



Research Articles

China's One-Child Policy and the Empowerment of Urban Daughters

ABSTRACT Urban daughters have benefited from the demographic pattern produced by China's one-child policy. In the system of patrilineal kinship that has long characterized most of Chinese society, parents had little incentive to invest in their daughters. Singleton daughters, however, enjoy unprecedented parental support because they do not have to compete with brothers for parental investment. Low fertility enabled mothers to get paid work and, thus, gain the ability to demonstrate their filiality by providing their own parents with financial support. Because their mothers have already proven that daughters can provide their parents with old age support, and because singletons have no brothers for their parents to favor, daughters have more power than ever before to defy disadvantageous gender norms while using equivocal ones to their own advantage. [Keywords: gender, family, fertility, demography, China]

IN 1998, WHEN I FIRST started tutoring Ding Na, the daughter of two factory workers in Dalian City, China, I thought her father's attitude exemplified the parental bias against daughters portrayed in many studies of Chinese family life (Greenhalgh 1985a, 1994b; Harrell 1982; Salaff 1995; Wolf 1968, 1972). Although studious and well behaved, Ding Na was often criticized by her father, who liked to remind her that he had always wanted a son. He worried that she might not score high enough to get into a good four-year college, even though she usually ranked in the top 20 percent of her high school class on practice exams. "What will you do if you don't get into a good college?" he lamented. "If you were a boy, you could study abroad while supporting yourself as a laborer, but what can a girl do abroad besides sit around waiting for remittances I can't afford?" Although her mother praised her for being more willing to help with chores than most other teenagers, whenever Ding Na had trouble helping her father carry groceries or move furniture, he snapped, "Girls are so useless. A boy would have no trouble with this."

On July 26, 1999, when Ding Na's college entrance exam scores were released, I began to see the relationship between Ding Na and her father in a different light. I stayed up with Ding Na and her parents as we waited well past our bedtimes for her scores to become available through an automated phone hotline at midnight. After her call finally went through, she wrote down her subject

scores, checking and rechecking her arithmetic, her eyes wide. "Are you sure you heard correctly?" her mother asked. Ding Na was sure. She had scored higher than she had ever scored on a practice exam in high school, and well above the likely cutoff for her top-choice four-year college. She shouted with joy as we congratulated her. Her father beamed at her with tears in his eyes and said, "I was wrong to have wanted a son. A daughter like you is worth ten sons."

The experiences of girls like Ding Na are quite different from those of daughters who grew up in the patrilineal, patrilocal, and patriarchal world described in classic studies of gender in Chinese societies (Andors 1983; Croll 1995; Greenhalgh 1985a, 1994b; Jaschok and Miers 1994; Stacey 1983; Watson 1986, 1996; Wolf 1968, 1972). The devastating effect of gender norms on daughters of that world is evident in the life stories of women born prior to the 1950s, and to a lesser extent in those of women born in the 1950s and 1960s. Girls born after China's one-child policy began in 1979, however, have more power to challenge detrimental gender norms and use helpful ones than ever before, thanks to the decline of patriliney and the absence of brothers for their parents to favor.¹

In this article, I argue that urban daughters born under China's one-child policy have benefited from the demographic pattern produced by that policy. By comparing the experiences of daughters born in the 1980s with

the experiences of their mothers and grandmothers, I show how singleton daughters have unprecedented power to deal with gender norms in ways that benefit them. Although I argue that low fertility has been a key factor in the empowerment of urban Chinese daughters, I do not claim that it is the only necessary and sufficient factor. Low fertility can only empower daughters in areas where opportunities for employment and education are already available to women. In the Chinese countryside, where such opportunities remain out of reach for many women, compulsory low fertility tends to frustrate women more than it empowers them. In cities like Dalian, however, it is clear that daughters would have been less able to take advantage of available opportunities if they had to compete with brothers for family resources, and if their mothers had not demonstrated that women can support their parents in old age.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Studies of many developed and developing societies worldwide have documented a high correlation between low fertility and women's empowerment (Abadian 1996; Balk 1997; Davis 1986; Dharmalingam and Morgan 1996; Keyfitz 1986; Sathar 1988). Although these studies have focused on low fertility as a cause and effect of mothers' empowerment, my findings suggest that more attention should be paid to how low fertility affects daughters. The effects of China's one-child policy on mothers are equivocal. On one hand, it has freed mothers from heavy child-bearing and child-rearing burdens; on the other hand, it has deprived mothers of the freedom to choose their family size and subjected them to intrusive state surveillance and enforcement tactics. The policy's effects on urban daughters, however, are largely beneficial.

Low resistance to the one-child policy in cities like Dalian can be attributed to the rapid pace with which people in such cities have internalized the same cultural model of modernization that has caused fertility decline in many societies worldwide. A society's fertility rate usually correlates with the degree to which it has adopted a modern economy in which child mortality is low, most people live in urban environments in which children consume a lot more than they produce, most mothers as well as fathers work at jobs incompatible with childrearing, and extensive education is widespread for both genders and seen as the road to socioeconomic success. All of these factors are likely to be both causes and effects of low fertility.

Parents are likely to want few children in a modern economy, in which children cannot contribute much to family income even though they cost a lot of time and money to raise and educate (Aries 1996:413; Handwerker 1986:3; Knodel et al. 1984; Oshima 1983). Daughters without brothers are more likely to be encouraged to pursue advanced education and demanding careers that tend to reduce fertility. Highly educated daughters have significant incentives to use their time to pursue prestigious and

well-compensated work rather than using it to bear and rear large numbers of children. Fertility is especially low when most women are expected to work at jobs incompatible with childrearing. A high rate of female employment is one of the strongest correlates of low fertility (Burggraf 1997; Essock-Vitale and McGuire 1988:229, 233; Felmler 1993; Gerson 1985; Sander 1990; Weinberg 1976). Schooling is also likely to cause women to learn childrearing practices that reduce infant mortality and, thus, reduce the need to have large numbers of children, as Robert A. Levine and his coauthors found in a 1983 study of Mexican mothers' education and childcare practices (LeVine et al. 1991).

Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo attributed gender inequality to a universal "opposition between the 'domestic' orientation of women and the extra-domestic or 'public' ties that, in most societies, are primarily available to men" (Rosaldo 1974:17-18). The public sphere offers greater possibilities for empowerment because, unlike the domestic sphere, it involves formal roles, rights, and duties; the authority that comes from lack of intimacy; the opportunity to achieve rather than be ascribed status; the power to create "culture"; the tendency to be categorized as the "norm" rather than the "anomaly"; and control over the production of goods with greater cultural value (Rosaldo 1974:25-35). This theory was later criticized by Rosaldo herself (1980) as well as by other feminist anthropologists for relying on dichotomies that do not exist in all societies (Collier and Yanagisako 1987; MacCormack and Strathern 1980). Still, Rosaldo's argument is useful for understanding gender systems in societies like China, in which gender inequality has long been based on distinctions between a superior public sphere dominated by men and a subordinate domestic sphere associated with women.

In such societies, the adoption of a modern economy tends to increase women's employment rates and parental bias against daughters tends to decrease when daughters are seen as capable of earning money. This pattern was documented in late 1980s Taiwan (Stafford 1995) and in 1970s-1980s India (Kishor 1993; Murthi et al. 1995; Rosenweig and Schultz 1982). When accompanied by modernization, the fertility transition enables and compels women to devote themselves to work and education rather than motherhood. This is not always beneficial to the first generation of women to experience the fertility transition, since they tend to have been socialized to desire large numbers of children and may suffer when they cannot realize this desire. It is much more beneficial, however, for daughters born to low-fertility mothers, since these daughters tend to be socialized from childhood to value the educational and career success that the modern economy and the fertility transition enable them to pursue. Among my survey respondents, 32 percent ($N = 1,215$) of girls indicated that they hoped to remain childless all their lives. The fertility transition has also enabled urban Chinese daughters to receive heavy parental investment and remain filial all their lives—an ideal that has

long been valued by Chinese people of both genders but was usually only attainable by men.

METHODS AND REPRESENTATIONS

Ding Na is one of the students I tutored in English during two years of fieldwork (1997, 1998–2000) conducted in Dalian, a large coastal city (1999 urban population: 1,977,214) in Liaoning Province, northeastern China. To learn about the experiences of singletons, I conducted participant observation in a junior high school, a vocational high school, a college prep high school, and the homes of 107 families that invited me to tutor their children in English or provide information about going abroad. I established long-term relationships with 31 of these families and participated in their social lives, leisure time, and everyday activities. I also conducted a survey of 2,273 students at the schools I studied.² Only two of the 31 families I befriended had more than one child. Only six percent of my survey respondents ($N = 2,167$) had siblings.

The schools where I conducted my survey enrolled students from a wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, although the most disadvantaged teenagers (such as those who were disabled or lacked urban citizenship) and the most elite teenagers (who were more likely to attend private schools, keypoint high schools, or study abroad programs) were underrepresented. Because of the midlevel statuses of the schools I studied, my survey results seem unlikely to deviate too far from the norms that might be found by a census or random sample of Dalian teenagers. Dalian's educational system divided high schools into six ranks of prestige. The nonkeypoint college prep high school I studied belonged in the second most prestigious category, and the vocational high school I studied belonged in the fifth most prestigious category. The junior high school I studied had the widest range of achievement levels and socioeconomic statuses, since it admitted all primary school graduates in its district without considering their exam scores or ability to pay. Almost all Dalian teenagers attended primary and junior high school and most went on to secondary education as well (Dalian Shi Jiaoyu Zhi Bian Zuan Bangongshi [Dalian City Education Records Compilation Office] 1999:219–221, 394–426).

The tutoring and information I provided was only useful to those who believed they had some chance of getting high school or college degrees, going abroad, or getting work that required English skills. I suspect that most urban singletons held this belief, since 94 percent ($N = 2,192$) of survey respondents indicated that they were tutored or took private classes at some point in their lives, and I seldom heard of urban singletons who thought they had no possible chance of upward mobility. Still, I cannot claim to have known families from all areas of China's socioeconomic pyramid. Like my survey sample, my ethnographic sample does not include youth from the narrow, extremely elite top or the wide, impoverished, rural bottom of that pyramid. My findings are not representative of

the experiences of the highest-ranked university graduates who dominate intellectual discourse, or of the rural citizens who constituted 64 percent (China Population Information and Research Center 2001) of the Chinese population in 2000.

THE ONE-CHILD POLICY

The primary aim of China's one-child policy is not to empower women but, rather, to promote modernization by reducing the number of people who must compete for resources, both in the family and the nation. While the goal of emancipating women from the burdens of high fertility was prominent in campaigns to promote the use of contraceptive technology during the 1950s and 1960s, government propaganda promoting the one-child policy that began in 1979 tended to mention women's empowerment only as an auxiliary benefit of the policy (White 1994). Contraceptive technology has enjoyed official approval in the People's Republic of China since 1954, although it did not become widely available until 1962. Family planning was voluntary until 1970, when Premier Zhou Enlai initiated a population control campaign with paramount leader Mao Zedong's blessing. This campaign encouraged families to have no more than two children, but it was unevenly enforced. Strictly enforced fertility limitation began in 1978, when government officials set a population target of no more than 1.2 billion people by the year 2000, and decided that a nationwide one-child policy was the only way to avoid exceeding this target (Liu Zheng 1981; Peng Xizhe 1991). Despite widespread rural resistance that led to a de facto two-child policy in the countryside (Greenhalgh 1994a), China had close to its target population in 2000, when a nationwide census counted a population of 1.27 billion (Chu 2001). In 1970, when population control policies began, China's total fertility rate was six births per woman; in 1980, two years after the start of the one-child policy, China's total fertility rate was down to two births per woman (Coale and Chen 1987; Whyte and Gu 1987:473). Farmers had higher fertility than urban residents even before the one-child policy, and two-child families are the norm in rural areas, where farmers' overwhelming desire for sons who can serve as labor resources and old-age insurance has made the one-child policy difficult to enforce (Greenhalgh 1990, 1994a; Greenhalgh et al. 1994; White 1987, 2000). In urban areas, however, the vast majority of women who married after 1978 have only one child. Compliance with the policy has remained high in cities like Dalian even during the 1990s, when the costs of violating the policy were reduced by rising incomes and the decline of the state sector and its surveillance and enforcement mechanisms.

Much of the literature on China's one-child policy has emphasized that compulsory fertility limitation harms women. American opponents of China's one-child policy have focused on abuses associated with the policy, such as cadres killing babies or physically forcing women to undergo

sterilizations or abortions (Aird 1990; Mosher 1993). Scholarly studies of the one-child policy have focused on the suffering of women who long for additional children; are blamed by husbands and parents-in-law for giving birth to singleton daughters instead of sons; and face surveillance, gynecological exams, mandatory contraception, fines, and the loss of benefits or jobs (Anagnost 1988, 1995; Greenhalgh and Li 1995; Kaufman 1993; Wolf 1985). Even some Chinese feminists have expressed alarm at the problems the one-child policy has caused for mothers (Greenhalgh 2001). Demographers have found an increasingly skewed Chinese gender ratio, which may result from female infanticide, parents' refusal to register daughters, parents' abandonment or lethal neglect of daughters, sex selection through selective abortion, or some combination of these factors (Arnold and Liu Zhaoxiang 1986; Coale and Banister 1994; Johnson 1996; Li Yongping and Peng Xizhe 2000; Zeng et al. 1993).

I do not discount the suffering caused by the one-child policy. However, I think a balanced view of the effects of the policy must also take into account the ways in which the low fertility produced by that policy has empowered urban daughters. As scholars working in other Chinese cities have pointed out (Gates 1993; Milwertz 1997), the one-child policy seldom results in extreme acts of enforcement or resistance in urban areas, in which desire for high fertility is far less intense than in rural areas. While medical techniques for detecting the sex of fetuses have been available (although illegal) in Dalian since the 1980s, the mothers of boys I tutored denied ever having used abortion to avoid having daughters and maintained that only farmers would do this. Among my survey respondents, boys' parents were indeed more likely than girls' parents to have lived in rural areas.³ While I heard rumors about farmers committing infanticide, physically forcing women to undergo sterilizations or abortions, or abandoning or lethally neglecting daughters, I never heard of such abuses occurring in Dalian. Most Dalian parents I knew told me that it was acceptable to have just one child, even if that child was female, and some even told me they were glad they had daughters instead of sons. They knew from their own experience that daughters could fulfill the filial obligations once reserved for sons. Unlike their rural counterparts, my female students' parents were not desperate to have sons at any cost.

THE LEGACY OF LOW-FERTILITY MOTHERS

My students' mothers were able to begin the transformation of their society's kinship system from a patrilineal, patrilateral, and patrilocal one to a bilineal, bilateral, and neolocal one. This was at least partly because of the paid work their low fertility enabled them to do. Paid work enabled women to provide their own parents with financial support in old age and, thus, prove that daughters could be as filial as sons.

Earlier studies attribute much of the male dominance in Chinese societies to parents' preferential treatment of sons over daughters (Greenhalgh 1985a, 1994b; Salaff 1995; Wolf 1968, 1972). My students' grandparents told me that, in their youth, daughters could not live with their parents after marriage or provide nursing care or economic support for their elderly parents. A significant obstacle to equality between daughters and sons in previous generations was the assumption that daughters would not be able to support their parents in old age. Because of this assumption, parents avoided investing family resources in daughters.

Because most of my students' grandmothers lacked the financial resources to support their own parents, they could not contest the cultural expectation that daughters would be less filial than sons. As early as the 1920s, leading Chinese feminists of both genders have advocated paid work as a key to women's emancipation (Lan and Fong 1999). Motivated both by feminist ideals and by a desire to mobilize women's labor for national development, the Communist government began providing women with employment opportunities soon after it took control of China in 1949. Yet many of my students' grandmothers told me that they were too busy bearing and rearing children to take advantage of these opportunities. According to the high school and junior high school students I surveyed in 1999, 81 percent ($N = 1,998$) of their fathers and 82 percent ($N = 2,006$) of their mothers had at least three siblings who survived infancy. "I got up at dawn, and by the time I had shopped, cooked, cleaned, and sewed clothes for my five children, the sun would be down," a grandmother told me. "Who would have done these things if I had gotten a job?" Grandmothers were far more likely than their husbands or children to have remained unemployed all their lives.⁴

The maternity leaves and medical problems caused by frequent childbearing also hindered the careers of those women who did paid work during the 1950s and 1960s. "I got to work upstairs in the factory office because I had gone to school, but I couldn't take a position of responsibility because I always had to take time off when I got pregnant," a grandmother told me. "After my fourth child, my health was bad all the time, and I had to quit my job." Grandmothers were far less likely than their husbands or children to work as cadres, managers, or white-collar workers at any point in their lives.⁵

Many scholars writing about women's status in China (Honig and Hershatter 1988; Stacey 1983; Wolf 1985) and elsewhere (Goldman 1993; Hochschild and Machung 1989; Molyneux 1985; Randall 1992; Steil 1995; Stockman et al. 1995) have argued that working women are burdened by having to work both a "first shift" of paid work and a "second shift" of housework. Yet the single shift of housework that a housewife did to take care of numerous children in the 1950s and 1960s seems at least as exhausting and time consuming as the combined first and second shifts of an employed mother who only had to take care of

one child in the 1980s and 1990s. Both generations of women worked all day, every day. The main difference is that employed mothers had part of their work valorized with monthly wages, which constantly reminded them as well as their husbands, parents, and parents-in-law of their power and indispensability.

Because of the Chinese government's policy of assigning apartments that were too small to accommodate joint families, most urban Chinese people have "networked families" (Davis and Harrell 1993; Unger 1993), in which married children live neolocally but in close proximity to both sets of parents. Only 17 percent of my survey respondents ($N = 2,188$) indicated that at least one grandparent lived in their home. Neolocality allows couples considerable flexibility in the negotiation of relationships with both sets of parents. In the flexible kinship system enjoyed by urban families, paid work gave women the leverage they needed to maintain ties to their own parents. As a junior high school student's mother told her husband when he complained that she was giving too much money to her parents, "Why shouldn't I give them the money I've earned? You should be grateful that I don't give all my wages to them!"

Elderly parents who were widowed or disabled usually moved into an adult child's household. Which child they ended up living with depended less on gender than on interpersonal dynamics and on the amount of time and living space each child's household could spare. In many families, elderly parents rotated between all their children, staying a few weeks to a few months in the household of each son or daughter. Regardless of their gender, adult children tended to contribute as much in care, companionship, money, and gifts to their parents as they could afford. Many of my students' mothers provided monetary support and nursing care for their own elderly parents (often getting their husbands to help), most who performed annual worship rituals for their husbands' deceased parents also did so for their own deceased parents, and some inherited money, goods, and housing from their parents. While 12 percent of my survey respondents ($N = 2,187$) were living with at least one paternal grandparent at the time of the survey, 5 percent ($N = 2,188$) were living with at least one maternal grandparent. Because of my students' mothers' success in diverting resources to their own parents, my students' families accept that daughters can be as filial as sons.

My students' mothers were not able to completely obliterate patrilineal assumptions. Because women tended to earn less than men, they also tended to contribute less to their parents than their brothers could. This became especially apparent in the 1990s, after the economic reforms caused layoffs and early retirements that disproportionately targeted women. According to survey respondents, 25 percent of their mothers ($N = 2,190$) and 12 percent of their fathers ($N = 2,190$) have been laid off or given early retirement. Men and women who lost their jobs tended to reduce the financial support they provided their parents

and let wealthier siblings pick up the slack. Because most men earned more than most women, these wealthier siblings were more likely to be brothers rather than sisters. Still, my students' mothers had at least proven daughters were capable of providing financial support for their parents. This reassured my students' parents that their daughters could have the same capability, especially if they were given the resources to take full advantage of socioeconomic opportunities.

DEALING STRATEGICALLY WITH GENDER NORMS

The strategy of raising a brotherless daughter to fill the kinship role usually reserved for sons was occasionally practiced even in prerevolutionary China (Jordan 1972: 91–92; Pasternak 1985; Rofel 1999:80–94). The appropriateness of such a strategy was proclaimed by legends like that of Mulan, a girl who took her father's place in the army because he had no son old enough to do so.⁶ As a rare and difficult last resort, the strategy of "raising a daughter as a son" (*guniang dang erzi yang*) had little influence on dominant Chinese cultural models or the scholars who studied them. This strategy gained popularity after the one-child policy made it a necessity for half of my students' families.

Parents whose love, hope, and need for old-age support are all pinned on just one child tend to do whatever is necessary to make that child happy and successful, regardless of the child's gender. Daughters and their parents face the extra challenge of winning happiness and success in a society structured by gender norms that have long disadvantaged women. They meet this challenge with a strategic combination of conformity and resistance.

For academically unsuccessful daughters of poor parents, gender norms provide a means of upward mobility through marriage and job markets unavailable to their male counterparts. Women face a glass ceiling produced by their extra burden of domestic responsibility, by gender norms that favor men in elite professions, and by inequalities between elite husbands and their less elite, hypergamous wives. Women also enjoy the protection of a glass floor created by the hypergamous marriage system, by gender norms that favor nonelite women in the educational system, and by the rapidly expanding market for feminine jobs in the service and light industry sectors. This glass floor makes it less likely that women will sink to the bottom of society, into poverty, crime, and unemployment. Men have neither the obstacle of the glass ceiling nor the protection of the glass floor. While elite men are more likely than their female counterparts to rise to the top of their society, nonelite men are also more likely than their female counterparts to fall to the bottom.

My students and their parents often talked about people's expectations of how males and females would behave. They were not interested in debating the extent to which such expectations corresponded with the way people actually behaved. Rather, they focused on weighing

the costs and benefits of disregarding, invoking, transforming, or conforming to particular expectations on particular occasions. I translate these expectations as "gender norms." Although powerful, these norms are recognized, talked about, and open to challenge. They are thus comparable to what Pierre Bourdieu called "orthodoxy," a system "of acceptable ways of thinking and speaking the natural and social world, which rejects heretical remarks as blasphemies" (1977:169). Unlike *doxa*, which Bourdieu defined as the "self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned" (1977:166), *orthodoxy* is defined in opposition to heterodoxy and, thus, unable to conceal its own arbitrariness.

Judith Butler proposed that the task of feminism is "to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to *displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself" (1990:148). By parodying norms and performing the possibilities they exclude or condemn, Butler argued, people can liberate themselves and others from the constraints of these norms. Because they have the full support of their parents, singleton daughters have unprecedented freedom to engage in this kind of play. At the same time, however, their freedom is limited by a socioeconomic system that remains structured by class and gender inequalities. While more elite women might have the wherewithal to seek the total liberation that Butler proposed, my mostly nonelite students and their parents find that they must choose their battles. Therefore, they do not try to eradicate all gender norms. Rather, they only try to do away with ones most likely to hurt their own interests, such as those that portray daughters as less filial and less worthy of parental investment than sons. At the same time, they conform to other gender norms, such as those that portray women as more patient and meticulous than men, when they feel that such norms may further their interests. They seek happiness and success, not liberation per se. While previous generations have also done this, daughters born after the one-child policy have more familial support for their strategies than ever before.

EDUCATION AND WORK

Parents of daughters as well as sons believe that success in education and work will be the key determinant of their children's (and, thus, their own) future happiness. Like sons, daughters are their parents' only hope for the future. I have never heard of any Dalian daughter's parents wanting her to become a housewife with no paid work. While a woman has the option of relying on her husband's income, it is not as desirable as having an income of her own.

Girls who conform to gender norms are more studious and obedient than their male counterparts and, thus, more successful in the educational system at all levels besides the very highest. The greater studiousness of girls was of limited use in previous generations because parents were reluctant to spend money on daughters' education and sometimes even made daughters drop out of school to

do work that would fund their brothers' education (Greenhalgh 1985b, 1994b; Lan and Fong 1999; Wolf 1968, 1972). Brotherless daughters, however, are encouraged to make full use of their academic talents because they are their parents' only objects of investment, and only hope for old-age support.

In the educational systems of Britain, Canada, the United States, Belgium, Morocco, and Algeria, girls from stigmatized minority backgrounds have tended to outperform their male counterparts, who are more likely to rebel against school discipline (which is identified with their ethnic oppressors) (Gibson 1997). Although they were not ethnic minorities, economically disadvantaged teenagers in Dalian experienced a similar phenomenon. Girls at the schools I studied tended to have higher overall scores than boys.⁷ This advantage, however, was balanced out by elite schools' emphasis on math and science (which boys favored) over the social sciences and humanities (which girls favored). High school entrance exams tested students on more science and math subjects than humanities and social science subjects, and four-year colleges accepted more science and math majors than humanities and social science majors. These factors constituted a significant bias against girls at the highest levels of academic achievement, but not at the middle and lower levels where the majority of students found themselves.

Gender norms structure Dalian's job market, but not always to women's disadvantage and men's advantage. Rather, they work in favor of younger women and academically unsuccessful women from lower-class families even as they work against older women, elite women, and poor, academically unsuccessful men.

Stereotypically feminine traits are seen as ideal for most jobs in light industry and the service sector. Stereotypically masculine traits are seen as ideal for most jobs in the rapidly shrinking heavy-industry sector and in high-status professions open only to a tiny elite. This means that elite women are less likely to get elite work than their male counterparts, but also that nonelite women are more likely to avoid unemployment than their male counterparts. Daughters are therefore counseled both to conform to gender norms that can give them an advantage in the general job market and to disregard those that might exclude them from elite professional work.

Women are rare in the most prestigious and best-paid professions, partly because they are hindered by their "second shift" of domestic work and partly because of many employers' belief that women do not have enough daring and creativity to do elite work. Focusing on biases against older women and elite women, recent studies have argued that post-Mao economic reforms have intensified discrimination against women (Croll 1995; Honig and Hershatter 1988; Hooper 1998; Kerr et al. 1996; Summerfield 1994). I found, however, that the consequences of those reforms are more complicated for the majority of youths, who are of average or below-average education and family background. The same economic reforms that encourage

state enterprises to discriminate against middle-aged women have also created service and light-industry jobs that favor young women. Physical attractiveness and stereotypically feminine positive traits can compensate for a woman's lack of education and family connections, but the poorly educated son of powerless parents is simply out of luck.

Recognizing the midlevel job market's greater demand for female workers, the educational system admits more girls than boys at the high school level. Greater educational opportunities for girls were reflected in the materials published by Dalian's Bureau of Education and given to Dalian's graduating junior high school class of 1999. At the technical-school level (sixth-rate), there were 1,346 places open to both boys and girls and 4,492 places reserved for girls, but only 4,301 places reserved for boys. At the vocational-school level (fifth-rate), there were 2,949 places open to both boys and girls and 5,189 places reserved for girls, but only 3,849 places reserved for boys. Several all-female private college-preparatory high schools (third-rate) were established in the Dalian area during the 1990s, but no all-male schools. At the second-rate college prep high school I studied, 52 percent of students ($N = 781$) were female and 48 percent were male. According to teachers, students, and education officials, only the small minority of schools classified as keypoint college prep schools (first-rate) had more boys than girls. A study conducted in 1990s Shanghai (an eastern coastal city with a political economy similar to Dalian's) found that the incomes of unmarried young women in Shanghai exceeded those of unmarried young men (Wang Zheng 2000:75). Most of the boys and about a quarter of the girls in my survey sample indicated that girls had an easier time getting jobs than boys did.⁸

Drawing on evidence from France and Kabylia, Pierre Bourdieu argued that, because of the strength of symbolic modes of masculine domination, "in work as in education, the progress made by women must not conceal the corresponding progress made by men, so that, as in a handicap race, the structure of the *gaps* is maintained" (2001:91). I found, however, that the gap between male and female statuses was much narrower in my students' generation than in their parents' and grandparents' generations. Although they still face a glass ceiling perpetuated by the symbolic structures of masculine domination that Bourdieu described, singleton daughters are not hindered by the parental discrimination that disadvantaged their mothers and grandmothers. The removal of this disadvantage has enabled singleton daughters to make the best use of their glass floor, and in some cases push the limits of their glass ceiling.

MARRIAGE

Many parents told me that girls are more fortunate than boys because girls have more paths to upward mobility. Family background, career success, and educational attainment are important spouse selection criteria for men and

women alike,⁹ but women who fall short by those standards can compensate with pleasant personalities, physical attractiveness, and the ability and willingness to do housework. Men can use these qualities to compensate as well, but not nearly to the extent women can.

In the marriage market created by the one-child policy, women enjoy several advantages. As in the past, grooms are expected to provide marital housing. The ability to live up to this expectation remains an important determinant of whether a man can win a bride. Thus, a son and his parents must try to buy, rent, borrow, or inherit extra housing by the time the son is ready to marry. A daughter and her parents, on the other hand, can consider the ability to provide or contribute to the purchase of marital housing an extra bonus to enhance the daughter's marriagability and comfort, rather than a requirement. Brotherless daughters and their parents see this as an advantage, rather than a sign that daughters are valued less than sons. Singletons of either gender face no competition for parental investment or inheritance. They and their parents just have to decide what form the wealth transfer will take. Unlike sons' parents, daughters' parents can invest all their savings in their daughters' education, rather than saving part of it for the purchase of marital housing. The need to purchase housing to attract a spouse is thus a disadvantage for sons and their parents. This disadvantage became particularly onerous after the housing reforms of 1997, which allowed work units to sell apartments on the private market instead of assigning them to workers in exchange for low, subsidized rents. A male vocational high school student told me that he could have gone to a college-prep high school if his parents, who ran a small shop, had spent all their savings on extra fees and bribes that would have gotten him in despite his low exam score. He said,

They gave me a choice. Either they could use their savings to send me to the college prep high school, or they could use it to buy an apartment for me so that I'll be able to get a wife when the time comes. I don't like to study, and I didn't think I could make it to college even if I went to a college prep school, so I chose the apartment.

In Dalian, women prefer to marry men of higher status, while men prefer to marry women of the same status. Thus, women can gain upward mobility through hypergamous marriage, while men are often forced to choose between permanent bachelorhood and marriage to someone of lower status. Although it produces inequality between husbands and wives, hypergamous marriage is in some ways more favorable to women than to men. Unlike women, men seldom gain upward mobility through marriage. Because of a low divorce rate, parental and school prohibitions against dating among teenagers, legal and social prohibitions against pregnancy outside wedlock, and a strict social prohibition against premarital sex that applies especially to women but also to men, Dalian women are relatively protected from the feminization of poverty pervasive in societies with high rates of single motherhood.¹⁰

Because of women's preference for marrying up, men have difficulty obtaining brides of similar socioeconomic status as themselves. I often heard boys and their parents complain about how difficult it will be to find brides. This is partly because of China's skewed gender ratio.¹¹ In addition, young Dalian men fear that there is a shortage of urban women willing to marry men of equal status. Women already at the top of Dalian's socioeconomic hierarchy aspire to marry even higher-status men from wealthier cities or foreign countries. Dalian men who cannot find local brides can acquire brides from the countryside, where women are eager to gain urban residency through marriage. Most urban men, however, consider this unacceptable. Matthew Kohrman (1999) found that even a disabled Beijing man considered permanent bachelorhood or marriage to a disabled urban woman preferable to marriage to a nondisabled rural woman, because he felt that as an urban man he could never feel "real love" toward a rural woman. Some of my male students likewise told me that they would prefer lifelong bachelorhood to marriage with "country bumpkins."

CHANGING DOMESTIC ROLES

In my students' parents' generation, men are expected to earn more, have better jobs, and do less housework than their wives, who are expected to take primary responsibility for domestic work, usually at the expense of their careers. Survey respondents' mothers were far more likely than their fathers to do household chores.¹² Still, my students' fathers were far more likely to help with housework than my students' grandfathers, most of whom told me that they did no housework at all. In the families of a few students I tutored, husbands did even more work than their wives. This was particularly likely when the mother worked or earned more than the father. The mother of the family I lived with cheerfully did all the housework while she and her husband both worked at nine-to-five jobs. Things changed when she rented a fruit stall, where she sold fruit from 8:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., seven days a week, while his factory increasingly sent him home with no work and no pay and eventually laid him off. Suddenly, she was making more money and doing more hours of paid work than he. Although she took pride in being a "good wife and virtuous mother," she realized that her time had become a lot more valuable than her husband's time and started pressuring him to do more housework. He reluctantly agreed, and from then on had dinner waiting for her when she got back home at 8 p.m.

Survey respondents expect the division of domestic work in their own marriages to be more egalitarian than in their parents' marriages, as demonstrated by their responses to a question about how much housework they want to do after marriage.¹³ The percentage of male respondents who indicated that they wanted to do at least half the housework after marriage was somewhat higher than the percentage of respondents who indicated that

their fathers did any housework at all. The percentage of female respondents who indicated that they wanted to do more housework than their husbands was a lot smaller than the percentage of respondents who indicated that their mothers did more housework than their fathers. When I asked boys who indicated that they wanted to do more housework than their wives why they chose that response, some said they would have to do a lot of housework to win and keep wives, since they are not likely to get good jobs or neolocal housing in time for their marriages. Others who already had girlfriends pointed out that their girlfriends are unlikely to do much housework after marriage. As one college prep high school student said, "my girlfriend is too lazy to even buy her own snacks, so I have to run down to the shop and get them for her during lunch. How can I expect her to do even her fair share of the housework?"

Boys and girls alike recognize that greater gender equality in the distribution of housework is expected for their generation than for previous generations. As a junior high school student replied when her mother, a retired factory worker, asked what she will do after marriage if she never learns to cook, "My husband will cook! Who says women have to be the ones to cook?"

CONCLUSION

The benefits enjoyed by singleton daughters result from the demographic pattern produced by China's one-child policy, and not necessarily from the compulsory nature of that policy. Global processes of industrialization, modernization, and urbanization have led to low fertility in all developed countries and many developing countries worldwide. These processes would probably have caused a fertility transition in cities like Dalian even without a one-child policy. Such a transition would have occurred more slowly, and produced fewer brotherless daughters, than the transition mandated by the one-child policy. Still, even a daughter with one brother is likely to enjoy more resources than a daughter with several brothers.

Singleton daughters deal with gender norms in ways that seem likely to further their own interests. People of every generation have tried to use gender norms to attain their own desires (whether they involved socioeconomic success or the maintenance of strong ties to one's parents), but the efforts of Chinese daughters born prior to the one-child policy were severely hindered by a patrilineal system that overwhelmingly favored sons at the expense of their sisters. In contrast, urban singleton daughters enjoy unprecedented support for their effort to challenge norms that work against them while utilizing those that work in their favor. When daughters are not systematically excluded from familial resources, norms that once went hand in hand with patriarchy become tools that girls can use as well as boys.

China's social structure is still characterized by gender inequality, particularly at the upper levels of the academic

and socioeconomic hierarchies. But brotherless daughters have the power to make the best use of their glass floor and push the limits of their glass ceiling, thanks to the parental support that their mothers and grandmothers were denied. Daughters empowered by the support of parents with no sons to favor are able to defy detrimental norms while strategically using ones that give them advantages in the educational system and the job and marriage markets. Parents of singletons only complain about their children's gender when they believe their children are conforming to disadvantageous gender norms, not when their children are conforming to advantageous ones. Complaints like those of Ding Na's father can thus be seen as discursive strategies adopted on specific occasions to exhort a beloved child to challenge detrimental gender norms.

Despite his moment of epiphany on learning his daughter's excellent college entrance exam scores, Ding Na's father continues to remind her that he always wanted a son whenever he finds fault with her. He continues to fret about her future, demanding that she succeed in college and worrying that she will not be able to find a good job afterward, especially since she has chosen to major in computer programming, a subject considered difficult for women. Yet Ding Na takes her father's commentaries in stride. "He criticizes me only because he wants to push me to do better," she told me. Indeed, I noticed that, though he criticized her in her presence, he also boasted about her in her absence.

While Ding Na was away at college, I had dinner with her parents and paternal uncle, whose singleton daughter was still in high school. Ding Na's father's brother talked about his fear that his own daughter would not succeed in the science major she had chosen, since "science is harder for girls." Ding Na's father, however, reassured him by quoting a famous line from "The Red Detachment of Women" (Hongse Niangzijun), a revolutionary model opera about Communist women soldiers: "In ancient times there was Hua Mulan; in modern times there is the Red Detachment of Women." He then raised his glass of beer in a toast and added, "in the future it will be up to our daughters."

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NOTES

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1. The degree to which any given gender norm is detrimental or helpful depends on the characteristics of the individual: The norm associating women with gentleness, for instance, might help a vocational high school graduate win a secretarial job and avoid the unemployment that plagues her male counterparts but prevent a female college graduate from becoming a manager (since managers are not supposed to be gentle).

2. This survey was administered in 1999 to most of the students in grades 8–9 at the junior high school, grades 10–11 at the vocational high school, and grades 10–12 at the college prep high school. Of the 2,273 respondents, 738 were from the junior high school, 753 were from the vocational high school, and 782 were from the college prep high school. The junior high school and college prep high school had balanced gender ratios, while the vocational high school was 71 percent ($N = 752$) female because it specialized in female-dominated majors such as business and tourism. I break my statistical findings down by gender or school only when dealing with survey responses that vary significantly by gender or school.

3. On my survey, 38 percent of female respondents ($N = 1,254$) and 29 percent of male respondents ($N = 852$) indicated that they had at least one parent who had not lived in the countryside, while 62 percent of female respondents and 71 percent of male respondents indicated that both parents had lived in the countryside.

4. Percent of relatives who never did paid work, according to survey respondents: paternal grandmother ($N = 1,716$) 36 percent, maternal grandmother ($N = 1,493$) 34 percent, paternal grandfather ($N = 1,651$) 0 percent, maternal grandfather ($N = 1,748$) 0 percent, mother ($N = 1,995$) 0 percent, father ($N = 1,964$) 0 percent.

5. Percent of relatives who were ever cadres, managers, or white-collar workers, according to survey respondents: paternal grandmother ($N = 1,871$) 14 percent, maternal grandmother ($N = 1,875$) 15 percent, paternal grandfather ($N = 1,863$) 42 percent, maternal grandfather ($N = 1,871$) 45 percent, mother ($N = 2,009$) 38 percent, father ($N = 1,984$) 48 percent.

6. The Mulan ballad is said to have originated in the fifth or sixth century C.E., and it became part of the official Chinese canon when it was included in the prestigious Song dynasty (960–1279 C.E.) anthology *Yuefu* (Luo Genze 1996). The legend of Mulan has inspired many novels, plays, and poems, and even a Disney animated movie. Mulan Girls' High School is the name of an expensive private girls' schools established in Dalian during the 1990s.

7. Average percentile ranks of singleton respondents by gender and school: girls grades 8–9 ($N = 361$), 57th percentile; boys grades 8–9 ($N = 325$), 42nd percentile; girls in college prep high school, grades 10–12 ($N = 262$), 54th percentile; boys in college prep high school, grades 10–12 ($N = 201$), 44th percentile. Percentile ranks are based on comparisons of the January 2000 final exam scores of all students in each grade level. The best possible percentile rank is 100, and the worst possible is 1.

8. Survey Question: "Who has a harder time getting jobs—males or females?" Girls ($N = 1,181$): 33 percent responded "females," 26 percent responded "males," 41 percent responded "no difference." Boys ($N = 788$): 16 percent responded "females," 53 percent responded "males," 32 percent responded "no difference."

9. Although important in young people's choice of marriage partners in 1990s urban China, romantic love is still sometimes outweighed by socioeconomic factors.

10. Most of my students live in two-parent homes. Among my survey respondents, 91 percent ($N = 2,188$) indicated that they were living with both their parents). Childbearing outside of wedlock is illegal, socially scandalous, and almost nonexistent in Dalian. Most unmarried women who get pregnant have abortions, which are readily available and less stigmatizing than the alternatives. In 1987, less than one percent of women were estimated to have remained single through age 50 (Zeng Yi 2000:93).
11. China's gender ratio imbalance has increased steadily since the implementation of the one-child policy. According to China's 1990 census, there were 1.083 males for every female born between 1980 and 1984 (Coale and Banister 1994:461), the period when most of my students were born. According to China's 1995 census, there were 1.17 males for every female born in 1995 (Li Yongping and Peng Xizhe 2000:71).
12. Percentages of mothers and fathers who did various kinds of household chores, according to survey respondents: 94 percent of mothers ($N = 2,198$) and 41 percent of fathers ($N = 2,199$) cleaned; 94 percent of mothers ($N = 2,195$) and 42 percent of fathers ($N = 2,194$) did laundry; 94 percent of mothers ($N = 2,196$) and 54 percent of fathers ($N = 2,196$) shopped for groceries; and 88 percent of mothers ($N = 2,194$) and 59 percent of fathers ($N = 2,194$) cooked.
13. Percentages of respondents (girls [$N = 1,159$], boys [$N = 839$]) who want to do various amounts of housework: 25 percent of girls and 17 percent of boys want to do more housework than their spouse; 63 percent of girls and 48 percent of boys want to do half the housework; 12 percent of girls and 35 percent of boys want to do less housework than their spouse.

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