These parental involvement behaviours played an important role in promoting children's better performance at school. During the school period, parents continuously transferred the idea that study is highly valued to their child through parent-child communications in daily life. In addition, parents' responses to their child's exam results turned to be a unique way of transferring parental expectations to the child at this stage. Moreover, parents' demands on good school performance promoted them to actively engage in their children's studies by becoming involved in supporting behaviours. For parents of GB, the choice of better schools for the child was a specific type of involvement activity that they adopted. As for the college days, since the children had already enrolled in college or university as their parents expected, the frequency of parent-child communication regarding the child's study was reduced. Most significantly, parental participation in children's college study through direct supportive behaviours was rarely mentioned. Furthermore, I argued that the outcomes of children's educational achievement were also influenced by the extent to which children can exercise their agency, which was determined by a dynamic process of parent-child power negotiations.

## **Chapter 6 Findings: Generation C**

### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the participants recruited for the cohort referred as Generation C. The five families recruited for Generation C depict those in which parents had their first child after 1990. This chapter comprises of four analysis sections. The first section presents the composition of the sample and the family context of the five recruited families as well as their relevant social background. The second section describes and compares the level of educational expectations (LEX) for the families recruited for Generation C, except Family 14, because the mother only gave an implicit answer regarding her educational expectations for her child. The third section presents and interprets the factors shaping parental educational expectations. Five themes, i.e., family economic condition, life experiences, the one-child policy, children's school performance and the demand for children to broaden their horizons, were developed from the interviews. The last section is an analysis of parents' involvement in their children's education classified under the communication and participation mechanisms during their child's educational career divided into pre-school period, school period and college days.

## Sample and Background Information

Table 6.1 The demographic information for the participants recruited to Generation C

| Demographical Index |                             | Family 11                       | Family 12                       | Family 13                      | Family 14                  | Family 15                      |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Child's             | Birth year                  | 1992                            | 1992                            | 1996                           | 1992                       | 1990                           |
|                     | Birth order                 | only                            | only                            | only                           | eldest                     | only                           |
|                     | Birth place                 | Urban                           | Urban                           | Urban                          | Rural                      | Urban                          |
|                     | Gender                      | Female                          | Male                            | Female                         | Male                       | Male                           |
|                     | Education                   | University student: First year  | University student: First year  | Senior high school: first year | Junior secondary education | University student: Third year |
| Father's            | Birth year                  | 1966                            | 1968                            | 1969                           | N/A                        | 1962                           |
|                     | Birth place                 | Rural                           | Urban                           | Urban                          | N/A                        | Urban                          |
|                     | Education                   | Bachelor's degree               | Bachelor's degree               | Senior secondary (technical)   | N/A                        | College Diploma                |
|                     | Occupation (Prestige score) | Middle official (67.1)          | Clerical worker (53.5)          | High official (69.1)           | N/A                        | Electrician (66.7)             |
| Mother's            | Birth year                  | 1967                            | 1968                            | 1971                           | 1971                       | 1963                           |
|                     | Birth place                 | Rural                           | Rural                           | Urban                          | Rural                      | Urban                          |
|                     | Education                   | College Diploma                 | College Diploma                 | College Diploma                | Below primary education    | Senior secondary (technical)   |
|                     | Occupation (Prestige score) | Secondary school teacher (72.9) | Secondary school teacher (72.9) | Nurses (55.3)                  | Peasants (29.3)            | Clerical worker (53.5)         |

Note: N/A=Not Available

The total number of participants recruited for Generation C (GC) is fourteen, among which five are children and the other nine are their parents<sup>16</sup>. They belonged to five families

<sup>16</sup> The father of Family did not participate in the current study as he worked in a city far from home when I conducted my fieldwork. So I failed to include him into this study.

respectively. The families in this chapter depict those families in which parents had their first child after 1990. As indicated in Table 6.1, the oldest child in this cohort was born in 1990 while the youngest one was born in 1996. Four of the children achieved were born in urban areas and one (the child in Family 4) was born in a rural village. Children in Family 11 and 13 were females while those in Family 12, 14, and 15 were males. The same as the children recruited for Generation B (GB), those included in GC were also born after the introduction of the one-child policy. Therefore, among all the five children recruited for GC, those in Family 11 (F11), Family 12 (F12), Family 13 (F13), and Family 15 (F15) were the only child in the family. In contrast, the child in Family 14 (F14) was the eldest of two children in his family.

Table 6.1 shows that most of the parents recruited to GC were born in the late 1960s, except for the mothers in F13 and F14 who were born in 1971. So all of them were in the same age cohort as the parents recruited for GB and the children recruited for Generation A. That is to say, they experienced the Cultural Revolution and they benefited from the restoration of the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE), through which some of them had changed their rural *hukou* (household registration) into urban ones.

### **The rapid and large-scale expansion in higher education**

In China, one of the most important events that occurred during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was the expansion of higher education. Since 1978 when the NCEE was resumed, the opportunity for Chinese people to attend higher educational institutions has expanded (Liu, 2006). The growth of the number of new entrants, students and graduates in regular institutions of higher education fluctuated from 1978 to 1998 and the rate of expansion was slow during this period. From 1999, when the policy to expand higher education was implemented in China, the growth continued constantly and the rate of expansion increased significantly. He (2009) suggested that, strictly speaking, the expansion of Chinese higher education began from 1999.

During the first five-year-plan after 1999, the annual increase in the rate of enrolment in higher education was 20% on average (Li, 2010). Furthermore, Li (2010) indicates that the percentage of high school graduates enrolling in higher educational institutions (HEIs) was 46.1% in 1998 and rose to 83.4% by 2003. Such a rapid expansion in higher education reached its first peak in 2005. In the same year, according to Xie and Wang (2006), the total number of students in Chinese HEIs was more than 20,000,000 and Chinese higher education switched from the phase of “elite higher education” into the phase of “mass

higher education”, with a Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) of 21%, which was thirteen times more than that of 1978 (1.55%). Although the speed of expansion in higher education has been falling since 2006, the annual increasing rate has remained at around 5% (Li, 2010).

### **The tuition system in Chinese HEIs**

At the early stage of the reform era (1977-1985), higher education was free of charge to all recruited students as the state entirely funded and supported the running of HEIs and student maintenance. Those recruited students could also receive a certain amount of living allowance. So lack of money scarcely hindered one’s enrolment in higher education. However, in wake of the subsequent marketization and decentralization of higher education, HEIs in China began to recruit fee-paying students from 1985. The proportion of fee-paying students increased continuously during the following years. Finally, all new college entrants have been charged since 1997 and free higher education has disappeared from China since then.

The recent admission system provides merit-based access to higher education. But since the implementation of the tuition-payment system in Chinese HEIs, “money talks” has become a harsh reality for people who intend to access the tertiary education (Yin and White, 1994: 224). Li Wang (2011) indicates that tuition fees in higher education increased by 25 times from 200 *yuan* in 1989 to over 5000 *yuan* in 2007, with the significant increase in tuition occurring since 1997. Wang (2006) criticized that the increase of tuition had brought to the fore the phenomenon that “higher education is costly”, which replaced the previous issue that “higher education is scarce”.

As a result of the tuition-payment system in HEIs, the disadvantaged position of students in rural areas has become more significant and serious than those in urban areas. According to Diao (2011), annual per capita disposable income of urban households was 5425 *yuan* in 1998 and it increased to 13785.8 *yuan* in 2007. For rural households, the annual per capita disposable income increased from 2162 *yuan* in 1998 to 4140.4 *yuan* in 2007. During the same period of time, tuition fees per student per year increased by 228.7%, from 1974.1 *yuan* in 1998 to 6489.4 *yuan* in 2007. This means that, from 1999 to 2007 the annual amount of tuition and fees per student needs has been higher than the annual per capita net income of rural households. Specifically, Diao (2011) argues that an agricultural worker has to spend the entire 13.6 years’ net income to support a college student four years. China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA) investigated the family circumstances of poor college students in 2005. The research results revealed that an undergraduate student

spent at least 28,000 *yuan* for four years' study in a university and this amount of money was equivalent to 35 years' net income for a farmer living in impoverished villages.

Lu (2004: 92) criticized this institutional reform in education because it had reduced the opportunities of children from financially disadvantaged families to achieve upward social mobility via tertiary education. That is to say, when higher education is not free of charge, students with poor family economic conditions find it difficult to afford the tuition fees charged by higher educational institutions. Therefore, they are more likely to be in an inferior position when competing for higher education with students whose families are in a better socio-economic status. Without a formal academic qualification awarded by tertiary educational institutions, it will become much harder for children from lower income groups to get a decent job in the current society where educational qualification has become the most important standard in the job market, as has been the case over two decades. Eventually, their abilities to achieve upward social mobility became reduced since college completion becoming a critical determinant of children's future economic and social status. This phenomenon has been partially reflected in the growing earning gap between workers with and without college degrees (Zhan and Sherraden, 2011).

### ***Financial support in Chinese higher education***

The disadvantaged position of academically capable students who cannot afford to go to university stresses the need to launch and develop financial aid programs in higher educational institutions (HEIs). Like in England, not only can native undergraduate students receive income-contingent loans subsidized by the government for both tuition and living costs, but there are also HEI-provided mandatory bursaries available for low-income students since the 2004 Higher Education Act came into effect during 2006-2007 (Callender, 2009, Callender, 2010). These institutional aids were launched primarily to encourage low-income students for advanced education and to help those who aspire to attend HEIs to realize their dreams. However, from the evidence currently available, Callender (2010) concluded that in England there was a mismatch between what the government aspires to achieve by introducing bursaries and HEIs' actual use of bursaries and scholarships. Moreover, Callender (2010) indicated that the bursaries and scholarships put in place may perpetuate existing divisions within and across higher education.

Since 2007, the Chinese financial aid system in HEIs was established in an attempt to increase the affordability of tertiary education and provide access to college for students from low-income families (Yang, 2010). In concrete terms, Yang and Cheng (2013: 204)

summarized the terms of the scholarship and grant programs that had been launched since 2008. See Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Major scholarship and grant programs in China.

| Program   | Nature                  | Amount  | Coverage   | Sponsor  |
|---|-------------------------|---|--|--|
| National Scholarship<br>(started in 2002;<br>revised in 2005<br>and 2007) | Merit-based             | 8,000 <i>yuan</i><br>per academic<br>year   | 50,000<br>exceptional<br>undergraduate<br>students                             | Central<br>government  |
| National Encouragement Scholarship<br>(started in 2007)                   | Need-and<br>merit-based | 5,000 <i>yuan</i><br>per academic<br>year   | 3% of all<br>undergraduate<br>students at<br>higher education<br>institutions  | Central and local<br>governments<br>jointly (8:2 in<br>Western regions<br>and 6:4 in Eastern<br>regions) |
| National Grant<br>(started in 2007;<br>revised in 2008)                   | Need-based              | 1,000-3,000<br><i>yuan</i> per<br>academic<br>year,<br>depending on<br>local living<br>standards;<br>3,000 <i>yuan</i> on<br>average<br>nationwide) | 20% of all<br>undergraduate<br>students at<br>higher education<br>institutions | Same as for<br>National<br>Encouragement<br>Scholarship  |

In China, the financial aid system in higher education is embedded in the governance and financing structure of Chinese tertiary education section (Yang, 2010, cited in Yang and Cheng, 2013). This feature of Chinese financial aid system in higher education determines that the major provider of university and college student aid is the Chinese government, at both the central government and local government levels (Yang and Cheng, 2013). Specifically, Yang and Cheng (2013: 202) indicate that:

“The Higher Education Act of 1999 mandated that central government should provide financial support for national universities (i.e. universities affiliated with the Ministry of Education), while provincial governments should be primarily responsible for provincial or local institutions.”

Table 6.2 shows that National Scholarship is sponsored by the central government, while National Encouragement Scholarship and National Grant are jointly sponsored by the

central government and local governments. Moreover, Work-study programs, which aim to provide working opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to earn extra income for their study and life, are operated by universities.

Generally speaking, student financial aid was increasing up to some extent (Xu, 2008), but there were several inadequacies within Chinese college financial aid programs. First and foremost, these financial aid payments are insufficient to meet low-income students' economic needs in relation to both maintenance and tuition fees (Yang and Cheng, 2013). They further claimed that even after receiving financial assistance, a high proportion of low-income students still had a high unmet financial need. In contrast, Wang and his co-authors (2013) argue that poor students currently are able to access sufficient levels of financial aid; thus, they do not shoulder heavy financial or psychological costs. Nonetheless, the latter study only evaluated the impact of scholarship in first-tier colleges, namely elite or prestigious colleges, while the financial aid distribution was not equal among tertiary educational institutions (Yang and Cheng, 2013). In other words, scholarship and grants in China are highly concentrated in prestigious HEIs, this means that students from the least selective institutions received the least amount of financial aid. The same problem was also noted by Li (2007), who said that the tuition and lodging fees in elite universities were lower than those at medium or low quality universities, but student financial assistance in elite universities was higher than that in medium or low quality universities. This is probably because the government has invested more in elite universities because the overall quality of elite universities is better than ordinary universities. This may also because elite universities are predominantly administrated by the state directly while ordinary universities are mostly under control of provincial or city-level governments. Moreover, Yang and Cheng (2013) criticized that scholarship funds are typically not given to needy students until some point of time during the second semester of the first academic year in college. As a result, students and parents from low-income families or poor areas believe this system of financial aid allocation holds so many risks and uncertainties that their college application decisions are unlikely to be influenced such financial aid system (Yang and Cheng, 2013). In this regard, for example, my research findings revealed that none of the parents from low-income families had mentioned HEIs' financial aid programs as influencing their higher educational expectations for children. Given the aforementioned inadequacies within student financial aid programs in Chinese higher education, Yang and Cheng (2013) claim that increasing access to college financial aid must be one of the policy priorities at both national and provincial levels.

### **Inequalities in educational opportunity**

The rapid and large-scale expansion in higher education has substantially increased the opportunity to receive higher education for Chinese students. But it does not necessarily mean that students from all family backgrounds have benefited equally from expanded educational opportunities. This means that increased opportunity does not lead to improved equity in accessing higher education.

Inequality in accessing education among students from different social strata exists in China. Xie and Wang (2006) argued that children from a higher social status had 14 times more opportunities for higher education than children from a lower social status. As universities in China are classified as national key universities, provincial key universities, municipal key universities, county-level key universities and non-key universities (Li 2010), children of the state and social governors' stratum were 18 times more likely to enrol in national key universities than children from unemployed groups by 2005 (Xie and Wang, 2006). That is to say, children from higher social strata are in a dominant position, not only in achieving higher education, but also in enrolling in more prestigious HEIs. Wen (2005a) also noted that although university students covered children from any family background in general, those from prestigious social strata formed a larger proportion than students from lower social strata.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, higher education expansion also occurred in many Western countries. But the increased educational opportunities did not reduce existing inequalities in accessing higher education. For example, in a systematic, comparative study of change in educational stratification in 13 industrialized countries<sup>17</sup>, Shavit and Blossfeld (1993) show that in most industrialized countries inequalities in educational opportunity among students from different social and economic strata have been remarkably stable since the early 20th century.

Regarding the effects of the expansion in higher education on reducing inequalities in educational opportunity, the case of China provides empirical evidences for the theory of "maximally maintained inequality (MMI)", according to Wu (2009). MMI was developed by Raftery and Hout (1993) to convey the idea that the effects of family socioeconomic status on children's educational opportunity have been maximally maintained, as educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups increase only at the point when the demand for

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<sup>17</sup> Czechoslovakia; England; Germany; Hungary; Israel; Japan; Netherlands; Poland; Stratification; Sweden; Switzerland; Taiwan; United States; Wales.

higher education from advantaged groups has been met. This is because, according to Mare (1980), the expansion in the scale for higher education and the distribution of educational opportunity are two independent processes. It is just like an increase in income does not necessarily lead to a more equal distribution of income (Wu, 2009). Likewise, Sussmann (1967) called the phenomenon that the groups in the lower strata could gain greater representation in education only after demands from those in the middle and upper strata had reached a near saturation point, a process of “class succession” (cited in Neelsen, 1975).

Existing inequalities in obtaining educational opportunities are not restricted merely by social class differences. According to Li (2010), class inequalities, rural-urban inequalities, gender inequalities and ethnic inequalities still exist in China despite the expansion of higher education, and such inequalities are more significant in the higher levels of tertiary education. To be specific, Liu (2006) indicates that even after the expansion of higher education, people living in developed cities or areas are in a superior status in achieving undergraduate education in comparison to people living in other less developed cities. In addition, the urban-rural gap in accessing education has been enlarged following the expansion of higher education (Li, 2010). This could, in part, be explained by the tuition-payment system that emerged from the late 1990s in Chinese HEIs. Zheng (2012) deems that even though the original intention of expanding higher education in China was to widen the routes for people located at the bottom of the social hierarchy to move up the social ladder, the increased time and financial investment required to enrol in a higher education institution appeared to favour children of better class origins or from rich families. Nonetheless, higher education expansion has reduced the gender-gap in achieving higher education, though gender inequality still exists. Before the expansion of higher education, the educational opportunities for men were 1.7 times as many as for women, but after the expansion of higher education, the comparative advantage for men was reduced by 50% (Liu, 2006).

However, it is inadequate to argue that education expansion is meaningless in promoting equity in education participation. Chunling Li (2003) argues that, in China, the trend of equalization in education is divided into two significantly different phases: the first phase is the period from the 1950s to the 1970s, featured by the increased equality in education along with the dramatic expansion in education; the second phase includes the 1980s and 1990s, which is characterized by increased inequality in education along with growing educational

opportunities. Parkin (1971) pointed out that socialist countries had deliberately implemented some policies concerning the distribution of education in favour of children from worker or peasant families, while discriminating against those from bourgeois or professional family background. According to Simkus and Andorka (1982), such educational policies included for example, rapidly increasing the supply of educational opportunity, especially in primary education, decreasing tuition fees for education at each level and providing scholarships or living allowances for students in higher education. Within this policy framework, socialist China also launched a series of policies in the Maoist era to promote equal distribution of education. In general, the Chinese government adopted three strategies at the time: firstly, expanding the educational system; secondly, implementing mass education programme; finally, increasing educational opportunities for children whose parents were workers or peasants, thereby increasing the proportion of these students in universities year by year (Deng and Treiman, 1997). Deng and Treiman (1997) further indicated that these policies successfully weakened the relation between family background and children's educational opportunities successfully in China. This explains, in part, the increased equality in education in China during the "first phase" of Li's (2003) classification of trends in equalizing education. But the current situation of educational equality in China is not like what it used to be before the 1970s, mainly because fees were introduced and increased rapidly year by year, while people's incomes did not keep up, especially the income of rural residents.

### **Inter-generational social mobility**

Both parents and children were invited to identify their educational attainment, from no schooling to a doctor's degree. The child in F14 completed junior secondary education but had already dropped out of school. When I interviewed him, he was helping his mother with their family business. The other four children in GC were either university or high school students when I interviewed them, so the educational levels they reported during my fieldwork could not be viewed as their final educational attainments. Specifically speaking, the child in F11, as well as the child in F12 were first year university students. At the same time, the child in F15 was in the third year of undergraduate study and the one in F12 was a first year senior high school student.

Most parents in GC had received higher education either in a university or in a college, as shown in Table 6.1. The father in F13 and the mother in F15 had finished technical secondary education and subsequently been assigned a job. In GC, the only parent who had not had tertiary education was the mother in F14. She completed senior higher education.

The situation of GC regarding the inter-generational social mobility in each of the five recruited families is much more complex than that of GA and GB. Among all the five families in GC, because the children in F11, F12, F13 and F15 were still students, inter-generational social mobility in each of these four families could not yet be determined. What is more, for these children in F11, F12, F13 and F15, I cannot determine whether they will achieve educational mobility compared to both parents. Although the children in F11 and F12 were university students and they were likely to achieve a higher educational level than their mother, they might only reach the same educational level as their father, namely a BA, if they stop there. As for the child in F15 who was about to graduate from the university, he had already achieved a higher educational level than his parents. The child in F13 was in high school when I interviewed her, so it is hard to say how much further she would go in education. F14 is unique in GC. Although the child of F14 had just finished junior secondary school, he had already obtained more education than his mother, who had not completed elementary school.

### **Summary**

Parents and children recruited for GC had undergone a series of dramatic changes around higher education in China. Most significantly, a rapid and large-scale expansion in higher education occurred since 1999. Hence, Chinese higher education became “mass higher education”. Since 1997, a tuition-payment system was applied to all Chinese HEIs, which meant that higher education was no longer free for any students. Thus, affordability has become a harsh reality for people who intend to go to college, especially when the tuition fees have increased considerably. As a result, the disadvantaged position of students in rural areas has become even more significant and serious than those in urban areas, because the average family income of rural households is usually lower than that of urban households. Thus, inequalities in educational opportunities still exist in China, even though the recent expansion in higher education has substantially increased the opportunity for Chinese people as a whole to receive higher education.

### **Parental Educational Expectations for Their Children**

The same as the parents recruited for GB, when parents of GC were invited to talk about their educational expectations for their child, except for the mother of F14, they gave me specific educational levels that they hoped their child could achieve. In this section, I will firstly list in Table 6.2 the level of parental educational expectations (LEX) for each of the

five families of GC, and then I will draw on parents' accounts to elaborate upon their educational expectations for their children.

**The level of parental educational expectation**

Parents of GC declared the specific educational level that they expected the child to achieve during the interviews with them, so it is possible to categorize and compare their educational expectations.

Table 6.3 The level of parental educational expectation in Generation C

| Generation C | F11       | F12       | F13 | F14 | F15       |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----|-----|-----------|
| LEX          | Doctorate | Doctorate | MA  | N/A | Doctorate |

Table 6.2 shows that, parents in F11, F12 and F15 all expected their child to achieve a Doctorate, which is the highest academic degree in China. Parents of F13 expected the child to obtain a MA, which is higher than the levels achieved by both parents. So I consider that the parents in these four families all held high educational expectations for their children. The LEX of F14 is non-available (N/A) because the child had already dropped out of school when I conducted my fieldwork. So when I invited the mother to talk about her expectations about the child's education, she expressed her hopelessness for her son's future. She said that:

“What can I hope now? Since he will never go to school anymore, I cannot help but face this reality. One has to live anyhow, so what I am expecting for him now is that he can at least become independent in the future. As there is no hope for his academic achievement, I have suggested him to learn about cooking, driving or car repairs.... He has not made any effort in studying, how can we have better choices?”

I probed further to find out her attitude towards the child's studies before he dropped out of school. She said that she had been extremely supportive of her child's education. She used “the higher the better” to describe the level of education she expected the child to achieve.

Interestingly, none of the parents in GC expected their child to obtain a BA. This indicates that nowadays parents expected more than a BA for their child. This was at least partially because work-units nowadays are expecting more in terms of candidates' educational

levels. To explain, Liu (2003) said that nowadays working units will recruit undergraduate students for the jobs that used to be occupied by high school students, while for the jobs that undergraduate students can be absolutely competent, they will recruit postgraduate students instead. For instance, the Teacher's Law of China is proposed a revision about the educational qualification requirement for teachers in higher education institutions (Caijing, 2013). The current Teacher's Law stipulates that candidates for teachers in higher education institutions must have a BA or MA. But the proposed new educational qualification requirement for teachers in higher education institutions is a MA and above. It apparently illustrates the current devaluation of BA.

### **Detailed descriptions of parental educational expectation**

Table 6.2 only shows the specific educational level that the parents of each family expected their child to achieve. Additionally, parents might expect their child to enrol in a prestigious university rather than an ordinary one. Therefore, in this section, I give the empirical accounts of parents to illustrate and elaborate upon their educational expectations of their child.

#### Family 11

“My daughter is a fresher in university now. What I am hoping for her is to successfully graduate from the current university and go on to the post-graduate study. I will not push her to continue studying when she has got a Master's degree, but it will be the best if she can obtain a doctoral degree in the future.” (Mother)

“In terms of education, it has always been the higher the better! Of course I hope she can get a doctorate in the future.” (Father)

The child of F11 was expected to achieve the highest educational level possible by her parents. Different from what had happened to most of the female children in Generation B, neither parents in this family mentioned that too high a degree would impede their daughter's marriage. As a probe, I tried to find out their opinions regarding the preference for sons as a cultural value in China. Surprisingly, both sons and daughters are considered the same in the mother's accounts:

“Boys and girls are totally the same. I would have the same hope if I had a son.”

The father showed a similar attitude as the mother, but he acknowledged that he did include gender differences into consideration in terms of subject choices in university.

“... When she told me she prefers machinery manufacture as her college subject, I was not pleased because I thought that a woman is unsuited for that subject.”

If gender differences cannot be totally ignored by parents when they are making life plans for their child, at least they are now more likely to admit that educational achievements are equally important for girls and boys.

#### Family 12

“I will definitely ask him to get a doctor’s degree and I will also try my best to send him to study in America. I have already created a blue print for him, which is to obtain a doctoral degree in the USA.” (Mother)

“I always instil the idea of studying abroad and obtaining a doctoral degree in his mind....” (Father)

“When my son was a little boy, I wished him to attend Tsinghua University when he was older.” (Mother)

“As soon as he enrolled in the senior high school, I set up four universities as his goals and let him choose one from them. But you know, as a parent, I definitely expected him to attend the best one such as Tsinghua or Peking University.” (Father)

Parents in Family 12, the mother in particular, had clear expectations of the highest order for the child. They not only expected their son to obtain a doctorate, but also they hoped that he could enrol in the best universities and study abroad.

When I conducted the interview with the child, he was a freshman in Tsinghua University, which is one of the Top 2 universities in China. Students need to take the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) if they want to go to college or university. In 2010, Tsinghua University recruited 120 new students from Henan province, but there were 950,000 candidates for places that year. This implies that, the admission rate for those taking the college entrance exams was 1/7917. This figure shows the competition a student who wants to attend Tsinghua University faces. It also manifests that parents of F12 had very high educational expectation for the child.

#### Family 13

“I expect my daughter to obtain a Master’s degree. Hopefully, she can study abroad.... Considering the financial condition of my family, we absolutely can afford

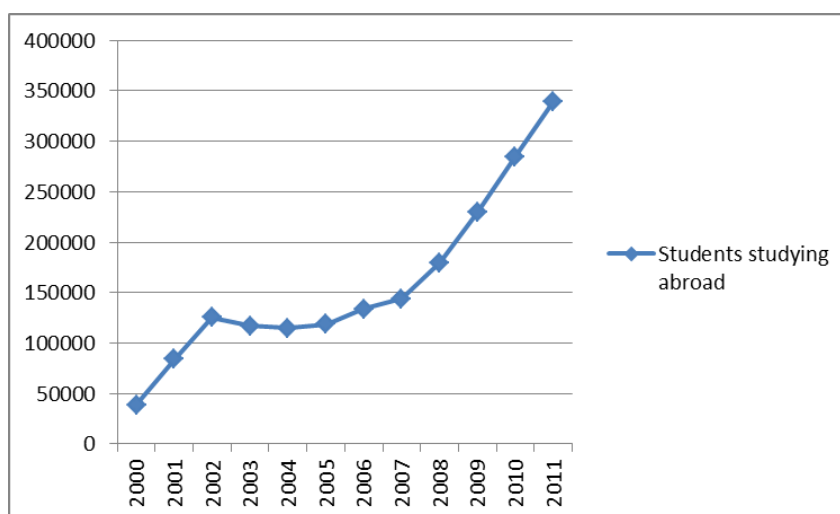
for her to study abroad. Besides, you know, we have only one child, and both I and my husband have well-paid jobs. So if we do not use the money to support my daughter's education, what else we can do with it?" (Mother)

"Even if my daughter does not work, the money I will get is sufficient to secure a very good life for her. So, if you ask me the educational level that I expect her to achieve, I will say, I do not have any specific requests. But, definitely, I will encourage her to study hard and go abroad because I want my daughter to gain a deep understanding of the meaning of life through the journey of study. Education should not be perceived as just a means to gain something, it could be the aim itself." (Father)

The child in F13 was expected to obtain a MA, and she was insistently encouraged to study abroad. Moreover, the parents of F13 referred to their family good financial condition as an important factor in determining their educational expectations for their child. In addition, education was not viewed only as a way of getting a job. In this family, attention was paid to the intrinsic value of education in itself.

There have been more and more Chinese studying abroad. Diagram 6.1 shows the growth in the numbers of students studying abroad between 2000 and 2011. As we can see, the annual growth rate has remained at over 24% since 2008. Zhang (2011) indicated that parents' growing intention to send their school-age children abroad is closely related to the severe unemployment situation for graduates, as these parents expect that their children's competitiveness in the labour market can be enhanced once they get academic qualifications from better overseas universities. This is largely due to the quality gap between Chinese universities and world-class universities in developed countries. Parents who were pursuing elite higher education for their children would not be satisfied by the Chinese model of higher education. In addition, due to the rapid development of the Chinese economic and growing family income, more Chinese families can afford to send their children to study abroad nowadays (Yang, 2007).

Figure 6.1 Number of Students Studying Abroad: 2000-2011



Source: Statistic Yearbook (2012), Chinese Bureau of Statistics.

#### Family 14

“You know, I always told him that our family could afford for him to go as far as he wanted to in respect of his education. We would even sell our blood to make money if we could not fund him. But he was just not interested in school. This annoyed me a lot. I have always been so jealous of those parents whose children are doing well in school.... Since I and my husband have been living a life by selling our physical labour, we hoped my son could receive as much education as possible and live a better life than us. So when he was still in school, I often told him ‘look at those people who can work in a comfortable office, what a wonderful life!’ In this way, I encouraged him to study hard and thus become a high-ranking official. But now, I dare not hope this anymore.” (Mother)

The above account reveals that the mother of F14 had been extremely supportive of the child’s study. Although she did not set any specific educational level for the child to reach, she expressed the views that she wished the child to receive as much education as possible. Moreover, she commented that she used to encourage the child to be a high-ranking official. These all imply that the mother had high expectations for her child. But the child disappointed his parents as he dropped out school very early because he was not interested in study and did not want to go on in school. I will explain this later.

#### Family 15

“I hope he can receive as much education as possible. A doctorate is the best in my opinion. I do not suggest him to work with just a Bachelor’s degree. If he can study abroad, I will also support him.” (Mother)

“I always encouraged him to attend good universities when he was a schoolboy.... When he was in junior high school, I still asked him to have Tsinghua or Peking University as the goal. But after he enrolled in senior high school, I did not dare to be too demanding and hope for prestigious universities, given his grades in school. Anyway, I always expected him to reach as high an educational level as possible.” (Father)

The father of F15 said that he linked his expectations for the child with the child’s school performance. When the child was not doing very well in school, the father lowered his expectations. But both he and his wife had always expected the son to achieve the highest possible educational level.

### **Summary**

Among the five families recruited for GC, parents of F11, F12 and F15 respectively all expected their children to obtain a doctoral degree while parents of F13 expected the child to get a MA. Moreover, some parents mentioned that they hoped their child would study abroad. This is a new theme for GC. I identified these parents as having high educational expectations for their children.

However, when I invited the mother of F14 to talk about her expectations about the child’s education, she expressed her hopelessness for the son’s future. This is because the child had already dropped out of school when I conducted my fieldwork. But she used the phrase “the higher the better” to describe the level of education she used to expect her child to achieve. Thus, she had had high educational expectations for the child.

### **Factors Influencing Parents’ Educational Expectations**

From the interviews with the parents in GC, I developed six themes to elaborate the factors influencing their educational expectations. The five themes are the family’s economic situation, parental educational attainment, one-child policy, children’s school performance, gender bias and the employment of children. I now examine the role played by these factors in shaping parents’ educational expectations for this cohort.

### **The family's economic situation**

The parents in F13 and F14 emphasized that they had set up their educational expectations for their children in accordance with their family's economic position. The parents in F13, for example, hoped that their only daughter could study abroad because they could afford it. Likewise, the mother in F14 mentioned that her family's economic position is better than that of other families in the same village. Thus, she thought her family was able to support the child's studies:

“Though we are not rich, the economic position of my family is better than that of other households in the same village because I have been running a small business at home and my husband also works in the city occasionally to earn money. So, I thought if my son was still in school, I would definitely support him to receive as much education as possible.”

Moreover, I also found that better family financial conditions encourage parents to perceive their children's education as an individual fulfilment, rather than a preparation for an occupation or for earn a living. For example, the father in F13 stressed that their family could afford a comfortable life for the daughter even if she did not work. But he still hoped she would study abroad because he wanted her to widen her horizons and gain more life experiences. He said:

“I encourage my daughter to attend the postgraduate education abroad not because of my demand for high educational levels or my preference for prestigious academic degrees, but only because I want her to be a person with wide knowledge and rich experiences. So it does not matter whether she will get a degree, thereby to obtain a job or to achieve something worthwhile, by studying abroad. I just hope she can have as much experience as possible.”

### **Parental educational attainment**

With intimate knowledge about the importance of education gained from life experiences, parents who had not had much education wanted their children to obtain a higher educational level than they. The father in F15, who had a college diploma, held high educational expectations for his child, a doctorate, due to the discrimination he had encountered in his work. He told me about his real experience:

“In 1996, when the company where I worked was recruiting a Production Manager, I and another Production Section Chief were the two candidates. Initially, the

leaderships of the management considered me as more eligible for the Production Manager's post in light of my working ability. But I lost the chance when they saw that I had only a college diploma while the other candidate was a dual-Bachelor."

The mother in F14, who had not finished primary education, reflected upon the hardships that she had experienced as leading her to set high educational expectations for her son:

"I have been living a tough life by selling my physical labour since I have not had much education. I hoped that my son would receive as much education as possible because I want him to live a better life than I."

### **One-child policy**

One-child policy has exerted the most dramatic influence on the nation in the last four decades (Fowler et al., 2010). I have pointed out in Chapter 2 that this policy has had various consequences, one of which is that it changed the Chinese family structure, so that the one-child-per-couple family has become the dominant paradigm in urban China. One of the implications of the one-child-per-couple family structure is that the only child can exert more power over the parents since there are no children to mitigate that power (Fowler et al., 2010). In view of the couple-centred, one-child family paradigm, Fowler et al. (2010: 348) further argued that:

"In addition, the parents, to secure the success, respect, and continuation of the family line, placed much more focus on the one child since all their hopes rested on his or her shoulders."

This has raised parents' educational expectations for their only child. For example, the father of F12 pointed out that he hoped that he could help their son make the best of his life since he is their only child:

"I always stand firm that I should do my best to educate my son so that he will become an independent, successful person. Since he is my only child and I have no chance to afford a loss, I have been under immense pressure as a father. I am so worried about any mistakes I might make in educating my son. You know what, when my son was a kid, for hundreds of times I thought that I would lose him. Now you can figure out how stressful that has been. So I and my wife always expect the best for my only son."

### **Children's school performance**

Parents' accounts also revealed that children's school performance was a vital criterion according to which they formed their educational expectations. Moreover, as a child's school performance often changed over time, parents tended to alter or modify their educational expectations accordingly.

The mother of F13, for example, reflected that when her daughter was in junior high school, she was quite demanding of prestigious universities for the daughter who was doing well at school. But the mother acknowledged that she lowered her expectations when the daughter enrolled in senior high school:

“She is now in her first year of senior high school. But I have lowered my educational expectation for her as she is not doing as well as she did in junior high school. Hence I do not persist on my previous expectations of prestigious universities for her anymore. Instead, I think I will be satisfied as long as she can get into a university, no matter whether it is a prestigious one or not.”

The same as the mother of F13, the father in F15 also mentioned that he did not dare to ask his son to enrol in Tsinghua University or Peking University after the son enrolled in the senior high school, given his poor school performance, although he insisted on sending him to the best universities before that.

In contrast, the parents of F14 and F15 still firmly deemed that the primary purpose of education was occupation or higher social status. The mother of F15, for example, had only finished senior secondary education. She was a clerical worker (53.5) while her husband was an electrician (66.7) when I interviewed them. The SES of her family measured by family income was low in the mother's opinion. Therefore, she paid great attention to the utilitarian value of education, especially making money. Talking about her expectation for the child's study, she said that:

“I encouraged my son to study hard by saying that ‘once you go to university, you can make a lot of money’”.

Likewise, the mother of F14 treated education as a way to achieve a decent job in the city and to obtain a higher social status than she. She said that:

“When he was still in school, I often told him ‘look at those people who can work in a comfortable office, what a wonderful life!’ In this way, I encouraged him to study hard and thus become a high-ranking official.”

### **Gender bias**

In GC, the children in F11 and F13 were girls. During the interview with the father in F13, I asked him whether he would be disappointed if his daughter achieved a lower social status than his. His response indicated that he cared about his daughters’ family well-being more than social attainment. He said that:

“I do not wish my daughter to be very successful in career. I think family is the most important thing for women. So I will be very selective about her husband choice.”

Likewise, the mother in F11 also indicated that social achievement was not as important for women as for men.

However, the educational levels parents in F11 and F13 expected their daughters to achieve were not low. Parents in F11 expected a doctorate while parents in F13 hoped their only daughter to achieve a MA and study abroad. One possible interpretation is that these parents’ educational expectations were more sensitive to the demand of the labour market because they wanted to ensure that their daughters could be employed in the future.

### **The employment of children**

The educational expectations of parents in GC also depended on their concern about their children’s employment. For example, the mother in F12 said that:

“I hope my son get a doctorate in abroad because as long as he had an international diploma, he can work either in China or in other countries. He will have more choice and opportunity in occupation.”

Likewise, the mother in F14 treated her child’s education as a way to achieve a decent job in the city and to obtain a higher social status. She said that:

“When he (the son) was still in school, I often told him ‘look at those people who can work in a comfortable office, what a wonderful life!’ In this way, I encouraged him to study hard and thus become a high-ranking official.”

## **Summary**

In this section, I interpreted the factors shaping parents' expectations for their children. Six themes were developed from the interviews with the parents recruited for GC. First of all, some parents set up their educational expectations in accordance with their family's economic situation. Secondly, parents' educational attainment determined the level of education they expected their children. Thirdly, due to the implementation of the one-child policy, parents of GC raised their expectations to a very high level for their only child. Additionally, children's school performance appeared to be a vital criterion, according to which parents tended to set up and then to modify their educational expectations for the child. Moreover, parents cared about their daughters' family life more than social status attainment. But it seemed that their educational expectations were not reduced by such gender bias. Finally, parents' plan for their children's employment determined their choice in education.

## **Parental Involvement in Children's Education**

In previous sections, I indicated that parents of GC held high educational expectations for their children and analysed the factors that had shaped these expectations. In this section, I investigate how parents' expectations have impacted on their children's achieving higher educational attainments or higher SES than they, as I did to Generation B (GB) in the previous chapter. But in contrast to the situation of GB, children recruited for GC were still students, in either senior high school or university, except for the child of F4 who had already dropped out of school. This meant that their educational attainments or occupational status remained uncertain as they had still not completed their education. Therefore, whether these children would achieve the higher educational levels or reach a higher social status than their parents could not be ascertained at the time the fieldwork was conducted. Nonetheless, interviews with the participants recruited for GC revealed that parents in this cohort had been actively involved in their children's education, to help them achieve better school performance, which parents perceived would help the children achieve higher educational attainments.

The association between parental involvement in children's schooling and children's school success has been universally recognized. It has been generally agreed that parental involvement is crucial to the academic success of their children. Parental involvement is claimed as a valuable element of student's educational achievement and one of the key factors predicting a student's success in school (Fan et al., 2011, Fann et al., 2009, DePlanty

et al., 2007, Fan, 2001). I developed two themes for categorizing the parental involvement in their children’s education emerged from my research data, communication and participation. As a category of parental involvement in the current study, parent-child communication was the major technique adopted by parents to transmit the value of doing well in school and to motivate children to work hard. As another category of parental involvement in this study, parental participation in their children’s study has promoted their better school performance. However, the effects of parents’ communication and participation on their child’s educational achievement were depending on the child’s openness to parental influences and parents’ parenting styles. My research data revealed that the parents in GC were more likely to be child-centred especially when their children were adolescents and simultaneously they gave their children agency in decision-making. Therefore, these children’s school performance or educational achievement was predominantly depending on their educational aspirations as shown in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4 The level of children’s educational aspiration (LEA) in Generation C

| Generation C | F11 | F12 | F13 | F14                   | F15 |
|--------------|-----|-----|-----|-----------------------|-----|
| LEA          | MA  | MA  | BA  | Dropped out of school | MA  |

Moreover, educational involvement by parents in GC also changed along with their child’s growth. I will discuss the findings according to the three different stages of a child’s educational career: pre-school period, school period and college days.

**Pre-school period**

In this study, the pre-school period represents the period of time from a child’s birth to his/her reaching school age. In Chapter 5, I indicated that Chinese parents nowadays value the early years of their child, as they become more and more aware of the fact that early year interventions are critical for the development of human capital throughout the whole life cycle. Hence, they tend to become involved in their child’s education as soon as possible. The same as the parents in GB, parents in GC also talked about their pre-school involvement in their child’s education.

**Communication**

Most frequently, parents in GC tended to convey the importance of schooling to their children by directly telling them how they valued their good performance in school, or by continuously encouraging them to achieve the expected educational levels. This type of

communication often occurred through daily conversations between parents and children. But such a communication was implemented indirectly by the father of F12 in GC. During the interview, he told me of an episode about his trip with his son to Beijing:

“When my son was four or five years old, we travelled to Beijing together. I was actually intending to let him know the two best universities in China: Tsinghua University and Peking University. So when we were there, I introduced the university to him while we were walking in the campus. I also bought some souvenirs representing the two universities for my son and put them in his bedroom when we returned home. By doing this, I wanted to show him how much I wished him to enrol in such a good university.”

Either through telling the child what they want directly or through influencing their child in what they hoped for him/her indirectly, the purpose of parents was to draw the child’s attention to schooling and to set up a goal, which was usually the same as their educational expectations, for the child.

### ***Participation***

During the pre-school period, parents of GC also actively participated in the child’s study at home, in order that they could perform better in school. For example, the mother of F12 taught her son mathematics by herself, and the son benefited from the mother’s effort in improving his school performance. According to the father’s accounts:

“My wife started to teach our son mathematics at home before he went to kindergarten. So my son had very good grades when he was in elementary school.”

Likewise, the child of F13 said that:

“Ever since I was three or four-year old, my mum began to train me on purpose. For example, she taught me to read, to write and helped me learn poems. I had already learned a lot before going to school. So when I enrolled in the elementary school, I did very well at all my courses. I remember once I asked for a two-month leave due to my illness, but I still came to be first in the class.”

The above accounts suggest that parents in F12 and F13 were both demanding and responsive. Typically, they were highly involved in their children’s study and communicate with their children actively. Thus, this makes these parents authoritative in parenting style. And the consequences of their parenting practices, i.e. reminding children about the

importance of study and teaching children at home, were positively related to children's school performance.

### **The school period**

The school period represents the time when the child is a student either in elementary school, junior secondary school or senior secondary school. The parents in GC also talked about the efforts they made at this stage to draw their children's attention to study and improve the children's academic performance. Likewise, communication and participation emerged from the data as two major themes regarding parents' involvement in their children's education.

### ***Communication***

During the school period, parents of GC, both directly and indirectly, transferred the idea that study is highly valued to their children through parent-child communication in daily life.

#### *"You must study hard"*

When the child was a school student, encouraging him/her to study hard in school ran through the parent-child communication. "You must study hard" were the most common words used by parents in GC to directly convey their encouragement for the child to work hard. In fact, the saying "you must study hard" has long been widely used by Chinese parents of any generation to encourage their children to make progress in school. This might be because Chinese parents firmly believed that "effort, hard work, and self-discipline are keys to success" (Ji and Koblinsky, 2009: 701). Actually, emphasis on effort over ability is a central Confucian concept and effort has been identified as a key cultural component of Asian success (Pearce, 2006). This could, in part, explain why Asian Americans are more likely than those from any other racial or ethnic background to value hard work and education as keys to upward social mobility (Song and Glick, 2004).

As for the children in GC, some of them were obedient to their parents and studied hard as they were expected. In contrast, the child of F14 did not obey his parents' wishes for him to study hard in school. The child of F14 was in a boarding secondary school. When we were talking about his school life during the interview, he mentioned how much his parents wished him to work hard:

"Because I was in a boarding school, I did not have many opportunities to have a chat with my parents. So every time I returned home for a holiday, they would keep nagging at me to study hard. After the holiday, at the moment when they were

seeing me off at the bus station, they would not stop reminding me to work as hard as possible until the bus revved up and roared away.”

However, the child paid little attention to study and dropped out of school during the second year of junior secondary school. During the child’s interview, I asked about his school experience. He said that:

“I was not interested in studying. Although my parents asked me to study, I made little of their words. I just wanted to have fun. Even if I was in school, I never focused on books but computer games. I simply hated studying and I did not consider education as important to me at all. I just did not want to stay in school...I wanted to give up.”

In addition, he told me of the following episode regarding his desire to drop out of school:

“One day, the school teacher caught me playing computer games again and she reported this to my parents. Obviously, my parents were very angry and disappointed. They tried to change my mind but I did not give away. Finally, my parents compromised that I could drop out of school but I should go to work.”

The above account indicates that although the parents of F14 used to expect their child to obtain as much education as possible, they compromised with their child who had little interest in school after having fulfilled parental obligations and responsibilities in their child’s education. They were disappointed by their child’s decision but they still agreed with him at last. This makes the parents in F14 child-centred, which indicates that although parents’ wishes and their child’s needs were different, they gave in the child’s needs and managed to deal with their disappointment.

However, child-centred parenting is not about being permissive in an un-structured way. They will still use their authority to guide their children’s behaviours as they think they have obligations in this regard as parents. Like the parents in F14, when they knew that the child did not want to go on with school, they tried to change his mind and asked him to stay in school, but the child rejected to do so. Then the parents gave in, although they were very unhappy with the child’s decision. As a result, the child of F14 did not achieve much in education in the end even though his parents had high educational expectations. This further demonstrates that children’s educational achievements are jointly determined by parents’ agency and children’s agency. Sometime parents hold high expectations but their

child reject to follow their wishes. And the child's agency becomes more powerful when parents tend to be child-centred.

*Responding to the child's exam results*

Along with encouraging their child to work hard, parents of GC also tended to keep track of their child's school performance. They would comment on their children's exam results, thereby letting them know that better performance was expected. The child of F12 told me his experience of being blamed by his mother. He said that:

“My mom had such a high educational expectation for me. Once I got 96/100 in a math examination and I was the first in my class as usual. But I was shocked by my mom's responses. She blamed me and asked me to stop going to school anymore, because such a result was a shame on her.”

This makes the mother in F12 an authoritarian parent due to the high demandingness and low responsiveness in interacting with the child regarding his studies. The child was very unhappy and felt he was being criticized all the time by his parents. He said that:

“I would be scolded by my mother after every exam no matter the exam result was good or bad.... Emotional support and encouragement were very rare in my family. So, for most of the time, I did not hope for any stimulation from my parents but relied on myself.”

The parents in F11 also tended to keep track of their daughter's school exams. But they were more responsive than the parents in F12 in dealing with their child's exam results. They tend to use positive and gentle reason-based strategies in disciplining and managing children's behaviours and this makes them authoritarian. For example, the father in F11 told me that:

“Basically, I would help her find out the reasons when she got bad exam results. I never criticized her. But I would encourage her whenever she was doing well at school.”

*Attending parent-teacher conference*

Besides talking to their child directly, parents also tended to indicate their first priority for schooling to their school age children indirectly. Attending parent-teacher conferences provide one instance of such parent-child communication.

Either in elementary or secondary school, parent-teacher conference is organized regularly by the school with the purpose of communicating the student's progress to the parents. As reported by the father in F12, he and his wife expressed their strong desire for the child's attention to schooling by actively attending the parent-teacher conference:

“Whenever there was a parent-teacher conference, we would attend it together in order to show our great attention regarding my son's education. There was a time when my son was in the junior high school, my wife and I attended a parent-teacher conference together as usual. However, only one parent was allowed to sit in the room due to the limited space in the classroom. So I asked my wife to sit inside while I was standing outside of the classroom, although it was in winter. By doing this, I wanted to let my son know how much we cared about his schooling. I also hoped to draw his attention to study.”

I considered attending parent-teacher conference as a positive reason-based strategies adopted by parents of F12 in disciplining their child, thus they were more like authoritative parents at this point. Nonetheless, they sometimes appeared to be authoritarian and use very harsh words to blame their child when they were unsatisfied by his exam results. This demonstrates that F12 parents' parenting style was dynamic and moving constantly between authoritarian and authoritative when the child was a school student.

*Set up a role model to the child*

In F13, to draw the child's attention to studying and to raise her educational aspiration, the mother decided to set up a role model for the child. However, the mother did not fulfil this goal by directly telling the child whom she should learn from. Instead, she bought her a book entitled *Harvard Girl Liu Yiting: a character training record* (Liu and Zhang, 2000), which was published in 2000 and became a bestseller in mainland China. The main character in this book, Liu Yiting, had matriculated from Harvard University and her parents wrote this book to discuss how they raised their daughter. After reading this book, the child of F13 was deeply encouraged by the “Harvard girl” and she made her mind on going to Harvard University. She said that:

“My mother bought me a book called Harvard Girl Liu Yiting. I read it and I liked it very much. Then I made up my mind to go to Harvard in the future, because I wanted to be the same as the girl in the book, Liu Yiting.”

This is another example of parent-child communication derived from the interviews. The daughter's account revealed that, even though her mother did not directly tell her to learn from Liu Yiting, she successfully achieved the goal of setting up Liu as the daughter's role model, so that she also raised her educational aspirations.

### ***Participation***

Parents' demands on children's school performance promoted them actively to engage in their studies by becoming involved in supporting behaviours. As for the parents in GB, one specific expression of parental involvement had to do with choosing key secondary schools for children. While for the parents of GC, they not only preferred key schools for their children, but also they tended to teach children after class and pay for children's cram class or personal tutor.

#### *Sending children to key secondary schools*

Highly demanding parents preferred to send their children to study in key secondary schools, because these schools usually possessed better academic resources. Graduates from key schools were much more likely to attend prestigious colleges than those from ordinary schools. But getting a place in any key senior middle schools through taking entrance examination was extremely competitive. For example, in 2010, there were 12,914 students in Hebi City who took the annual entrance examination for senior high school. At the same time, the planned number of new entrants for the best senior high school in Hebi City was only 200, which means the possible enrolment rate was less than 1.5%. In the presence of such severe competition, only the top-achieving students could get access to the key schools as a planned-entrant. Otherwise they would be charged a large amount of money, namely a school-choice-fee, which was nearly ten times more than three years' tuition fees at high school. In order to get a place in key schools for children who failed to meet the academic requirements, parents would rather pay the school-choice-fee. The child in F11 was a case, she said that:

“My mom insisted on sending me to study in the key secondary school of the city, although my entrance exam results were far from meeting the requirement. But she ‘bought’ a place for me at last, which cost a lot of money.”

Moreover, not satisfied with the key schools in the home city, some parents aimed at better schools in another city far away. For example, the mother of F12 expressed her consistent concern about the quality of schools:

“My husband and I always set the key schools in Zhengzhou City (the capital of Henan province, around 97.34 miles from Hebi City) as the goal for my son. I brought him to Zhengzhou to take the entrance examinations for the four best secondary schools in Henan. At last, he succeeded in getting a place in Henan Experimental Middle School, which is the top secondary school in Henan province.”

The child in F11 and F12 preferred key schools as well. So they agreed with their parents in school-choices.

#### *Teach children after class*

These school students have school-assigned homework almost every day. This homework is a complement for classroom teaching. Students are supposed to do their homework at home by themselves and it plays an important role in improving students' academic performance (Zhu, 2003). Although parents are often asked by school teachers to become involved in supporting students' homework, most of the time they will participate in these tasks actively. Parents in my study talked about the efforts they made in tutoring children with their school-assigned homework. Basically, they would help solve the questions asked by children, make sure all the homework was finished and urge their children to do their homework when they attempted to procrastinate. What is more, parents sometimes gave additional assignments to the child even if school-assigned homework was already onerous. For example, the father in F12 confessed that:

“When my son was in the elementary school, I also gave him extra homework, which usually included five maths problems, every day. I named this homework as ‘papa’s homework’. Once he had finished this homework, I would check it and correct the mistakes he had made.”

#### *Pay for children’s cram class or personal tutor*

Help with children’s homework is positively related to students’ academic achievement (Domina, 2005, Khajehpour and Ghazvini, 2011). But not every parent could actually participate in children’s schoolwork in person even if they would like to. It has been argued that parents with higher education attainment are better qualified in helping children with their homework (DePlanty et al., 2007). In my study, not only parents with low educational attainment found it hard to give support relating to the child’s homework, but also those with higher educational attainments sometimes confessed their inability to help with their children’s study. Under this situation, these parents would either send their children to

attend cram classes or hire personal tutors to teach them at home. The mother in F13 has a college diploma, but she reported her inability to help with the child's homework:

“My daughter is in her first year of senior high school now. Although I have had some senior secondary education, I cannot help with her schoolwork due to the revision of school textbooks. Sometimes when she asked me for help, I felt so shamed that I could not give any. So I decided to hire a personal tutor, who could help my daughter with her homework.... The tutor comes to my house twice a week at present. She is a first year college student who knows my daughter's textbooks very well.... She has been helpful so far.”

### **College days**

When their children were college students, the parents of GC, who hoped their children to achieve postgraduate study, did not reduce the attention they gave to their children's education during the college days. Likewise, communication and participation were identified as two themes categorizing parental involvement in their children's education.

### ***Communication***

Similar to the pre-school period and school period, parent-child communication was still the major mechanism through which parents tended to encourage the child to work hard in college. For example, in F11, the daughter was expected to get a doctoral degree. So her parents kept encouraging her to study hard and prepare well for the entrance examination for postgraduate study:

“Ever since my daughter enrolled in the university, I had been encouraging her to study hard and asked her not to be as relax as the other college students did. I also told her to pay great attention to English and mathematics, because if she would like to enrol in postgraduate study, she had to take exams in English and maths. I wanted her to make early preparations for these assessments in order that she could get a good result in the future.”

The child in F12, a student in Tsinghua University, was not quite confident with his future when I interviewed him. He said that:

“If I could have a better academic record, I would definitely go abroad; but I am not that confident at present.”

His mother had realized this situation:

“Before he went to college, he insisted on studying abroad. But now he is not as confident as before due to his unpleasant academic record in the college.”

Nonetheless, the parents did not give up their high expectations for him. They tried to encourage the child to realize these desirable goals:

“I kept on telling him that he is ought to get a doctorate abroad. I also set those people who were studying in America as role models for him to persuade him to keep going.”

### ***Participation***

From the interviews, I developed two specific involvement activities in building up the theme participation: making decision for the child and offering financial support.

#### *Making decision for the child*

After taking the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE), the next task each student must do is choosing the university or college that he/she wants to apply for. This research revealed that parental educational expectations played a decisive role in influencing children’s developmental outcomes at this stage.

The son in F12 was born in 1992. When I interviewed him, he was a freshman in Tsinghua University. In 2010, Tsinghua University recruited 120 new students in Henan province while there were 950,000 candidates in the same year in Henan. That is to say, the admission rate for those taking part in the NCEE was 1/7917. These figures suggest how difficult it was to get a place in Tsinghua University. Anyhow, the child succeeded in this fierce competition.

When the child was about to fill in the university application form after taking the NCEE, the teacher suggested that he apply to Fudan University, which could guarantee an offer, but its ranking was lower than Tsinghua University. The child felt happy with this choice since he was not as ambitious as his parents:

“My parents always expected me to go to Tsinghua University and they also believed my ability as I was doing very well in school. But I was not that ambitious. So I thought that Fudan University is also very good, although it is not as good as Tsinghua University. Plus, I did not need to bear any risk of failure if I chose Fudan University.”

His parents were not satisfied with this option. What they had been expecting for the child was not just an academic degree but a degree awarded by the best university. Finally, they decided to persuade the son to keep Tsinghua University as his goal. The mother said:

“I was not satisfied with the university that the teacher suggested that my son to apply for, although it was pretty a good one in China. I thought that the three years’ hardships my son had had in the senior secondary school and the efforts we had made for his study since he was born were not for a university like that. Our goal had always been Tsinghua or Peking University. So I told my son ‘Tsinghua is there, you should at least have a try. You will regret it if you do not grasp the chance.’”

The father also went to talk to the child and persuaded him to apply for Tsinghua University. He said that:

“We talked about twenty minutes and reached our decision on applying Tsinghua University by consensus. I also reminded him that since the decision was made by our negotiation, he should not blame me and his mother if he failed to matriculate Tsinghua University.”

This story of F12 suggests that when parental educational expectations were higher than their child’s educational aspiration, parents would motivate their child to achieve higher educational level through decision-making. However, whether children would accept their parents’ decisions made for them or stick to their own views depended on the children’s openness to parental influence and the extent to which parents desired to gain control of the decision-making process. Thus, the decision-making process was a dynamic parent-child power negotiation. In F12, the power outcome relating to who would make the final decision depended on an interaction between the parents and their child. The parents were quite clear about what they wished, but they did not force the child to obey. Rather, they accepted the child’s agency and facilitated his decision-making. Eventually, they reached a consensus through negotiation. Nonetheless, parents in F12 still intended to persuade their child to follow their advice and guidance. In other words, the negotiated decision is actually the expected result of the parents but not what the child initial wish. This makes the parents in F12 authoritative parents. They were not child-centred mainly because child-centred parents respect their child’s aspirations and they will support their child even if they do not agree.

The decision-making process in F15 was different from that of F12. This is partially because parents in these two families had different parenting styles. The child in F15 talked about how he and his parents made decisions regarding his education during his interview. He said that:

“Whenever they suggested me to do something, I would firstly think about their suggestions. They would explain why they wanted me to do what they suggested me to. From their explanations, I could get a lot of information which I did not have before, such as subject-choice in college. Based on the information they gave me, I would consider what I wanted for myself. If I felt ok to follow their suggestions, I would accept. Otherwise, I would not.”

The child’s above statement suggests that parents in F15 are inclined to be child-centred, but not permissive. Specifically, the child said that he would have space to think about his parents’ suggestions before making a decision based on the information he had got from his parents. Then he mentioned that he would accept his parents’ decision if he agreed with it; but he did not have to accept it if he did not want it. This implies that the child was given a significant level of autonomy in decision-making. Moreover, the child’s account reveals that, the parents in F15 still use their authority to guide the child’s decision-making, in other words, the parents would let the child know what they wanted for the child and they would also explain why they want this. By doing this, the parents let their child make decisions based on carefully considering the opinions they favoured, although the decision would in the end be the child’s. Thus, this is not about the Western notion of permissive parenting, which indicates parents who always avoid asserting authority or imposing restrictions (Maccoby and Martin, 1983).

#### *Offer financial support*

By 2000, 85 per cent of populated areas in China had instituted nine-year compulsory education programs (Rong Wang, 2003). Students covered by these programs are obliged to attend elementary school (6 years) and junior secondary school (3 years) for free. Senior secondary schools charge students tuition and other fees. The amount of money has always been around 100/150-200 *yuan*/person/semester in Henan province and is still affordable for most families. Therefore, interviews conducted for the present research revealed that financial issues only appeared when a child was going to attend higher educational institutions.

My study found that parents with high educational expectations were less likely to be kept back from motivating and supporting their children to achieve higher educational attainments by the family's poor economic conditions. Ambitious parents were more willing to pay the price for their children's higher education in spite of the family's actual economic condition. The theme "offer financial support" does not necessarily mean the amount of money that parents invest in children's higher education. Instead, it represents parents' strong willingness to pay the price for and the make great efforts to make money so that they can support their children's higher education. Evidence includes the fact that parents would save money specifically for their child's education. They would protect their children from carrying any financial pressure for the family and they would make every effort to make money for the child's higher education.

The child in F15 was born in 1990 and was a senior college student when I conducted the interview. His father was an electrician (66.7) and the monthly income was 2,000 *yuan* (around 200 pounds) in 2009. While his mother was a clerical worker (53.5) and she earned 1,500 *yuan* per month in 2009. So, the total annual income in F15 was 14,000<sup>18</sup> *yuan/person*. In 2009, the income status of F15 was between lower middle income households (11,243.55 *yuan/person*) and middle income households (15,399.92 *yuan/person*) (China Statistical Yearbook, 2010).

In F15, the child was expected to gain a doctorate and study abroad. Given the income status of F15, I considered that sending the child to study abroad would be too heavy a load for this family to carry if he could not get any funding from other institutions. Based on my own experiences as an international student studying in the UK, I told the mother about the amount of money she needed to send her child study abroad. After being informed the approximate expense of studying abroad, the mom was shocked at first because she realized that it was beyond her ability. But she went on saying that:

"To be honest, I have never thought about the issue of money regarding my son's education. I have already saved some money and all the money will be used for my son's higher education. Since he was in primary school, I have been telling him 'do not worry about your tuition and we have saved money for you to study abroad'."

This quote shows the mother's strong willingness to pay for her son's education. Due to the limited annual income, she had been saving money and she also invested all the money for

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<sup>18</sup> (2000+1400)\*12/3=14000.

the child's education. Moreover, even if the family's economic position was not very good, she kept encouraging the child to study abroad for the highest degree.

In F15, parents' continuous financial support in their child's schooling and their strong willingness to pay for the child's higher education was also embodied in their not encouraging the child to enter the labour-force to make money and to release the economic pressures upon the family. The mother commented that:

“Although the economic condition in my family is not very good, we feel reluctant to let my son share the financial load with us. This is because his schooling has always been the most important thing to us and it has to be the first priority.”

### **Summary**

This section is an analysis of parents' involvement in their children's education, classified under the themes of communication and participation, by dividing the child's educational career into the pre-school period, school period and college days. I indicate that parent-child communication, whether direct or indirect, was the major way parents adopted to emphasize the value of doing well in school, to motivate the child to work hard, and to build up the child's confidence in obtaining higher achievements, throughout the three stages of the child's life. Parents also actively participated in their child's education. They would teach the child at home to improve his/her school performance, they would help make decisions for the child's education, and they would also offer continuous financial support for the child's study in spite of family economic condition, especially for higher education. I also indicate that children's educational achievement was an outcome of both parental expectations and children's aspiration, especially when parents accepted their child's agency in decision-making.

## **Chapter 7 A Comparative Analysis for the Three Generations**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a comparative analysis for the three Generations in light of the findings detailed in the preceding three analysis chapters. Firstly, this chapter compares parents' educational expectations for their child across the three cohorts recruited for the present study, to develop a thorough picture showing the similarities and differences in Chinese parents' educational expectations across the three cohorts. Secondly, it compares the factors shaping parents' educational expectations for their child to indicate that what factors have impacted on parents' educational expectations across the three generations and what factors are specific to a certain generation. Thirdly, it compares parents' involvement activities in their child's education across their child's educational career. Finally, it stresses the mechanisms through which parental educational expectations impacted upon their children achieving higher educational attainments and obtaining upward inter-generational social mobility.

### **Level of parental educational expectation**

Overall, parents recruited for my research had high educational expectations for their children. But the specific educational expectations of parents within the three different Generations in this study varied highlight both similarities and differences. Table 7.1 illustrates key themes regarding parents' educational expectations for each generation and each family.

Table 7.1 Parental educational expectations for each generation and each family in this study

| Generation A          | Family 1                                    | Family 2                                    | Family 3                       | Family 4                                    | Family 5                                |
|-----------------------|---|---|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Parental Expectations | Leave the peasant life                      | Leave the peasant life                      | Leave the peasant life         | Leave the peasant life                      |   |
|                       | Get a permanent job                         | Get a permanent job                         | Get a permanent job            | Get a permanent job                         | Get a permanent job                     |
|                       | No specific request about educational level | No specific request about educational level | Get into college or university | No specific request about educational level | Get into college or university          |
| Generation B          | Family 6                                    | Family 7                                    | Family 8                       | Family 9                                    | Family 10                               |
| Parental Expectations | BA  | BA  | BA, a prestigious university   | BA  | MA                                      |
| Generation C          | Family 11                                   | Family 12                                   | Family 13                      | Family 14                                   | Family 15                               |
| Parental Expectations | Doctorate                                   | Doctorate, go to study abroad               | MA, go to study abroad         | Child dropped out of school                 | Doctorate, go as far as the child could |

Firstly, parents recruited for Generation A (GA) predominantly expected their children to leave the peasant life (only for rural households) and get a permanent job in the city. They did not have any specific goals of the final educational level to be achieved by their child, although some of them expressed their strong desire for their child to get into a college or university. Conversely, parents recruited for Generation B (GB) and Generation C (GC) had definite educational levels or academic degrees that they expected their children to obtain. For GB, the educational level expected by parents for their children was predominantly a BA. For GC, parents overwhelmingly expected their child to obtain either a MA or a doctorate. Some of them also wished that their children would study abroad.

Although the specific levels of parents' educational expectations for their children varied along with the socio-historical changes throughout contemporary China, the extent to which parents of each generation valued education did not change. My research data revealed that parents of the three Generations consistently considered education as the most crucial factor that would assist their children in achieving a successful life and a higher social status than they. Parents who were peasants, especially those recruited for GA, perceived education as the only route for their children to move from rural areas to cities

and live a much more secure life. This finding is similar to previous research which has suggested that a central goal for most parents in China's rural areas is to have their children attend higher education so as to break away from agricultural life (Hawkins, 1992). To a great extent this notion has to do with the fact that education is almost the only means of social mobility especially for rural people in China (Cheng, 1994). Moreover, the importance these parents attached to education was not altered during the Cultural Revolution, when the prevailing attitude in society was "study is useless" and educated people were severely attacked by political rebels. In face of the substantial increase of the rate of return to schooling in the 1990s along with the development of the knowledge economy in China, parents of GB valued education, especially higher education, in view of its role in securing a higher social status for their children. They believed that the higher their children's educational levels were the more prestigious jobs they would get. The decisive role of higher education in securing a higher social status for a person reduced from the late 1990s due to the large and rapid expansion in higher education. It appeared that some college or university students could not find a job immediately after graduation. Some parents in GB and GC had already noticed this phenomenon. However, they did not reduce the importance they attached to their children's education. In contrast, they enhanced the educational levels that they expected to their children to achieve and ensure that they became competitive in the labour market.

Another theme that never changed across the three Generations was that parents always expected the best for their children. Parents who were peasants firmly wanted their children to leave the rural areas and move into the city. Parents who had failed to get a higher education themselves wanted their children to be enrolled in colleges or universities. Parents who had already obtained an academic degree expected even higher educational levels for their children. Most significantly, mothers who used to be struggling to adapt to the political changes or gender discriminations against women firmly and unhesitatingly had made great efforts to make sure that their daughters were not going to be in the same position as they. Theoretically, this indicates that parents tended to incorporate their own aspirations and especially those unfulfilled into the expectations they have for their children (Seginer, 1983). Studies in the West have come up with similar results. For example, Newson and Newson (2012) reported that lower-class parents offered themselves to their children as a model to be avoided and they wanted their children to go as far as possible in education or occupation.

It is worth noting that parents' educational expectations and their children's educational aspirations were not always the same, especially in GB and GC. The educational levels children in GB aspired to achieve were mostly higher than what their parents expected them to obtain; while, the educational aspirations of children in GC were not as high as their parents' educational expectations. This might be because students in contemporary China were more sensitive than their parents to the changing effects of an academic degree upon occupational attainment, due to their wide access to the mass media from which they can gain a lot of related information. They were less likely than their parents to accept that education is always "the higher the better". For example, the child in Family 15, GC, was expected to get a doctoral degree. But he did not agree with his parents. He said that:

"I do not have the same opinion with my parents. They always encourage me to get a doctorate or even reach a post-doctoral position. But I think if I do not want an academic work, a research degree will be unnecessary for me. An MA is quite enough in my point of view."

### **Factors shaping parents' educational expectations**

Among the three Generations, there are similarities and differences within the factors influencing parents' educational expectations for their children. In general, five factors were identified as having shaped parents' educational expectations in my study. But the mechanisms of the five factors in influencing parents' choice of education for their children were slightly different from each cohort. I will discuss them below.

#### **Rural-urban divide**

This theme only applied to rural households. Parents firmly hoped that their children could leave rural areas. Rural parents' strong desire for urban life was mainly caused by the significant rural-urban divide.

During the Maoist era, peasants worked collectively for their production teams. Their major income source was from production teams and the amount of income was limited in comparison with the physical and mental oppression they suffered by working on the farm. They lived a difficult life. But the life in urban areas was the opposite during that time. Urban workers got a regular salary from their work-units which were owned and run by the state. The state government also routinely provided urban workers with permanent employment, living allowance and welfares. These entitlements made the life of urban

residents good and secure. But all these entitlements were not available to rural residents. Thus, parents in rural areas expected their children to be an urban worker, so that they would live a much better life than they.

Rural reforms introduced from 1978 abandoned the collectivized agriculture and dismantled rural communes. Farmers got private land to work on and they were allowed to sell agricultural products freely through the market. Moreover, they were not restricted to villages doing farm work. All in all, the quality of life for the great majority of rural residents has improved significantly since 1978. The government has also promoted the social security in rural areas during the last ten years. However, modern China has witnessed an enlarged rural-urban income gap since 1998. Plus, the household registration system (*hukou*) has consistently denied rural residents the same opportunities and welfare services as urban residents. Thus, the extent to which rural parents expect their children to leave the agricultural life and get a job in urban areas has not reduced along with the economic and social reforms implemented in rural areas and China in a broader context during the post-reform era. Parents in GB and GC who were peasants still complained about the insecurity and hardships in agricultural life, and expressed their strong desire that their children would leave the countryside.

### **The family's economic condition**

Among the three Generations, parents' expectations for their children's education were shaped by their own wealth. The overall interrelation was that parents with more wealth would be more likely to expect their children to obtain higher educational levels. The extent to which parents could afford for their children's educational costs such as tuition fees and living expenditures determined their educational expectations. However, the term of costs that parents in different Generations worried about the most were different. For GA, parents were concerned about the living expenditures for their children's education the most since the state government in the Maoist era formulated low schooling costs and free higher education with a maintenance grant (Guan, 2000). That is to say, as long as parents could provide their children with sufficient food and clothing when they were in school, they could support their children's studies. In contrast, the educational expectations of parents in GB and GC depended on whether they could afford the tuition fees in higher education, as free higher education had disappeared from China from 1997. For the parents recruited for GC in particular, they would firstly consider their family economic situation when formulating their educational expectations for their child,

because they could not ignore the increasingly high tuition fees charged by colleges or universities.

### **Parental educational attainment**

Research findings suggested that, across the three Generations, parents' expectations for their children's education depended on their own educational attainment. Parents tended to set their own educational attainments as a minimum standard and asked their children to obtain higher educational levels than they. Thus, parents' higher educational attainment predicted their higher educational expectations. Parents who did not have much educational experience hoped that their children could have all the education that they missed because they saw their children as a continuation of their life, thus they set high educational expectations for their children. For example, the mother in F14 had not completed primary education but she expected his son to get as much education as possible. This was because she did not want her son to be like her. She expected her son to leave rural area. These parents' desire for their children's high educational achievement became stronger if they experienced setbacks or discrimination in life due to their lack of education.

### **Gender bias**

An interesting result of my study was that none of the parents in GA mentioned gender as a factor influencing their educational expectations. They emphasized that they had the same expectations for daughters and sons. For example, the mother of F4 in GA strove for an educational opportunity for her daughter against the government and family authorities. Also, the mother in F2 said that they would support all their children's education. This might be because those mothers had been denied access to education when they were children due to gender bias against girls inherited from traditional cultural values. Thus, they wanted to make sure that their own daughters were not going to be in the same position. Take the mother of F2 in GA as an example. She was born in 1940 in a village. She was illiterate and had been a peasant all her life. When we were talking about her childhood during the interview, she stressed that her family did not support her and her sisters' schooling when they were school-age children:

“I have no school experience, nor do my sisters. Girls were not allowed to attend school, because parents believed that girls would be wild (over ambitious) once they became educated. You know, my grandpa even beat my mom when he heard that I had been looking forward to going to school.”

In the end, this woman did not have a chance to go to school due to severe gender discrimination against girls prevailing during her childhood. But as time passed, she realized the importance of education and also became aware of the value that education held not only for men but also for women. So, she expressed her strong willingness to support all her children's study, especially her daughter. She said that:

“When I became a mother (in the 1960s), I had already known that study is good for everyone. The situation at the time was different from the old days when girls were not allowed to go to school. So I supported the study of each child.... When my daughter made her own decision to give up school, I was so angry; her father as well.”

In contrast to the parents in GA, educational expectations of parents in GB and GC depended on the gender of their child. But these parents' gender bias did not imply that they were not supportive of girl children's education. In contrast, these parents had high educational expectations as detailed in the previous analysis chapters. Their gender bias was embodied in their worry about their daughter's marriage ability and family well-being. In GB, such parental concerns were primarily the outcomes of prevailing prejudice and discrimination against well-educated women. They thought that well-educated women were in a disadvantaged position in seeking a spouse, while success in education and career terms would increase men's worth as a potential husband. Thus, parents in GB felt reluctant to encourage their daughters to obtain postgraduate studies such as a doctorate as they thought that few men would like to marry women with a doctorate. In addition, some of the parents in both GB and GC emphasized that family well-being was the most important thing for women. And they believed that if women were too successful in education or in their careers, they would have to undergo the work-family conflict. Thus, these parents were not demanding high educational levels or prestigious occupations for their daughters.

Tsui and Rich (2002) suggested that there were no gender differences related to education between single-girl and single-boy families in modern urban China, which was an unintended consequence of the one-child-per-family policy. They also deemed that girls were better off living in one-child families in the big cities of modern China. Likewise, Fong (2002) argued that those singleton daughters, mostly in urban areas, were able to enjoy the same support as sons from their parents, because they did not have brothers to compete with for parental investment.

However, bias against daughters expressed by parents in GB and GC reflected the continuation of a traditional patriarchal Confucian legacy. In spite of the overall increased level of parental expectations between the three Generations in my study, I found that parents nowadays still hold lower educational expectations for girls than for boys, regardless of whether the girl is their only child or not. This finding is not absolutely against the aforementioned scholars who have argued that the one-child policy has reduced parents' educational gender bias. As in my study, most of the parents recruited for GB and GC expressed extremely high educational expectations for their daughters, including obtaining a doctorate or studying abroad. Such high parental educational expectations for daughters could, in part, reflect the enhanced status of women in modern China. This implies that gender bias among Chinese parents to daughters acquiring a good education has weakened recently but not disappeared, even in one-child urban families when it might impact upon their marriage chances.

### **The employment of children**

Parents paid great attention to their children's education mainly because of the instrumental value of education in employment. However, along with the economic system's transformation, changes in the employment system and expansion in higher education, parents in each Generation came to see the role of education in occupational attainment differently.

When the unified job-assignment system became operative in China, students who graduated from technical secondary schools, colleges or universities would be assigned a job by the state directly. Graduates did not need to worry about being unemployed. But they did not have many free choices in their occupations either. Under this situation, parents in GA almost firmly believed that once their children got into tertiary education, they would definitely get a permanent job. Especially for the rural parents recruited for GA, getting a permanent job in the city appeared to be their primary motivation to support children's studies.

Parents in GB and GC bore their children after the economic reforms in China. They acknowledged the development of a knowledge economy; they noticed the increased return to formal schooling; they realized the superior status of workers graduating from prestigious universities in the labour market; and they also witnessed the recent degree inflation. The same as parents in GA, parents in GB and GC also considered that the primary goal of education was to get a job and achieve a better life. Parents in GB increased their

educational expectations in face of the grim employment situation, because they wanted their children to be more competitive in job hunting.

In short, the research results of my study revealed that the employment of children continuously shaped parents' educational expectations across the three Generations. Parents set up their educational expectations in accordance with the employment system. They increased their educational expectations in light of the need in the labour market. Their attention to education did not reduce along with the degree inflation in the current society as they firmly believed that the job market in China requires a higher education degree to find any decent-paying job.

### **The impact of parental educational expectations in children's educational achievements**

The findings detailed in the three preceding analysis chapters for the three cohorts recruited for my study indicated that the effects of parents' educational expectations on children's educational achievements were mainly transmitted through parental involvement in their children's studies. Looking at the involvement of the parents in their children's education, I found two themes from the empirical data. One was communication and the other one was participation. Generally speaking, communication refers to parents talking to their children to let them know the value of education, the importance of studying and what parents expected them to achieve. Through communication, parents hoped to draw their children's attention to formal schooling or raise their educational aspirations. Participation refers to parents' practical supporting behaviours conducted to promote children's better school performance and higher educational achievements. Both communication and participation aimed to realize parents' educational expectations for their children.

My close examination of parents' involvement in their children's studies revealed that, the academic supporting behaviours of parents in GC were much more comprehensive and concrete than those undertaken by parents in GA. This means that, the elements comprising the themes of participation and communication were more varied in GC than in GA. GB was in between of GA and GC. GB parents' involvement in their children's education was more comprehensive than GA but less than GC. It demonstrated that parents' supporting activities regarding their children's education changed between the three cohorts. Moreover, my research results indicated that how parents involved in their children's studies were depending on their capacities. Provided that parents had the same

educational expectations, their academic supporting behaviours and the decisions they made for their children's education were altered by their own education and economic resources.

Additionally, I found that the effects of parents' involvement upon children's school performance and educational achievements were influenced by the extent to which children could exercise agency at the personal level. By agency, I define it by drawing on the work of Dominelli and Gollins (1997), who indicate that agency as practice is about making choices and taking purposive action to realize these choices.

### **Parental involvement in children's studies**

Comparing parents in GB, GC and GA in terms of their involvement in their children's studies revealed a significant gap between urban and rural households in terms of the educational support parents could provide to their children in GA. F5 is the only urban household recruited to GA. The major academic performance supporting behaviours the parents in F5 had undertaken were creating an appropriate study environment for their child, teaching their child at home<sup>19</sup> and making decisions for the child. However, no parent in the other four rural households reported that they had taught their children at home as did those in F5. My data demonstrated that the absence of this type of support in rural households was basically because these rural parents had low educational levels themselves and lacked time due to the onerous farm work they had to do. Instead, the primary technique used by rural parents to help their children's studies was communication. They constantly asked their children to study hard and told them that education led to a better life.

In both GB and GC, parents indicated that their educational involvement varied according to the stage in their child's educational career divided into pre-school period, school period and college days. But parents in GA did not. The same as the parents in GA, parents in GB and GC often asked their children to study hard and told them the importance of schooling directly through parent-child communication in daily life. But parents in GB and GC also used other techniques to realize these goals. The specific technique used by parents in GB was responding to children's exam results to let their children know what parents expected them to achieve in school. For the parents in GC, the specific communication techniques they used were travelling with children to the universities they dreamed of, responding to

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<sup>19</sup> It is also worth noting that the reason why the parents in F5 educated their child at home was to compensate the absence of formal schooling in school resulted by the Cultural Revolution.

children's exam results, attending parent-teacher conferences and setting up role models for their child. The communication techniques employed by parents in GC were more comprehensive than those used by parents in GB and GA.

Parents in GB and GC also actively participated in their children's education. Before their children reached school age, parents in both GB and GC taught their children at home by themselves. During the school period, parents in GB and GC also made efforts to send their children to key secondary schools. In my opinion, one of the reasons why parents recruited to GA did not express their preferences for key schools might be that school choice was not made available to parents until the early 1990s (Tsang, 2003), making the political context also important in this regard for them. The egalitarian ideal was strong during that time and the state government attempted to remove educational differences due to school type which was thought to be related to the socio-economic background of parents. But in recent years, the government became willing to allow more parental choice in the school, given that the quality gap between key schools and regular schools appeared to become significant. It represented a clear break with past educational policy and ideology (Tsang, 2003). As revealed by my data, this quality gap was a contributing factor to the parents in GB and GC demanding attendance at key secondary schools for their children.

In addition to sending their children to key secondary schools, parents in GC also tutored their children with school-assigned homework. However, the same as the rural parents in GA, some parents in GC also found it hard to teach their children at home or help with children's studies. But different from GA, GC parents would either send their children to attend cram classes or hire personal tutors to teach them at home. Basically, cram schooling helps students gain entry to a better school by improving their abilities in taking tests on academic subjects. Cram schooling has been popular in many countries around the world, but has been particularly widespread in Asian countries, such as Taiwan, Japan, Korea (Liu, 2012). In China, sending school students to cram classes or hiring personal tutors for them has become more and more prevalent during the last decade along with the increasing competition in school entrance examinations and parents' increasingly high expectations for their children (Jin, 2010). However, since cram schooling cause a charge, the opportunity of cram school participation might reflect specific patterns of social stratification and income levels. Cao and Zhang (2011) have noted the effects of family economic position on students' cram school participation. They indicate that, to a certain extent, children from families of lower social status are excluded from attending cram

schooling. In addition, I think there is also a rural-urban divide in the supply of cram schooling, because from what I have noticed as an insider of the research places, almost all the cram schools, especially good quality cram schools, are located in cities. As a result, students in rural households might be disadvantaged in accessing high quality cram school. For example, the mother in F4, GC, confessed her and her husband's lack of ability to help with their child's studies, but they did not consider sending the child to cram schools. Thus, for children in GC, it is possible that the socially stratified opportunity of cram school participation may have limited the positive effects of high parental expectations on children's educational achievement since it has been demonstrated that attending cram schools has significant positive effects on students' school performance (e.g. Liu, 2012). In contrast, none of the children in GA were advantaged in achieving good school performance by attending cram schools because cram schooling was very rare during that time.

Another important type of parental involvement derived from all the three Generations was making decisions about their children's education. My data revealed that parental choices in children's education were to a large extent determined by parents' educational expectations. Parents' educational expectations influenced their children's educational achievements by making decisions for them.

### **Children's agency**

In the above section, I discussed the effects of parental involvement in children's education on their educational achievements with the agency of parents as my focal point. Indeed, parents' academic supporting activities and the decisions they made improved their children's school performance and educational achievements. However, my research findings illustrated that the extent to which children could exercise their own agency also influenced their educational achievements.

First of all, children with high educational aspirations were able to perform well in school in spite of the lack of parental involvement, because these children were more conscientious in their studies. In contrast, students who were less committed to education tended to be more reluctant to study hard and make progress in education, even though their parents had high educational expectations and tried hard to help with their studies. Moreover, parents were more likely to reduce their interventions in children's education if their children were more conscientious in studies. In contrast, parents might exert more

psychological and behavioural control if their children did not pay enough attention to education as they expected them to.

Children's agency was also embodied in the decision-making process regarding their education within family. Traditionally, parents have a dominant position in decision-making within the family, because children tend to be economically and emotionally dependent on their parents especially when they are young and their particular needs and wishes are usually subordinated by an "adultist" power hierarchy (Dominelli, 1989). Also, Chinese Confucian filial piety justifies absolute parental authority over children and it demands that children to unconditionally obey their parents. However, the decision-making process was not always dominated by parents and the children were not completely powerless in my study. This meant that parent-child power relationships were not operating within a "zero-sum" paradigm (Parsons, 1957) in which one party holds power at the expense of the other. In contrast, it was a process of negotiation and changing constantly. Children could also play as an active part in the decision-making process if their parent-child relation had a quality to place the parents in conditions which allow the children space to assert their own agenda.

Moreover, my data suggests that the nature and consequence of parent-child interactions in regards to children's educational achievements are influenced by parenting styles, i.e. authoritarian parenting, authoritative parenting and child-centred parenting. Nonetheless, my research indicates that it is problematic to say which parenting style is the best to enable children to succeed educationally. Although authoritarian parenting has been found to be predictive of poor school achievement for some children, my study has provided several cases across the three Generations which indicate that it is sometimes necessary for parents to be demanding and controlling especially when their child is not self-controlled or is too young to make decisions independently. Nevertheless, the parents in my study indicate that physical chastisement of children is not necessary in obtaining obedience if issues are negotiated. The authoritarian parenting style becomes even more significant when young children have little interest in study, because parents should lead their children to the "right way", the way which will enable these children achieve their fullest potential in the educational system. For instance, parents in F2 and F14 of my study did not insist on their request when their children wanted to drop out of school; as a result, their children failed to obtain higher education, nor did they achieve upward social mobility

in the end. This is probably why Chinese children of authoritarian families perform quite well in school (Chao, 1994).

Authoritative parenting was associated with the most success according to extant studies either in Western society or in Chinese context. An in-depth study of the 15 sampled families in my research revealed that Chinese parents were becoming more and more authoritative in parenting rather than authoritarian. Specifically, parents of the younger generation were more likely than the older generation to acknowledge that their child was an independent individual who should be responsible for his/her own life. Although they still had clear expectations and set boundaries to their children's behaviours, they were more likely to have open-communication with their children and they increasingly tend to appreciate parent-child negotiation. However, due to the small sample size and the qualitative nature of the research design, I cannot argue that authoritative parenting style is the best one to enable children to succeed educationally. But my research findings could serve as the basis for a large-scale study that attempts to examine the situation in China more generally.

### **The role of parental educational expectation in children's relative social mobility**

My research findings revealed that the role of parental educational expectations in children's social status was realized primarily through its effects on children's educational achievements. But the relation between the two does not always follow the pattern of higher parental expectations predicting higher educational achievements for children. Regardless of the agency of the children, whether or not parents had adequate resources and the knowledge to put their expectations into practice could impact on their ability to realize their children's anticipated educational achievements. This implied that family affluence and disadvantage could potentially influence children's educational attainment in spite of parents' high educational expectations for them.

I found that the role of parents' adequate resources and knowledge in promoting children's educational achievement was more important in GB and GC than in GA. Primarily, this was because the educational costs in GA were comparatively lower than those in GB and GC. Thus, a family's poor economic situation would be less likely to impede an individual's access to education in GA. Conversely, the findings detailed in the previous three chapters indicate that the types of academic supporting behaviours undertaken by parents of GB and GC were all more or less associated with the family's economic position, because such

activities could not be implemented without adequate economic resources, especially money. For example, to send children to key secondary schools, parents sometimes had to pay a large amount for school-choice-fee. Cram classes or personal tutors could not be obtained without money. Significantly, students have been unable to attend higher education without parental financial support since 1997, when the charge of tuition fees to enrol in higher education was implemented. As a result, even though parents held high educational expectations for their child, they might not be able to engage in sufficient or appropriate academic support activities. Given the recent large and widening income gap, particularly the rural-urban income gap (Sicular et al., 2007, Chang, 2002), the achievements between children from advantaged or disadvantaged groups may widen. Even high parental educational expectations cannot successfully narrow this gap. Thus, I conclude that the role of high parental educational expectations in children's relative social mobility was equally important for all, but they faced serious economic barrier in being realised for GC and GB.

Moreover, my data revealed that, GA children's higher educational achievements brought them a much higher social status than their parents. And due to the state-controlled unified job-assignment system, the first job children in GA obtained almost had no relation with their parents' *guanxi* networks. They were automatically assigned a job by the state government after graduation. *Guanxi* network represents the relationships that an individual maintains in social networks (Knight and Yueh, 2008). Bian (1994a) indicates that when direct state assignments were more heavily used in assigning jobs, there were fewer people who used *guanxi* to find jobs. But for the children in GB and GC, academic degrees only provided them with a qualification for entering the labour market. This meant that they had to compete with other graduates for working opportunities based on their resources. Thus, there was a growing proportion of job seekers who relied on *guanxi* networks to secure employment opportunities in the emerging labour market in which a significant proportion of people find jobs through individual application (Huang, 2008, Bian, 2002b). As a result, the influence of family's social status on a student's employment is becoming increasingly significant. In recent years, many scholars have indicated that, for the students with the same educational levels, those who had few social resources due to their family's lower social status have been disadvantaged in accessing work opportunities and prestigious jobs (Wen, 2005a, Zheng, 2004).

The competition for jobs is becoming more severe for the children in GC due to the increasing number of college graduates. The rapid and large-scale expansion in higher education from 1990s considerably increased the number of workers with tertiary education. For example, male labour-force with the tertiary education increased from just over 10% in 1988 to 40% by 2009 (Meng et al., 2012). As more and more job seekers with higher educational qualifications are entering the labour-force, fresh graduates from higher education institutions have found it more difficult to get jobs with good terms and conditions, compared with those who entered the labour market earlier (Li et al., 2008). And the employment situation of university graduates is becoming worse and worse. Huang (2007) indicates that from 2000 to 2005, the real employment rate (excluding those who applied for further education or went to abroad after completing undergraduate study) of university graduates was around 50%-70%, which shows a decreasing trend in graduate employment overall. The decline became significant after 2003. By 2009, the Employment Report of Chinese Higher Education Graduates (MyCOS Institute, 2009) shows that, the half-year-later employment rate of higher education graduates which only included graduates from universities and colleges with specialized courses, was about 86% in 2008, indicating a decline of 2% compared to 2007. Even though, the 2010 Employment Report of Chinese Higher Education Graduates (MyCOS Institute, 2010) illustrates that the half-year-later employment rate of university graduates which only included graduates from universities and colleges with specialized courses in 2009 increased by 1% compared to 2008, it was still 0.9% lower than that of 2007. Nonetheless, in 2009, the percentage of university graduates who applied for postgraduate education either in China or abroad was 0.8% higher than 2008. As for university graduates in particular, the 2012 Employment Report of Chinese Higher Education Graduates (MyCOS Institute, 2012) demonstrates that, the half-year-later employment rate of this group declined by 0.4% in 2011 compared to 2010.

Some of the parents in GC had already realized that soft-skills and *guanxi* networks had become very important in job hunting. They commented that academic degree was absolutely necessary for a person to get a job, but a high educational level could not ensure a more prestigious occupation or a higher social status as before.

Based on the above discussion, I want to highlight that the role of parental educational expectation in children's relative social mobility is mediated by the specific social and economic factors and contexts that determining individuals' positioning in society.

However, as most of the recruited children to GB and GC were still students, it is hard for me to precisely indicate how their status attainments changed compared to the children in GA.

## **Summary**

This chapter has presented a comparative analysis for the research findings based on the preceding three analysis chapters. Firstly, it reveals that parental educational expectations have increased generation by generation. Secondly, the research results suggest that rural-urban divide, the family's economic situation, parental education and the employment of children have consistently shaped parents' expectations for their children in contemporary China. Gender bias influenced the expectations of parents in GB and GC. But none of the parents in GA mentioned gender as a factor influencing their educational expectations. Thirdly, parental involvement in children's education was different among the three cohorts. Academic supporting behaviours of parents in GC were much more comprehensive and concrete than those undertaken by parents in GA. GB parents' involvement in their children's education was more comprehensive than GA but less than GC. Additionally, the research findings suggest that the impact of high parental educational expectation in children's social mobility is mediated by the changing social-institutional contexts.

## **Chapter 8 Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

This final chapter aims to consolidate findings and discussions from the previous chapters, stress the original contribution of this study and offer insights that can support the design/development of future research, and to identify the limitations of the study. In concluding this chapter, some remarks in association with the study's implications for policy and practice are illustrated.

### **Major research findings of this study**

In this study, life-history interview techniques based on narrative research approaches were employed to study 42 participants who were recruited from Hebi city, Henan province, China, through a combination of purposive and network sampling methods, in order to find out the answers to the research questions which were:

1. What educational expectations Chinese parents held for their children?
2. What were the factors influenced the construction of parental expectations for their children's education?
3. How parental educational expectations influenced children's educational achievements?
4. What was the mechanism of parental educational expectations in children's social mobility?

I conclude with overall comments in answering these questions below. However, this research is primarily exploratory and oriented to adapting existing theories based on Chinese context. Therefore, I maintain that it is beyond the scope of the current thesis to comment upon the relevance of these research findings beyond the small sample studied.

### **Question 1: What educational expectations Chinese parents held for their children?**

Overall, all the parents in my research were identified as having high educational expectations. Such results support the findings of other researchers such as Francis and Archer (2005) who have clearly demonstrated that the Chinese value for education is exceptionally high. Moreover, findings from my study suggest that parents' educational expectations have increased gradually along with the social and economic development as well as the building of the knowledge economy in modern China. However, rural parents' desire for their children to leave the countryside and have a better life in cities was

consistent. This at least partially implied that China's economic reforms started in about 1978 and its present economic boom did not fundamentally change the context of inequality under China's rural-urban divide. In other words, life in the countryside was tough and it continues to be tough and less developed than the urban areas. Actually, China's rural-urban divide is largely embodied in the household registration (or *hukou*) system, which continues to play a key role in determining access to social benefits and entitlements to state resources (Fu and Ren, 2010). Thus, there is no wonder that parents in rural areas always want their children to have a better life elsewhere.

However, during the post-Maoist China, it is becoming increasingly challenging for people of rural origins to become urban residents or to have authorised urban *hukou* status. On the one hand, Xiaogang Wu and J. Donald Treiman (2007) indicated that although there were some opportunities for students from rural origins to acquire non-agricultural *hukou* status through tertiary education, those chances were predominantly obtained by the very few best and brightest people among the whole rural population. In spite of the limited chances, rural parents in my study firmly believed that tertiary education was almost the only means for their children to leave the peasant life. Thus, I considered that they had high expectations for their children. On the other hand, individuals with agricultural *hukou* status are in an inferior position in recent Chinese labour market. Since the unified-employment system entirely disappeared from China during the late 1990s, higher education students are no longer able to be assigned a job in the city and given an urban *hukou* automatically after graduation as before. In the current labour market, non-agricultural *hukou* status gave people easier access to more prestigious employment positions such as jobs in state-owned sectors or "white-collar" occupations (Guo and Iredale, 2004). This meant that agricultural *hukou* status has a negative effect on labour-market return to education (Fu and Ren, 2010). It is also noteworthy that there are more and more opportunities recently for people of rural origins to migrate into the city and work there. Those migrant workers with agricultural *hukou* status in urban areas are called "rural-migrant workers" or "peasant-workers". For those who cannot manage to get into tertiary schools, migrant work is widely perceived the best or perhaps the only option available to rural people wishing to improve peasant households' wellbeing (Croll and Huang, 1997). However, peasant-workers in urban cities in China have experienced marginalisation regarding employment and working conditions, social security and medical benefits, education, housing and discrimination from urban residents (Keung Wong et al., 2007). In other words, they are not entitled to the many rights and benefits enjoyed by workers with

urban *hukou*, even if they are doing similar jobs (Wang et al., 2002). All in all, the agricultural *hukou* status restricted the upward social mobility of the rural population (Wu and Treiman, 2007).

**Question 2: What were the factors influenced the construction of parental expectations for their children's education?**

My study suggests that parents' construction of expectations for their children's education is a process of negotiation in which cultural understandings of the role of education is coupled with individual experiences and reflections about the educational system itself. Along with such negotiation, parents also reflexively engage with their social environment in order to make sense of the changing alternatives about their children's educational and occupational attainment.

Primarily, parents in my study grounded their educational expectations for their children in social contexts. They were concerned about the rural-urban divide in life quality and security, the educational system, the employment system and the prevailing gender norms. Other factor that had profoundly influenced parents' construction of educational expectations for their children can be classified into family contexts. Specifically speaking, parents' educational expectations were shaped by their own educational level, family economic situation and concerns about girls' marriage. These findings are not different from those of studies based on Western populations (e.g., Seginer, 1983, Gill and Reynolds, 1999, Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997).

In addition, my study suggests that parents' educational expectations were not static. Rather, parents tended to change their expected educational level according to their child's school performance. This supports the research results of Entwisle and Baker (1983), who uncovered the influence of children's academic performance on parents' educational expectations for them in American society. Apart from this, a unique finding of my study was that parents would enhance the level of education that they expected their child to achieve when they became aware of the increasingly severe employment situation as they wanted to ensure the competitiveness of their child in the labour market.

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, only very few parents in my study gave explanations which were in any way connected to the value of education for its own sake or the intrinsic aspects of education, such as learning about new things to increase one's knowledge. In other words, education has not yet been widely understood as being a driver of individual development rather than purely a means of getting a job among Chinese parents, as for

example education occurs in the Danish version of the Nordic social-democratic model (Grytnes, 2011). Parents in my study predominantly valued education as a route to better jobs, higher social status and eventually live an affluent life. This implied that, theoretically, they overwhelmingly articulated the instrumental value of education. Thus, parents constantly paid close attention to the employment system and the labour market situation.

### **Question 3: How parental educational expectations influenced children's educational achievements?**

Based on the results of my study, parental expectations have positive effects on children's educational attainment. Concretely, my study suggests that effects of parental educational expectations on children's educational achievements were basically transmitted through parents' involvement in their children's education in order to make their educational expectations come true. In general, parental involvement in children's education in my study is defined as parent-child communication regarding the value of study and parental participation in their children's study, such as teaching children at home, providing help with homework, attending parent-teacher conferences, sending children to schools of better quality and making education-related decisions for children. My research results are consistent with previous studies showing that parental involvement is positively related to children's educational performance (Barnard, 2004, Fan and Chen, 2001). At higher education level, the influence of parental expectation was even more significant as revealed by my research findings. Besides the effects of parental involvement in children's education mentioned above, most importantly, parents who expected their children to attend higher education were more likely to financially support their children's higher education regardless of their low family-income or economic burdens.

In this regard, I also have stressed the significant role of children's agency in determining their educational achievement. I indicated that even though parents usually had certain expectations for them, children were not always passive recipients. Rather, they usually had their own goals in terms of education. And children's own educational aspirations could mediate the effects of parents' educational expectations in children's educational outcomes.

Moreover, the extent to which parental expectations interacted with children's aspirations was largely determined by parenting styles as revealed by my research data. Nonetheless, if children are more autonomous, they are more likely to be independent in making decisions about their education, thereby weakening the effects of their parents'

educational expectations. Conversely, if children are more dependent on parents and under their control, they are less likely to exercise their own agency but follow their parents' instructions. In these cases, the effects of parental attitudes toward their education are anticipated to increase.

Moreover, it is noteworthy to stress that the lack of parental involvement in children's education does not necessarily mean these parents are not interested in what their children's educational attainments are nor they have low expectations for their children's education. Regardless of social and political contexts, my research results indicated that the level of parental involvement in children's education was to a large extent associated with contextual factors such as family economic condition and parent's knowledge about education. In other words, the higher a parent's socio-economic status, the greater his or her advantage in procuring additional capital that could benefit the child. That is to say, if parents were unable to offer their children financial support due to poverty despite their efforts, they could not offer children advice about something they did not know, no matter how eager they wanted to actualize their educational expectations. Nonetheless, I deem that the effects of having high educational expectations in promoting children's academic achievement are still important in spite of the obstacles.

#### **Question 4: What was the mechanism of parental educational expectations in children's social mobility?**

The current study found that, in contemporary China, patterns of intergenerational social mobility achieved by children were determined profoundly by interactions between parental educational expectations, children's educational aspirations and their social, economic and political contexts in this regard. Children's educational attainments were decided by interactions between the agency of parents and the agency of children. While, children's social status was actually the outcome of the interaction between these two agencies coupled with the specific social, economic and political factors and contexts that determining an individual's social positioning in society. Thus, future research in intergenerational social mobility could engage with social and policy environment in order to make more sense of the impact of changing dynamics of social mobility and changing alternatives about educational attainment, especial for a country in continuous institutional transformation like the New China.

## **Original contributions and avenues for future studies**

Primarily, my study adds on to the literature in mainland China regarding parental educational expectations as a mechanism encouraging children's social mobility. My study found that children's educational achievements were influenced by interactions between parental educational expectations and children's own educational aspirations. This finding challenges the theoretical tenets of much research on children's educational attainment, which either focused on the effects of parental expectations or looked at the effects of children's own aspirations. These studies have ignored the extent to which parental educational expectations interact with children's educational aspirations in influencing children's educational achievements, except for those which have only indicated that students' aspirations are mediating factors in parental expectations (e.g. Seginer, 1983, Schoon and Parsons, 2002). Thus, future research might investigate the path of children's status attainment, either in China or in other countries, and pay more attention to the interaction between parents, children and their social contexts. Methodologically, I suggest using longitudinal research paradigm as an alternative to approach this issue as I have found the dynamic feature of parental expectations and parenting styles, and the changes of involvement activities engaged by parents in their children's education in different periods of children's educational career. A longitudinal study could actually be conducted to follow the children in Generation C in this study, most of whom are still either school students or university students, to see what educational and occupation achievements they will obtain in the future and how these achievements relate to their parents' expectations for them.

In addition, my study contributed to the gaps in existing Chinese studies of parental expectations by accounting for the changes of social stratification and social policy changes that have occurred in contemporary history. Thus, my study offered knowledge about how and why Chinese parents' educational expectations changed or not alongside the social and economic development of contemporary China and uncovered the rationale behind their construction. Policy makers or researchers might draw on my research results to gain an understanding of the impact of the previous policies, especially the educational and employment policies, on peoples' lives and map out what they can do in the future.

I have formulated a new model for parenting style in my thesis: these are authoritarian parenting, authoritative parenting and child-centred parenting. In this regard, my research supports the idea that, like the Western-based conceptualization of parenting styles,

authoritarian parents are demanding toward their children, authoritative parents are typically highly involved in their children's life and tend to communicate with their children actively and openly. However, I argue that Confucian filial piety is a protective factor against a permissive parenting style. I have proposed a child-centred parenting style. Moreover, I have acknowledged the negotiated nature of power relations between parents and children. Put simply, negotiated power relations implies that power needs to be theorised as a negotiated entity rather than seeing it as a static entity or a "zero-sum" phenomenon (Dominelli and Gollins, 1997). This means that, parents do not have absolute power over their children all the time. Sometimes the parent is authoritarian but the child rejects this approach to become self-determined despite this. Thus, this parent may become authoritative or eventually even child-centred as a result of the negotiated power relations between them. So, when conflicts occur between parent and child, they will have to negotiate and renegotiate to reach an agreement. According to my empirical data, such parent-child power negotiations are a continuous process. It determines the degree of child autonomy on the one hand and the degree of parental authority on the other hand. When the child has more power to achieve his/her own will than simply respond to the power of parent over the child, I would say this child has more autonomy, and vice versa. Thus, I argue that a parent's parenting style is dynamic and that it changes along a continuum, which has authoritarian parenting at one end, authoritative parenting in the middle and child-centred parenting at the other end. See Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1 The continuum of parenting styles



Another contribution of my research is that, I highlighted how my insider and outsider researcher roles in fieldwork altered access to research participants and shaped dialogue in the fieldwork process. Rather than seeing my researcher identity as either insider or outsider, I argued that I was an insider-outsider. Additionally, I argued that my researcher role was not static or fixed, but subjected to constant negotiation through interactions between me as the researcher and research participants within the research process (Cui, forthcoming).

The issue of the researcher's role as insider, outsider or insider-outsider has long been receiving substantive attention and exploration by social scientists. But few attempts have been made to subject this issue to sustained analysis in sociological studies based in a Chinese context. I myself as a Chinese researcher, through analysing my empirical experiences in the fieldwork conducted with Chinese people and by outlining my critical reflections on my researcher identity with reference to the Chinese context, have contributed to Chinese social science research in terms of qualitative research methods relating to researcher's role (Cui, forthcoming)<sup>20</sup>. The factors and situations that have shaped the outcome of my insider-outsider role are illustrated in this thesis and may enhance knowledge of the use of qualitative methods in Chinese social science studies. Also, the knowledge offered by my thesis in regard to the negotiations of my researcher identity within Chinese culture also can be drawn on by researchers from other cultural backgrounds who attempt to conduct research with Chinese people.

### **Limitations of the current study**

The thesis is limited with regards to the sample composition. Firstly, people recruited for this study were all Han Chinese. Although Han Chinese made up almost 93% (Fong and Spickard, 1994) of the whole Chinese population, it is still necessary to include parents and children from other ethnic groups in order to gain a thorough understanding of the applicability of the research findings to such groups. Secondly, there was a lack of diversity within parental educational levels and occupational status in the sample. I failed to recruit parents who had an academic degree higher than a BA and who were in a professional status or higher status in the social hierarchy. Thus, I could not find out how their educational expectations for children compared to the expectations of the parents who were in a lower educational or occupational status than they. In addition, although both rural households and urban households were covered in each of the three cohorts recruited for this study, the ratio between the two types of households was not balanced, nor was the ratio of girl children and boy children. This was mainly attributed to the recruitment of participants from people available to the researcher through network sampling techniques. Finally, similar to other life-history research, my study faced the common challenge of having a small number of participants, which made it necessary for me to avoid drawing out generalisations from such a small scale study. In response to this

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<sup>20</sup> My paper entitled *The insider-outsider role of a Chinese researcher doing fieldwork in China: An exploration of fieldwork experiences* has been submitted to the Journal of Qualitative Social Work for a consideration of publication.

challenge, I have stressed that this research is primarily exploratory and oriented to theory building. It could serve as the basis for a large-scale study that attempts to examine the situation in China more generally. Thus, I maintain that it is beyond the scope of the current thesis to comment upon the relevance of these research findings beyond the small sample studied.

In terms of the data analysis procedures and the results, the thesis is not without its flaws. First and foremost, as a researcher who is from the same cultural root and growing up in the same region as that of the research participants, my intimate cultural knowledge and personal experiences might have inevitably shaped data interpretation. But I constantly reflected on my researcher identity as an insider-outsider and its impact on how I interpreted participants' life stories and their accounts. What I learnt from this reflexive approach to data analysis was that my personal experiences and my intimate knowledge about the research participants allowed me rich resources to enhance understanding of the research question. Along with my reflective approach, the analytical process and writing up of the data also involved discussions with my supervisors and effective feedback gained from academic conferences. Another issue that must be stressed here is that, certain Chinese words, phrases, concepts and metaphors might have been translated into English inadequately, which might cause a risk of losing the meaning of some accounts stated in Chinese. I have provided as much interpretation for these accounts as possible rather than just giving simple translations. In addition, I have drawn on other academic papers to refer to their translations and interpretations of certain Chinese words or metaphors. Moreover, the negotiation with my supervisors also helped me cope with this risk.

### **Policy and practice recommendations**

The findings of this thesis illustrate that parents' educational expectations function as links between family socio-economic status (SES) and the achievement outcomes of children in the Chinese context as it does in the Western world. This suggests that factors like parental beliefs are potentially important in enhancing the educational achievements of children from disadvantaged families, thereby narrowing the achievement gap between children of families from higher SES and lower one. One major area where policy and practice might therefore help reduce educational inequalities is, to raise parental desire for their children to achieve higher educational move. In addition, since my study has proposed that children's social mobility is largely determined through the interaction between parents and children, policies and practices that helping children from poorer families to believe

that their own actions and efforts can lead to upward social move are equally important in reducing achievement gaps.

I have argued that whether or not parents had adequate resources and the knowledge to put their educational expectations into practice in order to be able to realize them largely determined their children's educational achievements. I have also noted that lower class parents often longed to know how to support their children in becoming socially mobile appropriately. Thus, I recommend that relevant policies are likely to include allocating funds towards parents and students from the poorest backgrounds and providing wide access to information about educational opportunities. Moreover, teachers should work closer with parents and provide direct teaching support to children who fall behind.

In addition, a more balanced human capital investment strategy across rural and urban regions of China is recommended given my research results. I suggest that reducing the rural-urban gap in accessing high quality education should be a prime objective for Chinese policy makers. Given that there are less key schools and poor quality educational infrastructure in rural areas, I recommend more direct subsidies from central government should be offered to poor rural areas in order to assist in equalising access to high quality education for children living in those areas.

What is more, the formulation and implementation of policy should attempt to increase educational opportunities for students who may not be able to afford the costs of higher education, such as children whose parents are peasants, unemployed, laid-off workers or rural migrant workers. These will involve the development of financing structures either by the state or higher education institutions (HEIs) that will increase access for students from lower-income families. Learning from student funding policies in England, what needs to be raised and stressed in relation to the funding system in current Chinese college is its over reliance on state government (Xue and Chen, 2012). Thus, encouraging the direct obligation and commitment of Chinese HEIs to offer bursary to low-income students rather than just depending on the state government funding becomes an important policy consideration. Private funding for education through tuition and fees is also encouraged as it can supplement government funding and make schools more financially self-sufficient.

Last, but not the least, I recommend policies targeted at improving employment opportunities for higher education graduates along with the expansion in higher education. Educational equality is also embodied in the equal outcomes of education. Students who

have obtained the same education should have equal access to employment opportunities irrespective of their family backgrounds. This is how an open society comes into being.

### **Concluding remarks**

For education, China has already made tremendous efforts to improve it, with the aim of promoting economic and social development and securing basic human rights (Rong and Shi, 2001). The latest edition of the Outline of Chinese Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) clearly indicates that promoting equality in education is one of the major priorities of government. The incumbent Prime Minister, Keqiang Li, has also emphasized and encouraged new social reforms that will promote inter-generational social mobility. He said that:

“The relative participation rate of students from rural families in HEIs is still low, so that we should increase the proportion of these students gradually, in order to make more studious children in the countryside to feel the hope (of attending universities)<sup>21</sup>.”

I hope the present research will support the design of and contribute to the development of state or local government policies that promoting equity in education and social equality in mainland China.

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<sup>21</sup> On 17<sup>th</sup> March 2013, the prime minister attended the interview after the closing session of the First Plenum of the 12<sup>th</sup> National People’s Congress. This quotation is derived from the interview and I have translated it from Chinese into English.

## Appendices

|                |   | Page |
|----------------|---|------|
| Appendix i:    | Informed Consent Form for Adults  | 250  |
| Appendix ii:   | Informed Consent Form for Juveniles   | 254  |
| Appendix iii:  | Informed Consent Form for Parents to Sign for Their<br>Children Under 18        | 257  |
| Appendix iv    | Invitation to Research Participants   | 259  |
| Appendix v:    | Interview Guide for the Researcher  | 260  |
| Appendix vi:   | Semi-structured Interview Questions for Adults<br>without Children of Their own | 264  |
| Appendix vii:  | Semi-structured Interview Questions for Adults with<br>Children of Their own    | 265  |
| Appendix viii: | Semi-structured Interview Questions for Children<br>who are Students            | 267  |
| Appendix ix:   | Research Ethics and Risk Assessment Form  | 268  |

### ***Appendix i: Informed Consent Form for Adults***

Title of Research: The role of parental educational expectations in their children's social mobility.

Investigator: Ke Cui

Before agreeing to participate in this research, it is important that you read the following explanation of this study. And ask me questions about it so that you understand the purpose of this research and how it will be conducted.

Explanation of Procedures:

This research is designed to explore the impact of parental educational expectations on children's social mobility. Parents' expectations or aspirations for their children's educational and occupational achievements are anticipated to vary according to their own educational attainments. Children's own aspirations and social mobility could be impacted by their parents' expectations. There are also various other factors which can vary these expectations. Therefore, this research aims to identify those factors in parent-child interactions that impact upon children's social mobility and social status. In order to achieve the goals of this research, five questions will be explored: (a) the processes whereby parental expectations and aspirations about their children are formed; (b) the impact of parental levels of education on their expectations about their offspring; (c) the interaction of parents' educational levels upon children's educational and occupational aspirations; (d) the processes whereby children's aspirations about education and occupation are formed; (e) the impact of expectations and aspirations on the social mobility of the younger generation.

Participation in the study involves completion of a semi-structured interview, which will last for approximately one hour. With your agreement, the interview will be audio-taped by the researcher and later transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. A copy of the transcription will be sent to you to check for accuracy. The interview will be conducted at a setting that is mutually agreeable to the participant and the researcher.

Risks and Discomforts:

There are no risks or discomforts that are anticipated from your participation in the study. However, there may be some discomfort or emotional feelings of sadness when asked

questions during the interview. I will arrange to have someone that you can talk to if this becomes the necessary.

Benefits:

The anticipated benefit of participating in this study is the opportunity to discuss feelings about family life, perceptions about education and social mobility, and concerns related to your educational or occupational experiences. Moreover, the information you provide will contribute to the development of educational policies and will improve social mobility in China.

Confidentiality:

The information gathered during this study will remain confidential. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the data. There will not be any identifying names on the tapes, and participants' names will not be available to anyone other than the researcher. The tapes will be destroyed upon the completion of the PhD studies. The information will only be used for the investigator's PhD thesis. However, the whole or part of the thesis might be published. The data will be stored in a locked cupboard or a password protected computer file to ensure that only the researcher can obtain it.

Withdraw without Prejudice:

Participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will not in any penalty. Each participant is free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without any prejudice.

Questions:

If you have any questions concerning this study, please feel free to contact the researcher.

Tel: (China contact number)

Email: ke.cui@durham.ac.uk

If you have any complaints about my conduct during this research, please contact my supervisor, Professor Lena Dominelli, by email: lena.dominelli@durham.ac.uk

I:

Before you agree to take part in this research and sign this consent form, I would like to highlight the terms. These are:

1. It is your choice whether to take part in this research and you are not obliged to take part. If you decide not to participate, there will be no negative consequences for you.
2. If you do agree to participate, you are free to change your mind and withdraw at any time, also without any negative consequences for you.
3. If you ever feel uncomfortable about any part of this research and do not wish to take part in a certain aspect of the research then you are free to withdraw from that.
4. I will record what you say throughout the research and then transcribe this. Tapes and records will always be kept in a secure, locked cupboard or a password protected computer file. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to them. They will be destroyed upon completion of the PhD studies.
5. I may present my research in reports, journal articles and presentations after it is completed. All names and identifying characteristics will be changed to maintain anonymity.

II:

Please tick box

Yes

No

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information for the study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reasons.

3. I agree to the interview being audio recorded.

4. I agree that my data gathered in this study will be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a secure place and may be used for future research.

III:

Agreement:

This agreement states that you have received a copy of this informed consent. Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study.

Signature of respondent:

Date:

Respondent name (printed):

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

If you wish to discuss this form or any part of the research at any time, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher by e-mail on: [ke.cui@durham.ac.uk](mailto:ke.cui@durham.ac.uk)

Thank you very much for your interest and help in this study. If you have any complaints about my conduct during this research, please contact my supervisor, Professor Lena Dominelli, by email: [lena.dominelli@durham.ac.uk](mailto:lena.dominelli@durham.ac.uk)

## ***Appendix ii: Informed Consent Form for Juveniles***

Hi, my name is Ke Cui and I am a postgraduate student from Durham University in the UK. Yes, I am a student just like you. I am here to do research for my thesis. This research is designed to explore the impact of parents' educational attainment on children's social mobility. I will explain it in more detail in order to let you fully understand what I am doing.

You might have found that you and your friends have different ambitions for achievement. You may also have been aware that your parents have expectations for your educational achievement or occupational attainment. Thus, my research aims to explore the interaction between your parents' expectations for you and your achievement especially in education. What I am going to do here is to find out how you have been doing with your school work, what dreams do you have for the future and what kind of job do you want to achieve when you become an adult. I want you to tell me this in an interview which will last for about one or two hours.

In addition, I want you to know that there are also some benefits for you in participating in my research. You will have the opportunity to discuss the impact of your family life, your attitudes to your parents, friends and teachers on your schooling. And the information you give me may contribute to the improvement of educational policies which may benefit you or your children in the future. I do not anticipate risks or discomforts for you. However, you may feel some discomfort or feelings of sadness when replying to some of my questions during the interview. I will arrange to have someone that you can talk to if this becomes the necessary. You may also choose to have someone stay with you during the interview.

Also, I promise you that everything you tell me will remain confidential. Only my supervisor and I will have the access to the data, your parents will not. I would like to tape record our conversation. The tapes will be destroyed at the completion of my doctoral studies. Your name or other information will not be released to anyone. Data will be kept in a locked cupboard or password protected computer file.

Participation in this study is voluntary, you will not be paid. You are absolutely free to decide whether or not to participate in this study and free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without any prejudice and no penalty will be involved for doing so. Your GPA will not be affected even if you refuse to take part in my research.

Before showing you the informed form, I have already obtained the permission of your parents for you to participate. However, this may not indicate your own choice. So I want you to think about this carefully and make your own decision.

I:

Before you agree to take part in this research and sign this consent form, I would like to highlight the terms. Please put a cross in one of the boxes for each question to indicate that you understand what the research is about and that you have no more questions about it that I need to further explain for now:

| Please tick box   | Yes                      | No                       |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I have read and understand the information for the study.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about anything in the research that I was not sure about.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that I do not have to take part although my parents have permitted me to join in this research. And I can withdraw my consent at any time.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I know that the interview will be audio taped and the records will be stored in a secure place, no one other than the researcher and her supervisor will see them. The tapes will be destroyed upon completion of the PhD studies. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. I understand that the information I provide

may be used by the researcher (Ke Cui)

after the investigation has finished but that

she will not use my name.

II:

Agreement:

This agreement states that you have received a copy of this informed consent. Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study.

Signature of respondent:

Date:

Respondent name (printed):

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

If you wish to discuss this form or any part of the research at any time, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher by e-mail on: [ke.cui@durham.ac.uk](mailto:ke.cui@durham.ac.uk)

Thank you very much for your interest and help in this study. If you have any complaints about my conduct during this research, please contact my supervisor, Professor Lena Dominelli, by email: [lena.dominelli@durham.ac.uk](mailto:lena.dominelli@durham.ac.uk)

**Appendix iii: Informed Consent Form for Parents to Sign for Their Children under 18**

I:

This form shows that you have given permission for your son/daughter to take part in this research. Please put a cross in one of the boxes for each question to confirm that you understand the following sentences:

| Please tick box  | Yes                      | No                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I understand what this research is about.<br><br>I will also ensure that my child has understood what this research entails.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about anything in the research that I was not sure about.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that my son/daughter does not have to take part and I can withdraw my permission for them to take part at any time. My child can also withdraw at any time.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I know that the interview with my son/daughter will be audio taped and the records will be stored in a secure place, no one else other than the researcher and supervisor will see them. I also understand that the tapes will be destroyed upon completion of the PhD studies. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I understand that the information provided by my son/daughter may be used by the researcher (Ke Cui)  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

after the investigation has finished but that

she will not use my son/daughter's name.

II:

Agreement:

This agreement states that you have received a copy of this informed consent. Your signature below indicates that you agree your child that may participate in this study.

Signature of respondent:

Date:

Respondent name (printed):

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

If you wish to discuss this form or any part of the research at any time, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher by e-mail on: [ke.cui@durham.ac.uk](mailto:ke.cui@durham.ac.uk)

Thank you very much for your interest and help in this study. If you have any complaints about my conduct during this research, please contact my supervisor, Professor Lena Dominelli, by email: [lena.dominelli@durham.ac.uk](mailto:lena.dominelli@durham.ac.uk)

## ***Appendix iv: Invitation to Research Participants***

Name of the investigator: Ke Cui

Address: UK, Durham University

Ustinov College

DH1 3DE

Email: ke.cui@durham.ac.uk

Mobile: (China contact number)

Project: How do parents' educational expectations impact on their children's social mobility?

My name is Ke Cui and I am a postgraduate student from Durham University in the UK. I am currently studying the role of parents' educational expectations in their children's social mobility. I have been given permission to conduct this project by the School of Applied Social Sciences, Durham University.

I am inviting you to participate in my research. Participation in this study is voluntary. If you are interested in my research topic, I will provide you with a leaflet describing the research project, a question and answer sheet giving you further information about the research, an informed consent form and the interview questions that I intend to ask if you agree to be interviewed. If you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw your consent at any time without suffering any penalty. Any information you provide will be anonymised and kept confidential. Data will be kept in a locked drawer or password protected computer file.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at the above email address or on the mobile phone number given above.

If you have any complaints about my conduct during this research project, please contact my supervisor, Professor Lena Dominelli. Her email is: lena.dominelli@durham.ac.uk

Appreciate your time very much.

Ke Cui

## ***Appendix v: Interview Guide for the Researcher***

### Interview Guide for the researcher

1. Tell me something about yourself. Such as your background, your educational path and where you worked up to now.
  - 1.1. Could you briefly discuss your educational path up to the present?
  - 1.2. What do you remember most about school? What is your best memory?
  - 1.3. Did you get further education? Why?
  - 1.4. How did you make decisions about which schools to attend?
  - 1.5. Could you briefly discuss your career until now?
  - 1.6. Have you changed your job? If yes, how many times you have changed your job?
  - 1.7. On what basis did you decide to obtain your first job? Why did you want this job?
  - 1.8. What is important to you in your work?
  - 1.9. Think back to your paid working experience, do you think your socioeconomic status has changed since you first started working? What do you think made this change or these changes happen? Do you think your children will benefit from these changes? If yes, how do you think they would be benefited?
  - 1.10. When you look back on your life, are there any moments which you would identify as turning points? What are they?
2. Tell me something about your children and your hopes and dreams for their achievements in their education and their careers.
  - 2.1. When did you decide to have your first child?
  - 2.2. How would you describe your expectations and aspirations for your child?
  - 2.3. How did you make decisions about which school your child would attend?
  - 2.4. Have you expected your child to go to college? How will you feel if your child goes to college and is successful in college? If your child fails to enter a college, what do you think you will do? How would you feel?
  - 2.5. How do you evaluate your first child's education or jobs?

- 2.6. If your child acquires a lower social status than yours, how would you feel?
- 2.7. What influences does your education have in your expectations and aspirations about your child?
- 2.8. How do you communicate your aspirations or expectations to your child?
3. Tell me something about your parents. How do you think their expectations or aspirations affect you?
- 3.1. What expectations did your father and mother have for you regarding your educational or career achievements? For example, what kind of job your parents expected you to achieve? Did they care about your school work?
- 3.2. Did your parents help you with your homework?
- 3.3. Did your parents encourage you to fulfil your dreams or just demand that you did what they wanted you to do?
- 3.4. What role did your parents have for your achieving of the educational or occupational goals?
- 3.5. Who became the person supported you most in reaching your educational/job goals?
- 3.6. Do you think your family of origin has affected your current position, either negatively or positively?
- 3.7. What is the most important thing given to you by your family with regards to your education and occupation?
- 3.8. What do you think affected your parents' expectations toward you?
- 3.9. In your family, how your father and mother make decisions about your educational and career paths? Did they have any disagreements over your development? If yes, how did they handle these conflicts?
4. Tell me your aspirations or expectations for yourself. Did you have any dreams or ambitions as a child or as an adolescent?
- 4.1. Did you have any dreams or hopes as a child or an adolescent? If yes, did your ambitions change and were they the same with or different from your parents' aspirations and expectations for you?

- 4.2. What promoted you to have these aspirations?
- 4.3. Do you feel you have achieved your goals? If yes, how do you think your hopes have been achieved? If not, why?
- 4.4. If you could go as far in school as you want, how far would you go? Considering your abilities, grades, financial resources, etc., how far do you actually expect to go in school?
- 4.5. When you think about the future, what are some of your fears or worries?
- 4.6. What do you see for your future, in 5, 15, 25 years' time?
5. Have you lived through moments of considerable social changes? How did they influence your life?
  - 5.1. What would you say was the most significant event in your life?
  - 5.2. What did you consider was important at the time when you made educational or occupational decisions?
6. When you think of 'social mobility', what comes to your mind?
  - 6.1. How would you define social mobility?
  - 6.2. What do you think are the main indicators (e.g. education, money, occupation or reputation) of social class? Are there any other indicators in your opinion?
  - 6.3. What do you think is important for your future: degree or other educational achievements, social origin, social capital, money, family connections and friendships?
  - 6.4. Do you think education can promote social mobility? If not, what do you think is/are the promoting factor/factors?
  - 6.5. Do you think you have experienced any social mobility?
7. When you think of 'educational level', what comes to your mind?
  - 7.1. What do you think is the purpose of school?
  - 7.2. What do you expect your child to learn when you sent him/her to school?
  - 7.3. What is your view of the role of education (beyond the classroom) in a person's life?

7.4. What do you think about the relationship between educational degree and occupational status is?

7.5. Do you think that if you had a higher educational qualification than you have already achieved, you might have gone further in your career?

***Appendix vi: Semi-structured Interview Questions for Adults without Children of Their own***

Part A: Biographical Information

1. Name:
2. Year of birth:
3. Are you employed? Yes No
4. Which of these categories is closest to your average income now (Chinese Yuan)?  
1) under 1000 2) 1000-2000 3) 2000-3000 4) 3000-4000 5) 4000-5000 6) above 5000
5. Your educational attainment:  
1) illiterate 2) under primary school 3) primary school 4) middle school 5) technical secondary school 6) high school 7) junior college 8) Bachelor's degree 9) Master's degree 10) PhD 11) post-doctoral degree
6. Specify your social class:  
1) national and community managers 2) managers 3) owners of private enterprises  
4) professional & technical 5) office worker 6) individual retail business  
7) service personnel 8) industrial worker 9) peasant 10) unemployed person

Part B: Interview Schedule

1. Tell me something about yourself, such as your background, your educational path and where you worked up till now.
2. Tell me something about your parents. How do you think their expectations or aspirations for you?
3. What dreams or hopes do you have? Are they the same with or different from your parents' expectations for you?
4. What do you think of the role of education in a person's life? How do you feel you have done in this regard?
5. When you think of 'social mobility', what comes to your mind? Can you define it?

***Appendix vii: Semi-structured Interview Questions for Adults with Children of Their own***

Part A: Biographical Information

1. Name:

2. Year of birth:

3. Year that you first became father/mother:

4. Are you employed? Yes No

5. Which of these categories is closest to your average income now (Chinese Yuan)?

1) under 1000 2) 1000-2000 3) 2000-3000 4) 3000-4000 5) 4000-5000 6) above 5000

6. Educational attainment:

1) illiterate 2) under primary school 3) primary school 4) middle school 5) technical secondary school 6) high school 7) junior college 8) Bachelor's degree 9) Master's degree 10) PhD 11) post-doctoral degree

7. Specify your social class:

1) national and community managers 2) managers 3) owners of private enterprises

4) professional & technical 5) office worker 6) individual retail business

7) service personnel 8) industrial worker 9) peasant 10) unemployed person

Part B: Interview Schedule

1. Tell me something about yourself, such as your background, your educational path and where you worked up till now.

2. Tell me something about your children and your hopes and dreams for their achievements in their education and their work careers.

3. Tell me something about your parents. How do you think their expectations or aspirations for you?

4. Tell me your aspirations or expectations for yourself. Did you have any dreams or ambitions as a child or adolescent?

5. Have you lived through moments of considerable social changes? How did they influence your life?

6. When you think of 'social mobility', what comes to your mind? Can you define it?

7. When you think of 'educational level', what comes to your mind? How do you feel you and your children have done in this regard?

***Appendix viii: Semi-structured Interview Questions for Children who are Students***

Part A: Biographical Information

1. Name:

2. Year of birth:

3. Your educational attainment:

1) illiterate 2) under primary school 3) primary school 4) middle school 5) technical secondary school 6) high school 7) junior college 8) Bachelor's degree 9) Master 's degree 10) PhD 11) post-doctoral degree

4. Which educational level(s) do you want to achieve?

1) illiterate 2) under primary school 3) primary school 4) middle school 5) technical secondary school 6) high school 7) junior college 8) bachelor's degree 9) master 's degree 10) PhD 11) post-doctoral degree

7. Specify which social class you want to achieve:

1) national and community managers 2) managers 3) owners of private enterprises  
4) professional & technical 5) office worker 6) individual retail business  
7) service personnel 8) industrial worker 9) peasant 10) unemployed person

Part B: Interview Schedule

1. Tell me something about your education path?

2. What do you think of the role of education in a person's life?

3. What do you remember most about your school experience?

4. Who became the person really supports you or influences you a lot?

5. Tell me something about your parents. How do you think their expectations or aspirations for you?

6. What dreams or hopes do you have? Are they the same with or different from your parents' expectations to you?

7. When you think of 'social mobility', what comes to your mind? Can you define it?

## **Appendix ix: Research Ethics and Risk Assessment Form**

University of Durham

### **School of Applied Social Sciences**

All research that involves access to human participants or to personal data with identifiable cases must be assessed for ethical issues and risks to the research participants and researcher(s).<sup>22</sup> The research ethics form starts this process and must be submitted by the principal investigator<sup>23</sup> for all such projects that staff or students of the School intend to undertake. Research that is purely literature-based does not require ethical approval.

It is your responsibility to follow an appropriate code of ethical practice, such as that of the British Sociological Association or Social Research Association<sup>24</sup>, and to acquaint yourself with safety issues by consulting an appropriate reference such as Social Research Update: Safety in Social Research<sup>25</sup> and the Code of Safety developed by the Social Research Association<sup>26</sup>. Data should be handled in a manner compliant with the Data Protection Act. Researchers undertaking studies in an NHS or social services setting must abide by the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care<sup>27</sup> and those with funding from a research council must work within the appropriate research ethics framework, for example, the ESRC Research Ethics Framework <sup>28</sup>. Useful guidance is also contained in the Code of Practice for Research published by the UK Research Integrity Office<sup>29</sup>.

When completed, this form should be submitted to the designated approver for your type of project. The form must be approved before any data collection begins.

| Type of project   | Default Approver   |
|---|--|
| Students on Social Work programmes                                    | Social Work Ethics Committee<br>(via Programme Secretary)          |
| All other students undertaking dissertations on taught courses        | Your dissertation supervisor                                       |
| All other students undertaking project work as part of taught modules | Your module convenor or workshop leader                            |
| Research students   | Director of Postgraduate Research<br>(via SASS Research Secretary) |
| Staff   | Chair of Research Committee<br>(via SASS Research Secretary)       |

<sup>22</sup> See Durham University School of Applied Social Sciences *Research Ethics and Risk Assessment Policy and Procedures*, revised September 2010

<sup>23</sup> In the case of student research, the principal investigator is usually the student.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/equality/Statement+Ethical+Practice.htm>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.the-sra.org.uk/guidelines.htm#ethic>

<sup>26</sup> <http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU29.html>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.the-sra.org.uk/safety>

<sup>28</sup>

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Aboutus/Researchanddevelopment/AtoZ/Researchgovernance/DH\\_4002112](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Aboutus/Researchanddevelopment/AtoZ/Researchgovernance/DH_4002112)

<sup>29</sup>

[http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/opportunities/research\\_ethics\\_framework/](http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/opportunities/research_ethics_framework/)

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.ukrio.org>

PART A. To be filled in by all applicants

Section A. I Project outline

Name of investigator: Ke Cui

E-mail address: ke.cui@durham.ac.uk

Dissertation/project title:

The impact of parental educational expectations on their children's social mobility.

Degree and year (students only): PhD Second year

Estimated start date: January 2011

Estimated end date: April 2011

Summary (up to 250 words describing main research questions, methods and brief details of any participants)

The aim of this study is to find out the mechanisms of parental educational expectations in their children's social mobility, especially upward social mobility.

Parents' expectations or aspirations for their children's educational and occupational achievements are anticipated to vary according to their socio-economic status (Sewell, 1957; Osborn, 1971; Tseng, 1971; Spencer, 1976). Children's own aspirations and social mobility could be impacted by their parents. There are also various other factors which can vary these expectations. Therefore, this research aims to identify those factors in parent-child interactions that impact upon children's social mobility and social status. In order to achieve the goals of this research, five questions will be explored: (a) the processes whereby parental expectations and aspirations about their children are formed; (b) the impact of parental levels of education on their expectations about their offspring; (c) the interaction between parents' educational levels upon children's educational and occupational aspirations; (d) the processes whereby children's aspirations about education and occupation are formed; (e) the impact of expectations and aspirations on the social mobility of the younger generation.

In order to collect data to explore the above five questions, the research will be qualitative and use following research methods: narrative; life history; and grounded theory. The data will be collected through semi-structured life history interviews. The research sample will be chosen in my home city, China, using a snowballing strategy that draws on my personal networks and by seeking external volunteers through leafleting. I will recruit friends or relatives who meet the selection criteria for this research as the initial participants and then I will gain more participants through them. Additionally, I will seek to recruit other volunteers by leafleting community centres and advertising in the local media. My mother, a middle school teacher, will help me to contact her colleagues and her previous students to see if they will participate in my research.

Accessing my sample through personal contacts will have several implications for me as a researcher. Firstly, the background of my participants might be slightly similar. Secondly, recruiting participants through personal contacts might reduce the quality of data. Because some people will not want to participate in my research, or they might do so in consideration of our friendship, this may reduce the quality of data provided. For example, if they participate in the interview they might not give me certain types of information about themselves because they would feel unsafe or too embarrassed to release private information to someone they know. In order to minimize this problem, I will not restrict my sample to people I know. I will also place leaflets asking for volunteers in local schools, doctors' offices, shops, community centres and other places where parents frequently meet, or publish a short article in the local newspapers or other media stating what my research is about, what I want to do and why this is necessary, to get a wider sample.

The approximate number of interviewees is forty-five (fifteen families with three individuals in each family). Three cohorts will be included according to the year in which they had their first child. These are: 1960-1980; 1980-1990; and 1990 -2010. Their 'child' will be included in the study as well. Based on the real situation, the age of parents who had their first child during 1960-1980 will be around 50-70 years old, the age of their children will be 30-50; the age of parents who had the first child during 1980-1990 should be 30-50 years old, their children would be 20-30 years old; while in the third cohort 1990-2010, the age of parents is supposed to be about 20-30, and their children possibly are adolescents or young people.

**Section A.2 Ethics checklist** (please answer each question by ticking as appropriate)

|  | Yes                                 | No                                  |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| a). Does the study involve participants who are vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children under 16, people with learning disabilities)?           | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| b). Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent (e.g. covert observation of people in <i>non-public</i> places)? | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| c). Could the study cause harm, discomfort, stress, anxiety or any other negative consequence beyond the risks encountered in normal life?                           | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| d). Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?  | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| e). Will the project involve the participation of patients, users or staff through the NHS or a social services department?  | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| f). Are appropriate steps being taken to protect anonymity and confidentiality? (in accordance with an appropriate Statement of Ethical Practice).                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

If you have answered **'yes' to any of questions a) to e)**, you must complete Part B of the form. Now go to Section A.3.

Section A.3 Risk assessment checklist

|  | Yes                                 | No                       |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a). Does the study involve practical work such as interviewing that requires the researcher(s) to travel to and from locations outside the University? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b). Does the study involve accessing non-public sites that require permission to enter?  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c). Are there any identifiable hazards involved in carrying out the study, such as lone working in isolated settings?                                  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you have answered **'yes' to any of questions a) to c)**, you must complete Part C. of this form.

Section A.4 Next steps

- a) If *only* Part A is required, please go to Part D of the form and ensure you complete the checklist and sign the completed form. Submit the form to the designated approver
- b) If you need to fill in Part B (this is required if you have answered 'yes' to any of questions a) to e) in Section A.2) please continue and complete Part B and add any further attachments.
- c) If you need to fill in Part C (this is required if you have answered 'yes' to any of the questions in Section A.3) please continue and complete Part C.

## PART B

Part B must be completed if you have answered 'Yes' to any of questions a to e in Section 2 of Part A. If your project requires approval from an NHS or Social Services ethics committee, you should submit a draft application to your designated approver prior to submission to the appropriate ethics committee. Once approval has been granted, including meeting any conditions, you must submit the approved form together with evidence of this approval. If you are submitting a draft NHS or Social Services ethics form, you only need to complete Section 1 of Part B.

### Section B.1 Other approvals

- a) Does the research require ethical approval from the NHS or a Social Services Authority?

Yes  No

If 'Yes', is the draft documentation attached? Yes  No

- b) Might the proposed research meet the definition of a clinical trial? It may do so if it involves studying the effects on participants of drugs, devices, diets, behavioural strategies such as exercise or counselling, or other 'clinical' procedures.

Yes  No

**If 'Yes', a copy of this form must be sent to the University's Insurance Officer, Procurement Department. Tel: 0191 334 9266. Insurance approval will be necessary before the project can start and evidence of approval must be attached with this form.**

### Section B.2 Project details and ethical considerations

- a) How many research participants will be involved in the study (sample size)?

Forty-five

- b) How will they be selected? (e.g. age, sex, other selection criteria or sampling procedure)

According to my sampling criteria, people who first became parents during 1960-1980, 1980-1990 and 1990-2010 respectively will be potential participants. They will be categorized into these three cohorts according to the year in which they had their first child. Their 'child' will be included in the study as well. I plan to select fifteen families with three family members (father, mother and their first child) in each family to bring the total number of participants to forty-five. And the sample will include people from different economic backgrounds, from both rural and urban settings, in places with different educational policies.

The participants will mainly be selected by personal contacts but I will not restrict my sample to people I know. I will place leaflets asking for volunteers in local schools, doctors' offices, shops, community centers and other places where parents frequently meet, or publish a short article in the local newspapers or other media stating what my research is about, what I want to do and why this is necessary, to get a wider sample.

c) Are there any people who will be excluded? If so state the criteria to be used

Yes. This is a purposive sample, so those not meeting the sampling criteria in Section B.2.b are excluded.

d) Who are the participants? (e.g. social services clients, NHS patients, users of a specific service)

Parents and children who meet the sampling criteria.

e) Who will explain the investigation to the participant(s)? Me as the researcher

f) How and where will consent be recorded? Informed consent forms

g) What steps will be taken to safeguard the anonymity of records, to maintain the levels of confidentiality promised to participants and to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act?

Fictitious names will be used instead of the real name for participants. Any information which risks revealing the identity of participants will be anonymised. All documents will be saved by the researcher and only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to them. Anonymity and confidentiality will be observed throughout the research process including in the written outputs. Data will be stored in a secure and locked cupboard or a password protected computer file to ensure that only the researcher will have access to it. The original data will be destroyed on completion of my PhD studies.

h) Will non-anonymised questionnaires, tapes or video recordings be destroyed at the end of the project?

Yes  Go to B.3      No  Go to next question      Not Applicable  Go to B.3

i) What further use do you intend to make of the material and how and where will this be stored?

The material might be used for publishing papers. The material will be stored in a locked cupboard or a password protected computer file.

j) Will consent be requested for this future use? Yes  No  Not Applicable

### Section B.3 Risk or discomfort to participants

What discomfort, danger or interference with normal activities could be experienced by participants? State probability, seriousness, and precautions to minimise each risk.

| Risk/Discomfort                              | Probability | Seriousness | Precautions                               |
|--|-------------|-------------|---|
| Getting upset when reflecting life histories | Low         | Low         | Have someone standing by to debrief them. |

PART C. FIELDWORK RISK ASSESSMENT AND HEALTH DECLARATION

All applicants who intend to conduct research with human participants outside the University should complete these forms. For further guidance please consult the University's Health and Safety Manual Section F1 at:

<http://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/healthandsafety/manual/f1.pdf>

Section C.1 Fieldwork Risk Assessment

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>DEPARTMENT</b> Applied Social Sciences  | <b>LOCATION</b> China                      |
| <b>ACTIVITY</b> Doing face to face interviews with volunteer participants  | <b>PERSONS AT RISK</b> Only the researcher |
| <b>DURATION OF ACTIVITY</b> Four months  |  |
| <b>POTENTIAL HAZARDS:</b><br>Alone working for the researcher.   |  |
| <b>POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES:</b><br>The researcher might be harmed by other participants.  |  |
| <b>EXISTING CONTROLS</b>   |  |
| <b>RISK RATING (SEVERITY X LIKELIHOOD) WITH EXISTING CONTROLS</b>  |  |
| HIGH <input type="checkbox"/><br>Severity ..... X Likelihood ..... = Risk Rating .....Low...MEDIUM <input type="checkbox"/><br>LOW <input type="checkbox"/>  |  |
| <b>NEW CONTROLS REQUIRED:</b> To inform someone, such as the researcher's parents, about where the interview will be conducted, how long it would take and to inform them that if they do not receive the researcher's call in three or four hours, they should call the researcher; but if there is no reply, they should call the policy for help. |  |
| <b>RISK RATING (SEVERITY X LIKELIHOOD) WITH NEWCONTROLS</b>  |  |
| HIGH <input type="checkbox"/><br>Severity .....Low..... X Likelihood .....Low..... = Risk Rating .....MEDIUM <input type="checkbox"/><br>LOW <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| <b>ASSESSOR</b>  |  |
| NAME ..... JOB TITLE .....   |  |
| SIGNATURE ..... DATE .....   |  |

## Section C.2 Fieldwork Health Declaration

During your research you may undertake one or more periods of fieldwork, involving visits to locations some of which will require a reasonable degree of physical health and fitness. In order to ensure that each research project operates with due regard for health and safety - in addition to being rewarding for those involved - all students and staff who expect to participate in fieldwork must declare any medical condition or incapacity which could prevent them from fully participating in the expected activities, or which may endanger the health and safety of themselves and others. As a condition of undertaking the research, you must complete the form below, after first becoming familiar with the details and expectations of the proposed fieldwork activities. All information will be treated in the strictest confidence and used only for determining the suitability of a fieldwork activity.

Please note that answering YES to any of Part B does not automatically exclude you from a fieldwork activity and every effort will be made to provide alternative arrangements where these are necessary, but it is essential that you provide full information. Where YES is answered, or the Part C declaration is not signed, the matter will be referred for a further medical opinion.

### PART A

Department of Applied Social Sciences

Location of research\_\_ China \_\_\_\_\_

Start and End dates \_1st Jan to 30th Apr 2011\_\_\_\_\_

Name of researcher \_\_Ke Cui\_\_\_\_\_

Name of supervisor \_\_\_\_\_Professor Lena Dominelli \_\_\_\_\_

### PART B

Do you have a medical condition, allergy or intolerance that may restrict your taking part in the expected fieldwork activities?

YES/NO

DETAILS \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any physical injury or incapacity that may restrict your taking part in the expected fieldwork activities?

YES/NO

DETAILS \_\_\_\_\_

Do you take medication to control any of the above conditions?

YES/NO

DETAILS \_\_\_\_\_

PART C

I declare that I am not knowingly suffering from any medical condition or disability that could prevent me from participating fully in the fieldwork activities.

My last tetanus booster was on \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## PART D. CHECKLIST AND SIGNATURES

### Section D.1 Checklist of attachments

***All applicants should tick which parts of the form you have completed and the documents you are attaching with this form:***

|  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Part A (all applicants)   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  |
| 2. Part B (for research with vulnerable people, on sensitive topics, etc)  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  |
| 3. Part C (for research outside the university)  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  |
| 4. Confirmation of insurance cover (if applicable; see Part B, section B.1.b.)   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  |
| 5. Information sheet for participants (required if consent is to be obtained)  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  |
| 6. Consent form for participants (required if consent is to be obtained)   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  |
| 7. Draft questionnaire (required if you are using a questionnaire)   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  |
| 8. Draft interview/focus group guide (required if you are using interviews/focus groups)   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  |
| 9. Written confirmation from all agencies involved in the study that they agree to participate.<br><br>(STUDENTS ONLY ARE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT THIS - the agreement may be 'in principle', pending ethics approval by the university or the agency. An e-mail from a manager or other appropriate gatekeeper is acceptable). | <input type="checkbox"/><br><br>N.A. |

### Section D.2 Signatures

All applicants must complete this section

Principal Investigator<sup>30</sup>: Date:

Supervisor/tutor (research students only): Date:

### Section D.3 Next steps

This signed form with all attachments should be submitted to the appropriate person for review and approval, as indicated on the front sheet of the form.

---

<sup>30</sup> For student dissertations and projects, the principal investigator will usually be the student

## References

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