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PRO GRADU THESIS

**A STUDY ABOUT IMPACTS OF CHINA'S UNIVERSAL  
TWO-CHILD POLICY ON CHINESE PROFESSIONAL  
WOMEN**

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YING, HAO: A Study about Impacts of China's Universal Two-child Policy on Chinese Professional Women

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## Abstract

The thesis studies China's Universal Two-child Policy (全面二孩政策) from the perspective of Chinese professional female, as it tries to examine the impacts of the new population policy on Chinese professional women's family life and career development.

This empirical work wants to give voice for Chinese female, and raise more attention to their rights under the new social policy background. The survey data was collected by online interviews in Beijing between January 2021 and February 2021. There were in total 23 informants, all of them were Chinese nationals between 20 to 48 years old. All the interviews were conducted in the Chinese language. The data gained from the interviews were analyzed in combination with existing literature findings.

The Universal Two-child Policy does re-emancipate Chinese women's reproductive rights to a certain extent, tends to provide more support in family elderly-care, and helps to enhance people's family happiness level. On the other hand, it leads to adverse effects on the health, economic status and family relationships of most professional women. The two-child policy also intensifies the original invisible employment discrimination, causing pregnancy and childbirth to become main barriers in women's job-hunting and career promotion. Coupled with the influence of Chinese traditional gender order, and the lack of social support, more and more Chinese professional women are facing dilemmas in both family and society during the two-child era.

An in-depth understanding of Chinese professional women's childbearing willingness and the impacts of the two-child policy on them will help to interpret the changes in China's fertility level and birth rate, so as to find out practical guidance for the next step in adjusting China's population policy.

**KEYWORDS:** China, Universal Two-child Policy, Chinese professional women, interview, gender roles

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1980s, China started to implement strict family planning policy, which has been called the “One-child Policy (独生子女政策)”. In 2016, this policy was finally abolished and replaced by the Universal Two-child Policy. The thesis studies the impacts of this policy change on Chinese professional women at childbearing age. The Chapter 1.1 starts with giving a brief outline of China’s latest round adjustment of population policy and emphasizes that during the era of the Universal Two-child Policy, China’s fertility rate and Chinese women’s willingness for childbearing have been declining. The Chapter 1.2 introduces the research goals and research questions of the thesis. The Chapter 1.3 tells how the thesis is structured.

## 1.1 The New Round Adjustment of China’s Population Policy

In 2011, in order to solve issues of low fertility rate, population aging, imbalance of sex ratio at birth, and disappearance of social demographic dividend, Chinese government carried out the 3d round adjustment of population policy (Kang Chuankun et al., 2017). All provinces in China allowed couples who were both only-children to have two children. On December 28, 2013, the Sixth Session of the Standing Committee of the Twelfth National People’s Congress approved the *Resolution on Adjusting and Improving the Population Policy*, allowing couples in which at least one of the marital partners was an only child to have two children (*Resolution*, 2013).

In October 2015, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the CPC approved the *Proposals of the CPC Central Committee on Formulating the 13th Five Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development*, proposed that the Universal Two-child Policy (全面二孩政策) would be implemented in the whole country (*Proposals*, 2015). On December 21, 2015, the Eighteenth Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Twelfth National People’s Congress approved the *Population and*



*Family Planning Law Amendment (Draft)*, announced that the Universal Two-child Policy would formally come into effect from January 1, 2016 (*Population*, 2015). As a consequence of this process, since 2016, all Chinese couples have been permitted to have two children, the One-child Policy which had been implemented in China for 35 years came to an end eventually.

China's new round adjustment of population policy has been considered as a key measure to save the country from a looming demographic crisis. The Universal Two-child Policy was given high expectations by the government. However, as of this writing it has failed to alleviate the low fertility rate which has existed for years in China. Indeed, the effect of the new policy has been far less than expected (Mao Weidong et al., 2018). According to the statistics from the China National Bureau of Statistics, in 2016, China's annual birth population was 17.86 million, with a birth rate of 1.30%, which was a slight increase compared by the 16.55 million annual births with a birth rate of 1.21% in 2015. In 2017, there were 17.23 million annual births, with a birth rate of 1.24%, which declined compared with the statistical data of 2016. Since 2017, the number of new births in China had been decreasing each year. In 2018, China's annual birth population was 15.23 million, with a birth rate of 1.09%; while in 2019 there were 14.65 million annual births, with a birth rate of only 1.05%, which touched the lowest level since the founding of the PRC (China National Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

The China National Bureau of Statistics proposed that one of the main reasons for China's low birth rate was the continuous declining of Chinese women's childbearing willingness over the years (China National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). In 2015, the Institute of Science and Technology of the National Bureau of Statistics conducted a survey on women's fertility planning in Beijing, only 42.8% of the participants were willing to have a second child, 26.4 % of the participants made it clear that they would not have a second child (China National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). In 2016, *Tencent News* organized an online questionnaire survey on Chinese women's childbearing willingness, the survey data showed that only 30.6% of the informants had plans to

have two children, the analysis report specifically emphasized that “having plans does not mean that things will really happen, the actual data may be lower than the survey data” (*Tencent News*, 2016).

Women’s willingness to have children is obviously an all-important factor in attempts to influence birthrate. As Chinese demographer Feng Xiaotian has pointed out, “revision of population regulations should be based on the full attention to and respect for female’s equal rights and childbearing willingness, which has important guiding significance for formulation and implementation of new population policy” (Feng Xiaotian, 2016). However, the focus of public opinion and academia on the Universal Two-child Policy has always been on its significance and effect. While the policy itself was placed with great expectations, female’s fertility intentions and rights of fair participation in social life have not been fully concerned no matter before or after the policy implementation. This thesis tries to examine how Chinese professional women’s family life and career development are affected by the Universal Two-child Policy.

The concept of Chinese professional women originated in the late Qing Dynasty, when, after the Opium War, the fields of women’s employment had to be expanded (He Liping, 1997). According to the description in the *Professional women and issues of professional women*, “women who do not rely on husbands or families, and provide mental or physical labor to the society to get paid are called professional women” (“Professional Women”, 1944). The definition of Chinese professional women used in this thesis is “women who have certain knowledge or skills, employed in the society or run freelance jobs”, which is from Shen Daochun’s *Professional women and women’s occupation* (Shen Daochun, 1995).

Female’s physiological characteristics determine their responsibilities of giving birth, which they cannot avoid. However, Chinese society and culture are likely to increase women’s burdens under the two-child policy. Influenced by Chinese traditional social gender order, women have always been regarded as the main bearers of taking care of

family and children (Xu Anqi, 2000); China's long-existing social stereotypes and gender prejudices in workplace make the females suffer more from explicit or implicit employment discrimination due to their pregnancy or childbirth (Lin Yudi, 2018). Therefore, in such social background, the two-child policy would be likely not only increase women's childbearing pressure and family responsibilities, but also let them encounter more unprecedented barriers in getting jobs and seeking promotion. According to Jia Zhike and Luo Zhihua, for most Chinese professional women, having more children means spending more time and energy on family, which may lead to their work efficiency declining. If professional women with two children cannot get enough support from their family or society, it will be difficult for them to make progress in their careers (Jia Zhike & Luo Zhihua, 2018).

## **1.2 Research Goals and Research Questions**

The Universal Two-child Policy has always been a topic of concern to the Chinese government and academia in the past decade, and the contemporary Chinese women's family life and career development have also been actively debated by the public opinion. According to the existing literature which I have found, most of the researches on the "Universal Two-child Policy" and "the contemporary Chinese women's family life and career development" are conducted separately. Empirical studies on China's Universal Two-child Policy from female perspective, especially from the perspective of Chinese professional women are still insufficient.

In my thesis, I would like to give voice for Chinese professional females and raise more attention to their rights and interests under the new social policy. I advocate combining social resources and family resources rationally to set up more effective population regulations, to alleviate China's current demographic crisis without damaging women's rights, while promoting gender equality. The findings of this study suggest to provide more targeted and stronger legal support, as well as more humane care for Chinese

professional women in both society and family, which would help to improve their life quality and career progress. In addition, the findings may also provide references for some Chinese women at childbearing age, who still hold a wait-and-see attitude on whether to have a second child. By knowing better about the two-child policy, they may be able to make more suitable choices for themselves according to their own actual situation, so as to ensure the realization of both personal value and family contribution to the maximum extent.

As mentioned in Chapter 1.1, women's acceptance and attitudes towards the new population policy are crucial to the effect of the policy implementation. A better understanding of Chinese professional women's childbearing willingness and the impacts of the two-child policy on them, will help to interpret the changes in China's fertility level and birth rate, so as to find out practical guidance for the next step in revising China's population regulations.

The research questions of this thesis are:

- 1) How do Chinese professional women think of China's Universal Two-child Policy?
- 2) What are the impacts of China's Universal Two-child Policy on Chinese professional women?

In this study, I have conducted interviews to collect data on Chinese professional women's opinions and attitudes towards the Universal Two-child Policy, in order to know about what kind of changes this policy has brought or will bring to them in their family life and career development. I have determined Chinese professional women as research subjects and invited representative informants to participate in online interviews. I have analyzed the interviews data combined with existing literature findings, to find out how the Universal Two-child Policy has affected Chinese professional women. On the basis of empirical analysis, I try to put forward reasonable suggestions on protecting Chinese professional female's rights during two-child period.

### **1.3 Structure of the Thesis**

The theoretical framework of this thesis is composed of policy studies, demographic studies and gender studies. The first chapter introduces China's new round adjustment of population policy briefly, and gives research goals and questions. The second chapter talks about China's population policies evolution and demographic changes, points out China's current severe demographic crisis, including fast population aging and serious gender imbalance, which are important background discussions for the introduction of the Universal Two-child Policy. The implementation process and government's high expectations of the Universal Two-child Policy are discussed at the last part of the second chapter.

The third chapter talks about Chinese women's subordinate status in feudal history, and contemporary Chinese women's life and work, which laying an important social and cultural theoretical foundation for the analysis of empirical research. The methodology is discussed in the fourth chapter, semi-structured interview and snowball sampling are used for data collection in this study.

The fifth chapter gives an in-depth empirical analysis combined with interviews data and existing literature findings, and tries to find out how the Universal Two-child Policy affect Chinese professional women's family life and career development. The final chapter gives conclusions of the empirical research, on this basis, it tries to put forward reasonable suggestions on how to protect Chinese professional women's rights more effectively under the Universal Two-child Policy background.

## 2 POPULATION POLICIES AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES OF THE PRC

This second chapter discusses China's population policies and demographic changes in the period from 1949 to the implementation of the partial two-child policy in 2013. Chapter 2.1 introduces China's population policies evolution. Chapter 2.2 discusses China's demographic changes (1949-2012) in terms of population size and population composition. Chapter 2.3 talks about the Universal Two-child Policy, including its implementation process and the high expectations placed on it.

### 2.1 From Pronatalist Policy to Family Planning Policy

During the Mao era (1949-1976), Chinese population policies can be described as pronatalist to intensifying family planning policy. From the Reform and Opening up (改革开放) in 1978, to the implementation of the partial two-child policy, Chinese population policies had been characterized by strict family planning and population controls. The subphases of these periods were as follows.

#### *Pronatalist Policy (1949-1953)*

In 1949, Mao Zedong believed that "It is such a good thing that China has a huge population. Under the leadership of the Communist Party, as long as there are people, any miracle can be created in China" (Mao Zedong, 1969). In the early days of the People's Republic of China, the central government encouraged childbearing, and followed the Soviet Union's model by granting women who gave birth to many children "Hero Mother" prize. At the same time, a variety of regulations were promulgated by the government to forbid contraception and abortion. For example, in 1952, the Ministry of Public Health of China formulated the *Interim Measures for Restricting Contraception and Artificial Abortion* (Fudan University, 2015).

### *Fail to Start Population Control (1954-1959)*

In 1953, the Chinese government conducted the first national census, the statistics presented that China's total population had exceeded 600 million, which was an increase of more than 100 million from 1949, and the natural population growth rate exceeded 2.00% (China National Bureau of Statistics, 1954). The fast population growing brought enormous pressure to China's limited resources and backward comprehensive national strength at that time. Discussions about controlling population had been started to be paid attention to by the central leadership. In early 1956, the Chinese government promulgated the *1956-1957 National Agricultural Development Program*, in which suggested that "birth control should be propagated in all densely populated areas in China except for minority nationality regions" (1956). However, in 1958, Mao Zedong Launched the Great Leap Forward Movement (大跃进). He argued that "in addition to the CPC's leadership, 600 million people is a decisive factor for national development", and put forward the view of "There is strength in numbers (人多力量大)" in his article *Introducing a Cooperative* (Mao Zedong, 1958). Concurrently, Ma Yinchu, the Chinese economist who strongly advocated limiting China's population growth at the time, was criticized, which also indicated that the hope of China's birth control was stifled in the cradle.

### *Proposing Family Planning (1960-1969)*

The Great Leap Forward Movement, the left-leaning errors in People's Commune Movement (人民公社化运动), and the severe natural disasters, together resulted in an extremely difficult period (1959-1961) in China, which has been called "three-year difficult period (三年困难时期)". During this hard time, China's mortality went up significantly, and the natality dropped sharply. After that, there was a very high compensatory population peak in 1962. Consequently, regulations about birth control were formally proposed by the central government. In December of the same year, the State Council issued the *Instructions on Promoting Family Planning*, required to control birth rate in all urban areas and densely populated rural areas (China State

Council, 1962). However, the Cultural Revolution (文化大革命) which outbreaked in 1966 caused big social instability in China, causing the implementation of Family Planning to halt.

#### *Family Planning Implemented (1970-1978)*

China's population grew rapidly during the Cultural Revolution. As of 1969, the country's total population exceeded 800 million (Fudan University, 2015), which made the central government once again realize the importance of population control. Since early 1970s, Chinese government became again determined to implement the Family Planning Policy in practice, and a variety of slogans were put forward for limiting childbearing in the whole society. In 1973, at the First National Family Planning Work Report Meeting, the "Late, Sparse, Few Policy (晚、稀、少)" was formally proposed, which was carried out quickly throughout the country. On March 5, 1978, Article 53 of the new Constitution stated that "The central government supports the Family Planning Policy." (Constitution, 1978). In October 1978, in the *Report of the First Meeting of the State Council Family Planning Leading Group*, it was proposed that "It is the best for a couple to have only one child, two at most". (*Report*, 1978).

#### *Proposing and implementing the One-child Policy (独生子女政策) (1979-1984)*

China's second-generation leaders Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun and Hua Guofeng strongly supported the Family Planning Policy. In order to further control China's population growth, in 1979, the central government put forward the One-child Policy (独生子女政策). It required that a couple can only have one child, while the violators would be subject to severe administrative and financial penalties (China State Council, 1979). In the same year, the One-child Policy was carried out in all areas of the country except for certain minority nationality regions in Yunnan, Qinghai, Ningxia and Xinjiang. In 1982, the Fifth Session of the Fifth National People's Congress made the Family Planning Policy a basic national policy (基本国策) (Constitution, 1982).



*Family Planning Constantly Adjusted (1984-2012)*

During the One-child Policy period, the government adopted certain unreasonable, even coercive measures to control childbearing, which intensified social contradictions and caused severe social instability. According to the incomplete statistics, in 1983, Chinese women set a record for the number of sterilizations and abortions (Liu Chaoran, 2006). In 1984, the Central Committee of the CPC had to repost the *Document No. 7 of Report on Family Planning*, which required that part of the regulations of Family Planning Policy need to be revised so that the One-child Policy could be suitably eased for certain special groups and people (*Document No. 7*, 1984).

Due to different economic development levels and regional characteristics, each province and municipality formulated their own local Family Planning regulations, which can be summarized briefly as follows: in all urban areas in China, and the rural areas of Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Chongqing, Jiangsu and Sichuan, one Han (汉) couple could have only one child; in remote poverty-stricken areas, couples were allowed to have a second child if the first child was a girl; part of the local governments permitted couples who were both only-children to have two children, and made specific rules for certain groups such as minorities, the disabled, re-married persons, returned overseas Chinese and people with special occupations, who were generally allowed to have two or more children (Family Planning Law, 2002; Chen Xu, 2013).

In 2001, the central government issued the Family Planning Law of the People's Republic of China, which mentioned that the government would stabilize the current population policy, encourage "later marriage and later childbearing" (晚婚晚育), encourage one couple to have only one child; while couples who met the "two-child conditions" could apply to have a second child. Specific regulations of different areas would be issued by the people's congress of each province, autonomous region and municipality (Family Planning Law, 2002).

## 2.2 China's Demographic Changes

One of the main reasons for implementing the Universal Two-child Policy is to alleviate the disequilibrium of China's population structure. This chapter talks about the social background of the Universal Two-child Policy from the perspective of demographic changes. It discusses the variation in China's population size and population composition from 1949 to 2012, looks into the issues in China's population development from the end of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century.

### 2.2.1 Variation in China's Population Size

Before the implementation of the One-child policy, China's population grew in an unplanned and spontaneous way. After the 1980s, affected by the strict childbearing restrictions, China's population growth had gradually moved towards a planned and controllable pattern. The variation of China's population size had gone through the following stages.

#### *The First Wave of Population Growth (1949-1957)*

At the beginning days of the People's Republic of China, the social environment was relatively stable. National economy started to recover and develop, medical and health conditions had also been improved. The country's human mortality dropped drastically, and the natality remained at a high level. In 1949, China's birth rate was 3.60% and the death rate was 2.00%, the natural population growth rate reached 1.60%, by the end of the same year, China's population was 542 million. In 1957, the death rate dropped to 1.08%, while the natural population growth rate rose to 2.32%, and the total population reached 647 million. From 1949 to 1957, China's total population increased by 105 million (Communiqué of National Census, 1965).

#### *The Three-year Difficult Period (1959-1961)*

During the "three-year difficult period", China's national economy development

encountered unprecedented setbacks, people lived on the edge of starvation, the human mortality went up significantly and the natality dropped sharply. In 1959, China's death rate went up to 1.46%, then reached 2.54% in 1960. In contrast, the natural population growth rate went down greatly, in 1960, the birth rate was just 2.09%. Years of 1960 and 1961 witnessed two consecutive years of negative population growth (Communiqué of National Census, 1965).

#### *The Second Wave of Population Growth (1962-1970)*

After the "three-year difficult period", there occurred a strong wave of compensatory reproduction in China, which caused a rapid rising of birth rate and baby boom. China's population growth reached an unprecedented peak, and the situation lasted until the early 1970s. In 1970, China's population death rate dropped to 0.76%, while from 1962 to 1970, the highest birth rate reached to 4.30% and the average value was 3.68% making the average annual natural population growth rate 2.75%. There was an increase of 157 million people in these eight years in China (Communiqué of National Census, 1983).

#### *Population Growth Under Control (1971-1980)*

Big issues and pressure led by the rapid population increase made the central government realize the importance of birth control. In order to achieve this, the Family Planning Policy was started to be implemented in the 1970s. China's population growth pattern began to transfer from unplanned and spontaneous to be planned and controllable. The country's birth rate and natural growth rate dropped fast, from 3.07% and 2.33% in 1971, decreased to 1.82% and 1.19% in 1980 respectively. However, due to the huge total population base, China's population was still large and kept growing. From 1971 to 1980, the total population increased from 852.1 million to 987 million, a net increase of 135 million people (Communiqué of National Census, 1983).

#### *The Third Wave of Population Growth (1981-1990)*

After entering the 1980s, the One-child Policy was formally carried out in the whole

country, while the measures of childbearing restrictions became stricter. However, as the people who were born in “the second wave of population growth” reached childbearing age in the early 1980s, China’s population birth rate still continued to increase in the next decade, from 1.82% in 1980, to 2.33% in 1987. Total population grew by 143 million from 1981 to 1990, with an average annual increase of 15.84 million. In 1990, China’s population reached 1.143 billion (Communiqué of National Census, 1991).

*Slow Population Growth, Low Natality (1990-2012)*

After 1990, influenced by the One-child Policy, China’s population natality dropped year by year, from 1.97% in 1991, to 1.46% in 1999. At the same time, China’s natural population growth rate declined as well, with a drop from 1.16% in 1992, to 0.76% in 2000, which almost touched the lowest level in the world. The statistics of the fifth national census in 2000 showed that China’s total population was about 1.266 billion, while the total fertility rate was only 1.22 (Communiqué of National Census, 2001). The statistics of the sixth national census in 2010 showed that China had a population of 1.34 billion, with a total fertility rate of only 1.18, which even ranked the lowest in the world. From 2000 to 2010, the average annual growth rate of China’s population was only 0.57% (Communiqué of National Census, 2011).

Year \ Items	Total Population	Birth Rate (%)	Death Rate (%)	Natural Growth Rate (%)
1949	541,670,000	3.60	2.00	1.60
1957	646,530,000	3.40	1.08	2.32
1959	672,070,000	2.48	1.46	1.02
1961	658,590,000	1.80	1.42	0.38
1963	691,720,000	4.33	1.00	3.33
1970	829,920,000	3.34	0.76	2.58
1971	852,290,000	3.07	0.73	2.33
1980	987,050,000	1.82	0.63	1.19
1981	1,000,720,000	2.09	0.64	1.46
1990	1,143,330,000	2.11	0.67	1.44
2012	1,354,040,000	1.21	0.72	0.50

*Table 1. China's population in key years according to Communiqué of National Censuses*

### **2.2.2 Variation in China's Population Composition**

According to Deng Weizhi, population composition can be divided into three categories on the basis of demographic characteristics: natural composition, geographical composition and social composition (Deng Weizhi, 2009). Due to the research focus and scope, this thesis only talks about population's natural composition, which includes age structure and gender structure.

#### *Age Structure*

According to *Dictionary of Population Science*, the population age structure refers to the proportion of each age group in total population in a certain period of time (*Dictionary*, 1997). Based on the classification criteria established by the *Population Aging and its Socio-economic Consequences* issued by the United Nations in 1956, if

the population over 65 years old in a country or region accounted for more than 7.00% of the total population, the country or region can be considered as aging society (UN, 1956). The World Congress on Aging in Vienna in 1982 determined that if the population over 60 years old accounted for more than 10.00% of the total population in an area, the area can be regarded as seriously aging society (WCA, 1982).

According to China's first and second national censuses in 1953 and 1964, the population over 65 years old accounted for less than 4% of the total population, China's population age structure was the youth type (Communiqué of National Census, 1954, 1965). After the 1980s, influenced by the Family Planning Policy, the ratio of children in the total population had continued to decrease, and the number of elderly people had increased, which accelerated the transformation of the population age structure. By the fourth national census in 1990, the number of people over 65 years old accounted for 5.63% of the total population, China's population age structure became into a typical adult type (Communiqué of National Census, 1991). Since the 1990s, China's population aging developed fast. According to the statistics of the fifth national census in 2000, there were 86 million people over 65 years old, accounting for 6.81% of the total population, which meant that China began to enter the ranks of aging countries (Communiqué of National Census, 2001). By the sixth national census in 2010, China had become the typical aging society. The population over 65 years old accounted for 8.07% of the total population, with an increase of 1.26% compared with the statistics in 2000. The whole society has been facing serious population aging issues (Communiqué of National Census, 2011).

Year \ Items	Population over 65 years of age	Proportion of total population in China (%)
1959	25,207,348	3.85
1970	30,670,664	3.75
1980	45,866,191	4.67
1990	63,912,757	5.63
2000	86,009,518	6.81
2010	114,178,413	8.07

*Table 2. Population aged over 65 in China in key years according to Communiqué of National Censuses*

Generally speaking, most countries' population age structure changes from the youth type to the adult type and finally to the old type accompanied by social development (Zou Bo, 2017). Especially in Western countries, the aging of population is a slow process with the gradual deepening of industrialization and modernization. However, China's demographic change happened under the circumstance of underdeveloped economy, and subject to obvious human intervention through the family planning policies outlined above. Therefore, it has its distinct features (Zou Bo, 2017).

According to statistical data of national censuses, China's population aging has the following features:

1) Huge base of the elderly population

As of 2013, there were 118 million elderly people over 65 years old in China, accounting for 8.68% of China's total population, and 20.78% of the world's elderly population (China National Bureau of Statistics, 2014).

2) Fast aging speed

The One-child Policy resulted in a dramatic decline in the birth rate of the society, the strict limitation regulations accelerated China's population aging, and made the

country reach the population aging peak much earlier than it would have otherwise happened. It took only around 18 years for China's population age structure to transform from the adult type to the aging type, compared with developed countries, this speed was quite fast (Su Wenxi, 2016).

### 3) Going beyond the social carrying capacity

The population aging in developed countries generally took place during the economically developed period, the slow aging process allowed these countries to have more time to adapt to the new demographic changes, and be more prepared to solve issues caused by aging population. However, China's population aging grew rapidly under the circumstance of an underdeveloped economy, and the fast aging has gone beyond the social carrying capacity. Consequently, the weak social public foundation has been unable to support the large number of elderly people (Tang Jun & Liu Weiwei, 2018).

According to United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), demographic dividend is:

The economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non-working-age share of the population (14 and younger, and 65 and older).

(UNFPA, 2016)

Chinese demographer Cai Fang has argued that China's sustained and rapid economic growth in recent decades was mainly due to the demographic dividend. He pointed that, in China's GDP change from 1978 to 1998, material capital contributed 28%, labor force growth contributed 24%, human capital improvement contributed 24% and labor urban-rural transfer contributed 21% to the overall growth (Cai Fang, 2019). However, as China entered aging society, its demographic dividend has been declining and the sustainable development of society has been facing huge challenges. Population aging directly leads to a reduction in labor force supply, which can influence social labor



productivity negatively, thus further affecting industrial transformation and upgrading in China (Cai Fang, 2019).

In addition, the population aging brings more burden of elderly-care to both family and society. At the moment, there is a serious shortage of public elderly-care institutions in China and a huge elderly population puts huge pressure on the underdeveloped social elderly-care and pension system. Beside of this, population aging also may lead to a decline in the social savings ratio, further affecting the social capital accumulation. As a result, the government has to face dual pressures of reduced income and increased expenditures for the elderly (Zhu Yuepu et al., 2017).

Professor Wu Yitong and Professor Luo Shougui, who are both from Shanghai Jiaotong University, adopted the method called Regional Population Scenario Prediction for their research on China's population aging forecast. They made the following predictions (Wu Yitong & Luo Shougui, 2017):

- 1) Without any policy intervention, the ratio of China's elderly people is bound to increase sharply from 2010 to 2050. People over 60 years old will account for 40.00% of the total population in 2052, the elderly population growth rate shall have slowed down since 2055. At the same time, the ratio of people aged 0-14 is going to fall to less than 10.00% of the total population by 2039, and remain at around 8.30% from 2054 to 2090.
- 2) In 2010, the size of the labor force in China was 993 million, accounting for 74.50% of the total population. If the current fertility rate remained unchanged, the proportion of labor force will fall below 70.00% in 2029. In 2052, it will be less than 60.00%. It is also predicted that at the end of the 21st century, China's total population might drop to 522 million, even less than half of the population in 2010, while laboring population will be 280 million, only accounting for 54.00% of the total population.

Wu and Luo argued that if there were no measures taken by the government to encourage childbirth from 2010 onward, China's population aging problem will be extremely serious by the end of the 21st century, and the entire society has to face huge population crisis (Wu Yitong & Luo Shougui, 2017).

### *Gender Structure*

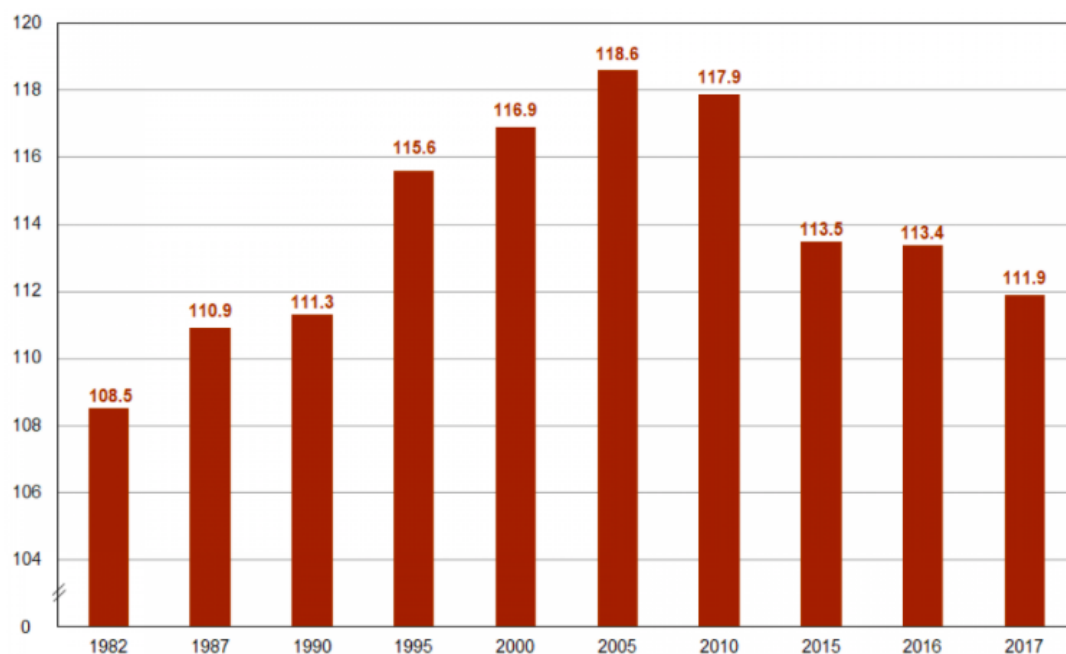
According to Barbara J. Risman, the gender structure of the population refers to the proportion of males or females in the total population of a country or region in a certain period of time (usually within a year) (Barbara J. Risman, 2004). Due to my study focus, this thesis mainly talks about sex ratio at birth, which is usually expressed as the number of males born for every 100 females born:

$$\text{Sex ratio at birth} = \frac{\text{number of males who were born alive}}{\text{number of females who were born alive}} \times 100$$

According to Orzack,S, “although the probability of miscarriage varies between genders across the course of a pregnancy, female mortality is slightly higher than male mortality over the full period” (Orzack,S, 2015). The United Nations set the normal value of the sex ratio at birth to 103-107 (UN, 1955). This value is also regarded as an important criterion to measure whether the sex ratio of a country or a region is balanced. For the convenience of comparison, this thesis defines the normal value of sex ratio at birth as below 107.

According to the *Communiqué of National Censuses*, from 1949 to the end of the 1970s, China's sex ratio at birth had been within a normal range. However, since the 1980s, it has been directly affected by the One-child Policy. China's earliest abnormality of the sex ratio at birth appeared in 1980 with the value of 107.4, after which it increased to higher than 110 in 1987. From 1990 to 2005, it went up rapidly, reached the highest level of 118.6. After 2005, it started to go down slightly, but still maintained at a high level (Communiqué of National Census, 1983, 1991, 2001, 2011). In 2016, China

Health and Family Planning Commission announced that China has been the country with the most serious and long-lasting gender imbalance of the birth population in the world (China Health and Family Planning Commission, 2016).



*Table 3. Sex ratio at birth in China, 1982-2017 (China National Bureau of Statistics)*

In China, people's preference for sons has been mainly influenced by the culture of patriarchy (父权), patrilocal residence (父居) and patrilineal lineage (父系). Patriarchy determined women's dependence on men in the family, and the unconditional dominance and obedience relationship between husband and wife; patrilocal residence required women to break away from their parents' kinship after marriage; patrilineal lineage stipulated the family line, which weakened women's property inheritance rights in the family (Zhou Xiaojie & Peng Hua, 2010). Due to the influence of such kind of social culture, many Chinese families have been with strong consciousness of "prefer boys to girls (重男轻女)" (Liu Qiang, 2009). Besides this, the home-based elderly-care model, which is still dominant in Chinese society also made most couples prefer sons than daughters (Wang Lei & Jiang Jiying, 2008).

Professor Yang Juhua believed that the One-child Policy was the key reason of the imbalance in sex ratio at birth in China (Yang Juhua, 2009). Before the policy, women could meet their demand for sons by giving birth for many times, which had little influence on the sex ratio at birth. However, under the strict restrictions of the One-child Policy, people were mostly unable to use this method to realize their “son-preference” anymore. Some of them had to use B-ultrasound to identify the fetus’ gender before delivery, then aborted selectively, to abandon female fetus (Chen Youhua, 2007). It has been noted how in countries with patriarchal culture, there has been an imbalance in sex ratio at birth during the process of fertility rate declining, therefore this phenomenon can be considered as the social cost of strict birth control in a certain period of time (Yang Juhua, 2009).

At the beginning of the 21st century, negative impacts of the imbalance in sex ratio of Chinese population became more and more obvious. One of the serious problems is the marriage squeeze, which was first proposed by Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea Den Boer. Their book *A Surplus of Men, a Deficit of Peace: Security and Sex Ratios in Asia’s Largest States* targets the two countries with the largest population in the world—China and India. The authors argue in their book that because there were far more adult males than adult females in these two countries, part of men were unable to choose their spouses in a “peaceful” way, but squeezed each other competitively, which resulted in a large number of single men unable to get married eventually (Valerie M. Hudson & Andrea Den Boer, 2002). More than thirty years after the implementation of the One-child Policy, due to the serious gender imbalance, more and more Chinese adult men faced the crisis of marriage squeeze, and the situation was even worse in rural areas with underdeveloped economy. In Sun Jianghui’s *Study on the Imbalance of the Sex Ratio between Men and Women in Illegal Crimes*, he pointed out that most of the men who were eliminated by marriage squeeze generally came from the bottom of society, and that the huge pressure from family and society could easily lead them to commit crimes (Sun Jianghui, 2007). Professor Zhou Yun and Tan Yuanfa believed that marriage squeeze would cause severe criminal behaviors such as sexual violence,

trafficking in women and children (Zhou Yun & Tan Yuanfa, 2017).

The imbalance of the sex ratio in China can also lead to a surplus of male labor force, which makes it more difficult for women who have been already disadvantaged in the labor market (Zhong Haiqi et al., 2007). According to the statistics from the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2016), the labor participation rate of Chinese women aged 25-34 had dropped significantly from 90.90% in 1990 to 82.60% in 2010. The gender imbalance will further aggravate the inequality of men and women in employment (Zhong Haiqi et al., 2007).

## **2.3 The Universal Two-child Policy**

After entering the 21st century, the excessive population growth has been no longer the core issue of China's population, whereas the issues rising from demographic structure, quality and distribution have gradually emerged in Chinese society. As can be seen from the statistical data of national censuses after the 1980s, the low fertility rate, accelerated population aging, disappearance of demographic dividend and imbalance of sex ratio at birth were all becoming main serious problems in China's population growth. The One-child Policy had lagged behind the new trends of China's population development, and the demographic crisis hindered the progress of Chinese society. In 2015, the Chinese government formally proposed to implement the Universal Two-child Policy in the whole country.

### **2.3.1 Implementation Process**

In 2001, sponsored by the National Family Planning Commission, Professor Gu Baochang of Renmin University, and Professor Wang Feng of Fudan University, jointly established a group to research China's population policy for the 21st century. In April 2004, their *Recommendations on Adjusting the Population Policy* was submitted to the

National Family Planning Commission. Gu Baochang argued that China was about to face severe population aging, the One-child Policy was no longer appropriated for China's social development (Gu Baochang, 2004). The research group suggested implementing a Universal Two-child Policy as soon as possible, and pilot projects could be conducted first in a few places where conditions permitted (Gu Baochang, 2004). In June 2004, the Chinese Institute of Demography organized a special seminar on this proposal where part of officials and scholars worried that a Universal Two-child Policy would lead to a sharp rebound in births and an unprecedented surge in China's population. From 2005 to 2006, Gu Baochang's team visited remote rural areas in Jiuquan, Yicheng, Chengde and Enshi, where the residents had been allowed to have two children. Their survey results showed that, there had been no fertility rebound due to the eased childbirth regulations in those areas, the population growth rate had maintained at a low level, with the total fertility rate of less than 2.0 for years. (Gu Baochang, 2009).

In 2004, the deputy dean of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Cai Fang pointed out that the shortage of migrant labor which appeared in 2003 indicated the end of the era of unlimited labor supply in China (Cai Fang, 2010). He believed that Chinese labor population aged 15-60 would be insufficient in the near future, the long-existing demographic dividend enjoyed by China's economic growth was about to disappear. He recommended adjusting China's population policy to enhance the fertility rate (Cai Fang, 2010). In 2007, with the support of the central government, the Renmin University launched a special research project named Survey of the Fertility Level and Fertility Intention of Chinese Women, aimed to study about the feasibility of implementing the Universal Two-child Policy in China (*Nanfang Zhoumo*, 2015).

In 2009, Professor Gu Baochang and other 25 Chinese demographers submitted the *Recommendations on Adjusting the Population Policy* to the central government for the second time. They requested to stop the One-child Policy as soon as possible, and emphasized that "it would be too late to take measures when China's population began

to grow negatively”. They suggested that Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang, which maintained long-term low fertility levels, to be made pilot areas for the Universal Two-child Policy implementation (Gu Baochang, 2009). In November of the same year, the director of the China National Research Institute Hu Angang believed that China’s economic strength and social resources were able to withstand the challenges from two-child policy, however if the One-child Policy was still maintained, China would face serious demographic crisis soon (Hu Angang, 2009). In December 2009, Tian Xueyuan, the former director of the Institute of Population Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who has been known as the “Deputy Chief Designer of the One-child Policy”, published an article in the *People’s Daily* where he argued that the ratio of China’s absolute labor force in the total population was close to the peak and that it was time to adjust China’s population policy (Tian Xueyuan, 2009).

In 2010, supported by the central government, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences started a new national project named The Quantitative Research on the Adjustment of China’s Population Regulations, which aimed to prepare for the new round adjustment of China’s population policy (Wang Guangzhou, 2012). In November 2011, all provinces in China allowed couples who were both only-children to have two children. In 2012, the report *Changes in Population Situation and Adjustment of Population Policy* which was issued by the China Development Research Foundation, mentioned that keeping the One-child Policy unchanged was not in line with the reality and requirements of China’s social and economic development. However, if a Universal Two-child Policy was implemented immediately throughout the whole country, it could cause a sharp increase in the number of births in a short period, which would lead to adverse effects on social security, education and employment. The report argued that considering that the reaction of China’s population policy to demographic changes was already lagging behind, coupled with the experience and lessons of developed countries in coping with low fertility rate, the most feasible way for China was to implement the two-child policy by region and by step, which not only took the urgency of time into account, but also avoided population explosion in a short time (China Development

Research Foundation, 2012).

In December 2013, the Chinese government allowed couples in which at least one of the marital partners was an only child to have two children. From 2014 to 2015, about two million couples applied for having a second child, accounting only for about 18.00% of the eligible couples nationwide. The total number of annual births in 2014 and 2015 were 16.87 million and 16.55 million respectively, with increase of 470,000 and 150,000 over 2013, which was much lower than experts' prediction (China National Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

In December 2014, Professor Gu Baochang and other 39 Chinese demographers proposed again to start the Universal Two-child Policy as soon as possible. They emphasized that China was the only country in the world that still kept birth control after the fertility rate dropped below the replacement level. The effect of the partial two-child policy which had been implemented since 2013 was far less than expected, this phenomenon also proved that the risk of birth rebound was exaggerated before (*Pengpai News*, 2015).

In October 2015, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the CPC reviewed and approved the *Proposals of the CPC Central Committee on Formulating the 13th Five Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development*, announced that the Universal Two-child Policy would be implemented in the whole country (*Proposals*, 2015). On December 21, 2015, the 18th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the 12th National People's Congress approved the *Population and Family Planning Law Amendment (Draft)*, which meant that the Universal Two-child Policy would come into effect on January 1, 2016. On January 1, 2016, the Universal Two-child Policy was officially implemented in China (*Population*, 2015).



### 2.3.2 Policy with High Expectations

In the first year after the implementation of the partial two-child policy in 2013, less than one million Chinese couples applied for having a second child. However, the previous official estimate was about two million applications for second-child each year (China National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). The *Economic Blue Book: Analysis and Forecast of China's Economic Situation in 2015* issued by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences stated that China's total fertility rate was only 1.4, which was far below the replacement level of 2.1, it was very close to the internationally recognized "low birth trap" of 1.3. The partial two-child policy obviously failed to save China's low fertility rate (Zhu Xi'an et al., 2016).

Since 2010, the proportion of China's elderly population in the total population had been rising rapidly, from 13.30% in 2010 to 15.50% in 2014. China had become one of the countries with the fastest growth rate of aging population. Issues of elderly-care were becoming serious for both family and society. The Universal Two-child Policy would be a key measure taken by the government to alleviate China's population aging crisis (Sui Che, 2015)

As Loyalka and Michelle have noted "According to a study by Zhang and Yang, China reached the Lewis turning point in 2010; cheap labor in the country has rapidly decreased and real agricultural wages have substantially increased" (Loyalka & Michelle, 2015). The Lewis turning point is "a situation in economic development where surplus rural labor is fully absorbed into the manufacturing sector", which was proposed by Nobel Prize winner William Arthur Lewis in 1968. Lewis believed that in the process of industrialization, with the transfer of rural labor to non-agricultural industries, the original surplus of rural labor would gradually decrease, thus leading to demographic dividend disappearing eventually (Ranis Gustav, 2015). In 2014, the director of the Institute of Population and Labor Economics of the Chinese Academy

of Social Sciences gave a public speech at the Two Sessions (两会), he emphasized that China's low fertility rate and population aging were the two main reasons for the emergence of the Lewis turning point in the country. Some parliamentarians of the Two Sessions argued that it was very necessary to implement the Universal Two-child Policy to maintain China's demographic dividend (Liu Yi, 2016).

Affected by the One-child Policy, the average size of a Chinese family had been shrinking, from 4.43 persons per household in 1982, to 3.10 persons per household in 2010 (Wu Fan, 2016). Wang Guangzhou, the population forecaster at the Institute of Population and Labor Economics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, combined population sampling data and computer simulation models to predict that, there would be about 176 million one-child families in China in 2015. Consequently, traditional functions of Chinese family such as child-rearing and elderly-care would be significantly weakened (Wang Guangzhou, 2012). As of 2016, there were more than 1 million Chinese parents who had lost their only-children, and who because of this were facing various problems of psychological trauma, financial pressure and elderly-care difficulty. In order to avoid such kind of social tragedy from happening again, in 2015, parliamentarians of the Two Sessions proposed to completely abolish the One-child Policy, and to start the Universal Two-child Policy soon (Feng Xiaotian, 2016).

It was also seen that because strict childbearing controls and popular preference of boys at birth directly resulted in the imbalance of the sex ratio at birth in China, weakening the influence of patriarchal culture or prohibiting fetal gender identification could not fundamentally solve the issue of gender imbalance. Removal of birth restrictions and abolishment of the One-child Policy may be able to alleviate the issue of imbalanced sex ratio at birth more effectively in China (Zhu Mingbao & Shi Zhilei, 2015).

### 3 GENDER STATUS OF CHINESE WOMEN

The third part of the thesis mainly discusses Chinese women's gender status. Chapter 3.1 talks about Chinese women's subordinate status in feudal history, and introduces the situation about preliminary liberation of Chinese female at the beginning of the 20th century. Chapter 3.2 discusses contemporary Chinese women's family life and employment situation. The Chapter 3 lays an important social and cultural theoretical foundation for the analysis of empirical research.

#### 3.1 Chinese Women's Subordinate Status in Feudal History

According to Nasrullah Mambrol, "The gender order is a patterned system of ideological and material practices, performed by individuals in a society, through which power relations between women and men are made, and remade, as meaningful" (Nasrullah Mambrol, 2017). The establishment of gender order is a socialization process, in which physiological factors, people's values and behavior norms play important roles (*Chinese Encyclopedia Database*, 2010). China's traditional gender order has been formed in its long history, although Chinese women's life style presented various characteristics in different dynasties, their subordinate status had not been changed in feudal history and the country's traditional gender order Nan Zun Nü Bei (男尊女卑) had been maintained for thousands of years.

In Chinese history, there had been quite a lot of doctrines and thoughts used to restrict female's status and behaviors. There were several very representative ones as follows:

- 1) Nan Zun Nü Bei (男尊女卑), which was the ideology of male domination and female subordination. It first officially appeared in the Taoist classic book *Liezi* during the Warring States Period (475 BC-221 BC), advocating that males were nobler than females (*Liezi. Tianrui*).

- 2) San Cong Si De (三从四德), which had been known as “the Three Obedience and Four Virtues”, was one of the diktats of classical Confucian ethics. The Three Obedience required women to obey fathers before getting married, to follow husbands in the marriage, and to be amenable for sons after husbands died. The Four Virtues referred to feminine virtue of ethics, speech, visage and serving in matrimony (*Yili. Sangfu. Zixiazhuan & Zhouli. Tianguan. Jiupin*).
- 3) San Gang Wu Chang (三纲五常), was originally from the book *Bai Hu Tong Yi* in Eastern Han Dynasty (25 AD-220 AD). San Gang required courtiers to be loyal to emperor, children to obey parents, wives to follow husbands. Widows especially could not re-marry after their husbands died. Wu Chang referred to the benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity. (*Baihutong. Sangangliuji*)

### 3.1.1 Thousand Years of Subordination

Women had high social status in the matriarchal period of primitive society. After the female-dominated society collapsed, China entered the patrilineal period, meaning that women gradually became the appendages of men.

During the Shang dynasty (1600 BC-1046 BC), certain characteristics of matrilineal society still remained, therefore women’s status was relatively high. With the progress of agricultural productivity, the division of social labor between men and women was further refined, and men’s status began to rise. In the Zhou dynasty (1046 BC-771 BC), both the Etiquette-music Reform and the prevailing patriarchal system began to restrict female’s behavior. This meant that women could neither join in playing musical instruments nor use the high-class sacrificial vessels during festivals. In official sacrifices, a female could no longer enjoy the long-standing sacrificial traditions. (Liu Hui, 2008).

In the Spring and Autumn Period (770 BC-476 BC) and the Warring States Period (475 BC-221 BC) social productivity further improved and women’s status continued to

decline. During this time, Confucianism was formed, its hierarchy and etiquette systems had profound influence on Chinese women. In addition, Nan Zun Nü Bei (男尊女卑) formally became part of the national law and discipline rite, which led to women being bound by numerous and complicated moral standards.

In the Qin dynasty (221 BC-207 BC), the concept of Jiefu (节妇) was introduced, which referred to those women who would not re-marry after the death of their husbands; such behavior was considered as woman's virtue. In the Han dynasty (202 BC-220 AD), Dong Zhongshu, one of the most influential politicians at the time, required that Chinese society was supposed to "exclude all the other factions, only venerate Confucianism (罢黜百家，独尊儒术)" (Wei Wenhua, 2003). This requirement made Confucianism the orthodox ideal of Chinese society, and the Confucian gender views also influenced the whole country deeply for more than two thousand years to come. Meanwhile, moral instruction for women (女训) frequently appeared in the *Book of Rites* and *BaiHuTongYi* which were Confucian classics. In the late Han dynasty, the edict for commending Jiefu increased significantly.

The Tang dynasty (618-907) has been regarded as the period with the highest female's status in Chinese feudal history. During this time, social economy and culture developed rapidly, the whole society was unprecedentedly open and prosperous, women's status was improved significantly, and even China's first female emperor appeared in Tang dynasty. Although Tang rulers still held positive attitude towards "women preserving chastity after the death of their husbands", they also encouraged women to re-marry. The laws of Tang Dynasty clearly stipulated that "women had freedom to divorce and re-marry" (Li Rui, 2017). During this period, it was popular for feudal nobles to choose their sons-in-law from the candidates who participated in the Imperial Competitive Examination (科举考试), which made some men depend on their wives' families economically and politically, thus enhancing women's status in the marriage (Li Rui, 2017). In addition, due to the close contacts with world and the influence of the northern nomadic tribes, Tang people were generally more open-

minded, tolerant, bold and unconstrained. Women had greater autonomy in social life. Coupled with the highly recommendation of Buddhism by the rulers in the early and middle stages of Tang, the consciousness of “all beings are equal (众生平等)” directly promoted Tang women’s status. However, after the “An-Shi Rebellion” (安史之乱) and the decline of the Tang dynasty, women were gradually deprived of their rights again, their pursuit of freedom and liberation was severely suppressed by the rulers.

In Song dynasty (960-1276), with the emergence of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism (程朱理学), the Confucian feudal code of ethics returned to a very high position in the society. Neo-Confucianists strongly discriminated against the women. Women’s lives were severely constrained by the San Gang Wu Chang (三纲五常), and the female foot-binding began to prevail in the whole country. In addition, literati and officialdom had serious prejudice against women’s nature, they believed that women were born with licentiousness, evil, jealousy and ferociousness (Fang Jianxin & Xu Jijun, 2011).

In Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), the civil marriage system established the absolutely dominant position of male in marriage, the wife was the private property of husband. Except during festivals, women were hardly allowed to go outside, they could only socialize with relatives and neighbors. Some officials of royal court with strong patriarchal thoughts even argued that, women’s contact with relatives and neighbors should also be strictly restricted. Public places including Yamen (衙门) and schools closed the doors on women, only few Buddhist temples were open to both male and female.

In Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the ruling class emphasized the ideal of the chaste and undefiled (贞洁) women, it was shameful for widows to marry again and “widows preserving chastity after the death of their husbands” was encouraged and rewarded by the country. Furthermore, the Ming Law stipulated that the legal inheritance rights of daughters were recognized only when there were no other male heirs in the same family, which was obviously a weakening of female’s inheritance rights (Zhang Zhouguo,

2009). The Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) was the end of China's feudal society, during this time, women had to strictly follow the San Cong Si De (三从四德). Under the ruling of patriarchy, Chinese women were forced to withdraw from the political and economic fields of the country and they fell to the bottom level of the society, which led to the lack of their identity as a social person.

### 3.1.2 The Preliminary Liberation

The era from the end of the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China was a period of transformation of Chinese society. Women also began to be liberated to a certain extent. People who were influenced by Western emancipatory thoughts demanded that women should enjoy the same rights as men. The Chinese word “女权” appeared at the end of the 19th century, it was regarded as the right or power of female. In the *Modern Chinese Dictionary* published by Guangming Book Company in 1933, “女权” means that women have the same rights as men in society, politics and education (Suto Mizuyo, 2010). *The Discussions on Women Series* published by Shanghai Bookstore contained 148 articles, which discussed Chinese women's lives from 1910 to 1920. These articles covered a wide range of topics, including women's education, political participation, family life, labor status and childbearing (Luo Jialun et al., 1923).

During the period of Republic of China, women began to enjoy the equal opportunity to study. The Nanjing government took a series of education reform measures, allowed girls and boys to study in the same school, established girls' middle schools and girls' normal schools. According to incomplete statistics in 1922, the number of female college students accounted for 1.99% of all students in the whole country (Du Xueyuan, 1995). Although the female education was still extremely backward in China, it was a huge improvement for Chinese women to obtain the equal rights to study. Education enabled more women to get modern knowledge, they started to realize the importance of personality independence and economic independence, and tried to improve their social status.

In the period of modern capitalist economic development, the New Culture Movement (新文化运动) and the May Fourth Movement (五四运动) brought new trends to Chinese society in the late 1910s and 1920s. During the New Culture Movement, the public opinion paid more attention to female's liberation. A large number of progressive women became the main force of female's liberation movement, they made great efforts to fight for equal rights for women. Marriage equality had been one of the social focuses during this period, many influential female writers including Bing Xin and Zhang Ailing, strongly advocated the freedom of love and marriage in their books. Influenced by such social circumstance, more and more Chinese women began to pursue freedom of marriage, and resist arranged marriage by family. According to a survey involving 835 Chinese women conducted in 1923, 21 of the 395 married people got married freely, accounting for 5.00%; whereas 20 of the 130 engaged people were engaged freely, accounting for 15.00%. Although the average ratio of arranged marriages still dominated accounting for 70.00% of the cases, compared with the previous situation there was nevertheless great improvement in the freedom of marriage in China (*Sociology Journal*, 1924).

One of the main aims of the May Fourth Movement was pursuing female liberation. Many progressive young people strongly demanded to break the feudal shackles imposed on women. Articles published in the journal *New Youth* (新青年) put forward new feminism, discussed the spirit of female independence, and demanded gender equality. Affected by the May Fourth Movement, part of Chinese women began to be more aware of independence fighting for their equal rights. Chinese females were more liberated mentally and physically after the May Fourth Movement. There even appeared female elites then, who not only strove to realize their self-worth, but were also active in fighting for women's equal rights and supporting the Anti-Japanese War.

Many feminist activists of May Fourth Movement became attracted by Marxism and the newly established Communist Party. In 1922, the Central Committee of the



Communist Party of China issued *The Chinese Communist Party's Views on the Current Situation*, in which it clearly stated that women had the same rights as men (1922). In the subsequent legislative items, women's rights were emphasized again, including rights in politics, economy, culture, family and marriage. Before the founding of the PRC, laws and regulations concerning the protection of women's rights and interests were formulated, including the Resolution on Women's Issues, Regulations on the Protection of Young Women, Marriage Law, Resolutions on Marriage Issues. Under the influence of modern democratic movements, Chinese women's status were continuously improved, at least on paper, the change could be seen obviously (Liu Ningyuan, 2013).

From the late Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China, Chinese women began to be liberated to some extent. However, the social mainstream values were still dominated by the patriarchy and the "Three Obedience and Four Virtues" culture and China's traditional gender order had not been changed fundamentally. The majority of Chinese women were still in oppressed positions, their status and rights had not been substantially improved, and the gender equality was far from being realized.

### **3.2 Contemporary Chinese Women's Family Life and Employment Situation**

This part introduces the family life of contemporary Chinese women from aspects of family status and health conditions. It also analyzes the current employment situation of Chinese women in conjunction with a recent authoritative social survey. The description about contemporary Chinese women's living and working provides an important social background and cultural foundation for the analysis of empirical research.

### 3.2.1 Contemporary Chinese Women's Family Life

Chapter 3.2.1 mainly talks about contemporary Chinese women's family status and health conditions, which have been key parts of their family life (Xu Anqi, 2000). With the change of social system, contemporary Chinese women's family status has been rising, but still restricted by patriarchal culture. The increased number of elderly parturient women and the huge pressure of most professional women, make many contemporary Chinese women face serious health threats.

#### *Family Status*

After the founding of the PRC, Chinese women's family status had been greatly improved. Their personal rights in the family had been further protected, and women had more initiative in the family affairs. In 1954, the first Constitution of the PRC clearly stipulated that "women and men have equal rights in the family life" (Constitution, 1954). The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China required that "women enjoy the same civil rights as men" (Marriage Law, 1980). The Inheritance Law of the People's Republic of China stipulated that men and women enjoy the equal ownership and inheritance rights of family property; husband and wife are the co-owners of family property (Inheritance Law, 1985). The Anti-Domestic Violence Law of the People's Republic of China prohibited any domestic violence (Anti-Domestic Violence Law, 2015). According to the statistical data of the third survey of Chinese women's social status in 2011, nearly 70.00% of Chinese women were able to participate in the decision-making of family affairs to some extent (China National Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

However, due to the influence of the deep-rooted patriarchal culture, coupled with the fact that feminism and related modern theoretical gender studies have not been taken seriously in China, the contemporary Chinese society still acquiesces in the traditional view of "Men work outside and women take care of family (男主外, 女主内)." And the worse situation is that most women have to work hard outside for making money in

addition to taking care of family, which brings them double pressures. Apart from this, there are still lots of Chinese women who suffer from domestic violence. According to the statistics from the China Women's Federation in 2016, 30.00% of Chinese married women had suffered from domestic violence, one woman suffered from domestic violence every 7.4 seconds in China. Nearly 157,000 Chinese women committed suicide each year, 60.00% of them were due to domestic violence (China Women's Federation, 2016). China is one of the few countries where women are more likely to commit suicide than men.

Chinese women's family status has also been influenced by a traditional kind of family relationship, namely the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Generally speaking, the relationship between husband and wife, and the relationship between parents and children are the two basic relationships in Chinese family (Liu Jianfeng, 2013). However, the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is a special one. Formed based on the intermediary of the above two relationships, it is neither stable nor close. In China, younger women usually maintain close contact with their parents-in-law, or even live together with them. Due to different living habits and values, it is easy for mother-in-law and daughter-in-law to have conflicts. Many of the contradictions are caused by different parenting ideas, or cost of raising children (Liu Jianfeng, 2013).

### *Health Conditions*

After entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Chinese government formulated special regulations for improving Chinese women's health level, including the *Program for the Development of Chinese Women (2001-2010)* and the *Program for the Development of Chinese Women (2011-2020)*. Both of the programs required to provide more social medical and health support to women, including preventive inspection, childbirth service and health education. According to the survey data released by the China National Bureau of Statistics in 2019, the proportion of women who accepted general health check went up to 68.70% in 2013, with an increase of 7.50% from 2010. The

prenatal examination rate of Chinese women steadily increased from 83.70% in 1996 to 96.60% in 2018. China's maternal mortality rate continued to decrease, from 1500/100,000 in 1949 to 17.8/100,000 in 2019 (China National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

In 2012, the State Council extended female's paid maternity leave to 14 weeks. Moreover, those who miscarried within 4 months of pregnancy were entitled to 15 days of maternity leave, while those who miscarried beyond 4 months of pregnancy were entitled to 42 days of maternity leave. Women's maternity allowance has been calculated and paid at the monthly mean wage of the prior-year of the employees from the unit where the beneficiary works (Labor Law, 2010). Compared with developed countries, China's social support for women's health, especially for pregnant and parturient women's health is still very limited. It can be found that Chinese women's maternity leave is relatively short, the maternity allowance is low, and there is lack of corresponding policies, facilities and subsidies for supporting women's postpartum life. At the moment there is even no unified legislation for paternity leave.

After the Universal Two-child Policy came into effect, the number of elderly parturient women has gradually increased, the number of pregnant women who were with health risks has been rising as well. According to Yan Songbiao, who is the director of Beijing Obstetrics and Gynecology Hospital, in the first year after the Universal Two-child Policy was implemented, the ratio of high-risk pregnant women reached about 82.50% in his hospital. Overnutrition or poor nutrition, pregnancy comorbidities, scarred uterus and mental illnesses were main health problems for pregnant women (*Xinhua Net*, 2017). Zhang Yan, the doctor from the Department of Gynecology of the Third Hospital of Beijing University, said that advanced age was the most common high-risk factor for Chinese women's pregnancy now. Except for this, overnutrition in pregnant women was becoming more and more common; mental illness was also a universal problem. According to clinical observation, about 1/10 pregnant women had psychological problems such as depression and anxiety. Environmental factors, as well as lifestyle

factors such as drugs, smoking and alcohol could also affect women's health during pregnancy (*Xinhua Net*, 2017).

### 3.2.2 Contemporary Chinese Women's Employment Situation

Since 1949, the Chinese government had formulated and implemented Labor Law of the People's Republic of China, Employment Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China, and Labor Contract Law of the People's Republic of China, aiming to eliminate gender discrimination in employment, promote men and women enjoy equal pay for equal work, protect women's equal employment rights. After the reform and opening up (改革开放), with the transformation of China's economic system, the adjustment of industrial structure, and the changes in supply and demand in the labor market, issues of limited employment channels for Chinese women have been improved greatly. Especially the development of non-state-owned economy offered more job opportunities to women. In 2018, the proportion of female employees in China reached 43.70%. In addition, China also began to attach importance to strengthening labor protection for female employees, promulgated the *Special Regulations on Labor Protection for Female Employees* in 2012. In 2017, the ratio of enterprises carrying out labor protection for female employees increased to 71.20% (China National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

Although the total number of China's female laborers had been increasing, the female labor force participation rate was declining. In the 1980s, 80.00% of female population was engaged in labor. However, by 2017, it dropped to 68.80% (China Women's Federation, 2019). Previous survey data showed that China's population policy had impact on women's participation in social labor. In the early days of the PRC women were encouraged to have more children and most of them gave birth to more than three children. Consequently, women's time were almost fully devoted to running the family, and the proportion of female's participating in social labor was low (Zhang Yan, 2017). After the 1980s, because of the influence of the One-child Policy, more urban women

participated in social labor and were able to leave more time for themselves in the workplace. From 2013, one of the major features of China's labor market was the steady decline in labor participation rate, women's labor participation rate went down much faster than that of men. Some scholars believe that the two-child policy is one of the reasons for this phenomenon (Zhang Yan, 2017).

In China, employment discrimination against women has always existed, and even intensified in the recent decades. Due to the lack of corresponding legal basis, most violations of women's labor rights cannot be sanctioned by laws. According to *Human Rights Watch*, in 2018, 19.00% of Chinese recruitment advertising of civil servants mentioned "male first", "suitable for male" or "only male". As mentioned in Chapter 3.1, because of the influence of patriarchal culture and the social stereotype, jobs which require high academic qualifications and professional skills are still dominated by men, and many Chinese women have to be engaged in so called low-level occupations (Chen Xiaoyan, 2017).

*Zhaopin.com* (智联招聘) conducted a survey named "Current Situation of Chinese Women's Employment" in 2019. A total of 86,510 samples were collected. Among all the participants, unmarried people accounted for 56.20% and married people accounted for 43.80%. The age of the informants was between 25-40 years old. Urban residents accounted for 98.00% of respondents. Here are some of the findings in the survey:

- 1) From the perspective of human resource cost, pregnancy and childbirth can be regarded as the main factors of increasing women's hiring cost. Female employees' work efficiency will easily decline after giving birth. Many employers who seek to maximize their interests try to avoid hiring female.
- 2) In 2019, the average monthly income of Chinese women was around 23.00% lower than that of Chinese men, the overall income growth of women was 8.00% lower than that of men.

Gender	Average Monthly Income
Female	1,125 USD
Male	1,470 USD

*Table 4. Average monthly income of urban Chinese female and male in 2019*

- 3) In China, there is a serious shortage of women in high-level positions in the companies, which is one of critical factors that expands the income gap between Chinese males and females. Among all the surveyed participants who were engaged in senior management positions, men accounted for 81.30%, while women only accounted for 18.70%. In addition, the legal retirement age for women is at least five years earlier than that for men, which also reduces women's potential income.
- 4) Employers prefer to provide more training and promotion opportunities for male employees than for female employees.

Level \ Gender	General Staff	Low-level Managers	Middle management	Senior Management
Female	9.70%	17.60%	16.50%	14.50%
Male	10.80%	19.30%	20.40%	27.30%

*Table 5. Possibility of promotion for female and male of different position levels in the coming year (2020)*

According to this survey, main issues faced by Chinese women during employment are: vague career planning, declined career ambition, lack of professional training, insufficient time investment, lack of self-confidence, and difficulty in balancing work and family (Zhaopin.com, 2017).

## 4 METHODOLOGY

Factors that affect Chinese women's current childbearing willingness have important guiding significance for me to determine the key research directions for my study. I have found representative literature, which have discussed factors affecting Chinese women's current fertility planning. I design empirical research scheme on the basis of classifying and integrating the factors from the literature review. Chapter 4.1 introduces factors which have been found influencing Chinese women's childbearing willingness. Chapter 4.2 talks about the research methods and data gathering.

### 4.1 Literature Review

Women's willingness for childbearing can generally reflect impacts of the population regulations on them in certain aspects (Li Mengna, 2017). It is a valid method to determine my research perspectives and dimensions on the basis of summarizing factors influencing Chinese women's fertility planning. According to the literature review, it can be found that Chinese women's willingness for childbearing has been influenced by various factors.

Tang Shiqi demonstrated that the mode of home-based elderly-care has been still dominating in China. There were some couples hope to increase guarantee for their future elderly-care by increasing the number of children in the family (Tang Shiqi, 2018). According to the data of a survey about two-child families' happiness index in Guangdong Province in 2017, 63.00% of participants agreed that the arrival of the second child enhanced their family happiness level (*Southcn*, 2017).

Mao Zhuoyan's research showed that factors from individual, family and society together influenced Chinese professional women's fertility intention. He argued that quite a lot of women took account into individual economic capability, family



relationship and social support when deciding whether to have a child (Mao Zhuoyan & Luo Hao, 2013).

Shen Feiwei's study showed that huge financial pressure impeded most Chinese young couples' planned parenthood. In face of soaring housing prices and rising living cost, lots of young couples would definitely not think about having a second child, if they were unable to be supported by good financial condition (Shen Feiwei & Chen Xiaoling, 2013).

Liu Mina believed that factors of age, education level, occupation and income could affect married women's willingness to bear a child. Her study showed that married women with older age were willing to have more children compared to younger married ladies; those enterprising women who preferred to pursue career success usually tend to consider having only one child, or even giving up fertility (Liu Mina, 2010).

In Li Jingya's study, there were two main reasons why Chinese professional women hold passive attitudes towards two-child policy: as more and more Chinese women have reached higher education level, many of them preferred to realize their self-worth in career, but not in the family; huge cost of childbearing caused great financial pressure on most professional women. (Li Jingya, 2017).

Han Xiaoxiao and Zhang Hong argued that the Chinese traditional gender order imperceptibly forced most professional women to give up their jobs and return to families after giving birth. Burden and pressure of taking care of family easily led to women's negative attitude towards to having a second child (Han Xiaoxiao & Zhang Hong, 2015).

Qi Saisai's study showed that the prevalent discrimination against women in the workplace seriously inhibited women's willingness to bear a child. Employing female has been regarded as the potential risk of human resources cost. Pregnancy and

childbirth would probably lead women into a very disadvantaged position in the workplace, or even make them lose jobs. More and more professional women chose to give up fertility because of the pressure from the workplace (Qi Saisai, 2017).

In Liu Mina's article, the author thought that China's laws and social welfare for protecting women's rights and interests were still not perfect, there was lack of corresponding well-being scheme to support the two-child policy. The basic benefits for female employees such as paid-leave and maternity allowance were unable to provide strong support to help professional women to reduce childbearing burden. There was shortage of legal basis for protecting women's labor rights (Liu Mina, 2010).

According to the literature review, it can be seen that factors which affect Chinese women's childbearing willingness include individual condition, employment circumstance, social support and traditional expectations on gender roles.

## **4.2 Data Collection**

In my thesis, the family life and career development of Chinese professional women during two-child period are the two main research directions of my research. Personal health, family relationship and financial situation are selected as aspects for studying on the impacts of the Universal Two-child Policy on Chinese professional women's family life. The concept of career development in this study is considered to be an overview of the whole process of participating in social labor, which includes the stage of entering the workplace, and the period of career promotion. I examine the impacts of the Universal Two-child Policy on Chinese professional women's career development from the angles of individuals, companies and society.

I conduct Semi-structured interview as the main way of data collection of this study because of its relatively high flexibility and adaptability. According to Tim May,

“Questions of semi-structured are normally specified, but the interviewer is freer to probe beyond the answers in a manner” (Tim May, 2011). This data collection way allows me to follow a specific purpose and collect data in depth with a targeted manner according to research plan. It can facilitate the mutual influence and interaction between the two parties in the conversation, both factual investigation and opinion consultation can be carried out during the interview process (Tim May, 2011). All the interview questions used for empirical survey are designed based on the key research directions which have been mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 4.2.

Snowball sampling is employed in this research design. This method is usually regarded as a good way for conducting exploratory research with relatively a small and specific population which is hard to locate or identify. According to Ashley Crossman,

Snowball sampling refers to a non-probability sampling technique in which a researcher begins with a small population of known individuals and expands the sample by asking those initial participants to identify others that should participate in the study. In other words, the sample starts small but “snowballs” into a larger sample through the course of the research.

(Ashley Crossman, 2019, para1)

In my study, there were small groups of people who were initial informants, they were asked to nominate their friends, who were then interviewed. I targeted my informants as 20-50 years old women who have lived in Beijing. The informants were supposed to be with diverse occupations, varying income and different educational backgrounds, college students were also included. I first confirmed five friends of my own, who were eligible as informants and had agreed to participate in the interviews, they certainly knew other qualified informants and could help to locate them, then those individuals knew other ones, and introduced them to the interviews. All informants were divided into married group and unmarried group, the married group included those with no children, one child and two children. Beijing has been selected as the target place

because of the high heterogeneity and mobility of its population, which could be more representative.

A total of 23 people accepted my interview invitation, aged from 20 to 48 years old, all lived in Beijing. There were 16 married women, seven of them were mothers of two children, four of them were mothers of one child, five of them were without any children. There were seven unmarried informants, including four college students.

Total number of informants	Number of informants in each group	
23	Married women: 16	Mothers of two children: 7
		Mothers of one child: 4
		Women without children: 5
	Unmarried women: 7	College students: 4
		Others: 3

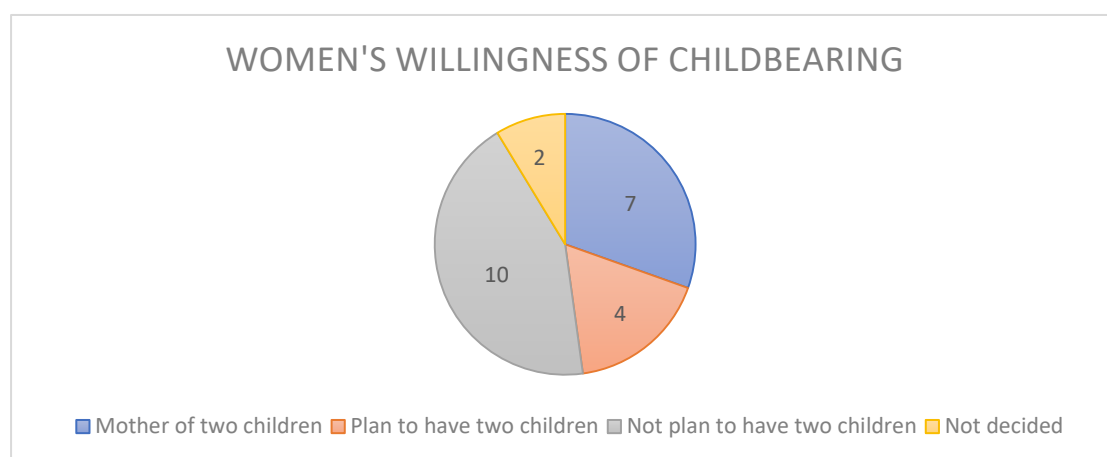
*Table 6. Basic information of the sample of interviews*

The main purpose of interviews is to find out informants' views of the Universal Two-child Policy, and to look into how the Universal Two-child Policy affects their family life and career development. Questions for interviews are open-ended, which leave enough space for further discussing, except for those about informants' basic information. In consideration of protecting participants' privacy, and creating a comfortable and safe interview environment, all the interviews were conducted in the form of online voice call anonymously. All interviews were proceeded in Chinese language. Due to the small number of informants and the fact that a few of them failed to provide relatively representative answers on certain questions, the interviews data are analyzed in combination with relevant existing literature findings, so as to get better understanding and make more comprehensive conclusion of this empirical research.

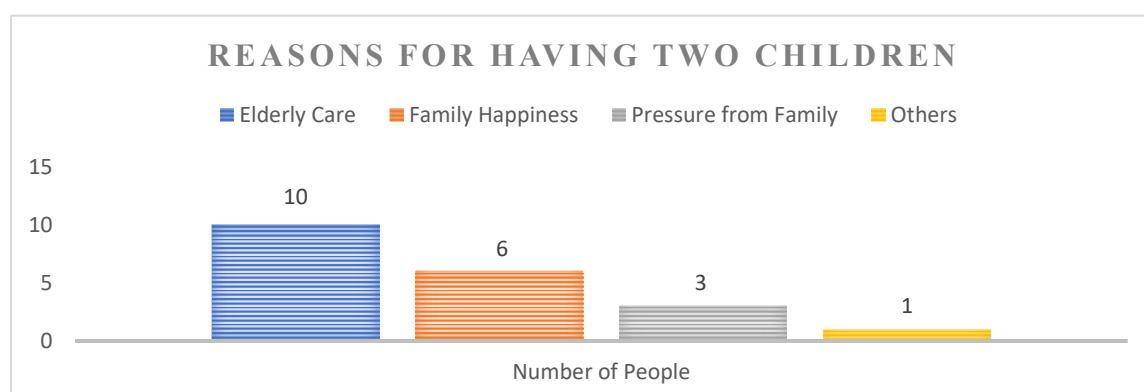
## 5 EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

The fifth part of the thesis tries to find out impacts of the Universal Two-child Policy on Chinese professional women. Chapter 5.1 discusses how the Universal Two-child Policy influence Chinese professional women's family life, Chapter 5.2 talks about the effects of the Universal Two-child Policy on Chinese professional women's career development.

Among all the 23 informants, excepting for seven mothers of two children, only four informants expressed their intention to have two children; ten people would definitely not have a second child; two people still had not made the final decision on this issue.



*Figure 1. Women's willingness of childbearing according to interview data*



*Figure 2. Reasons for women to have two children according to interview data*

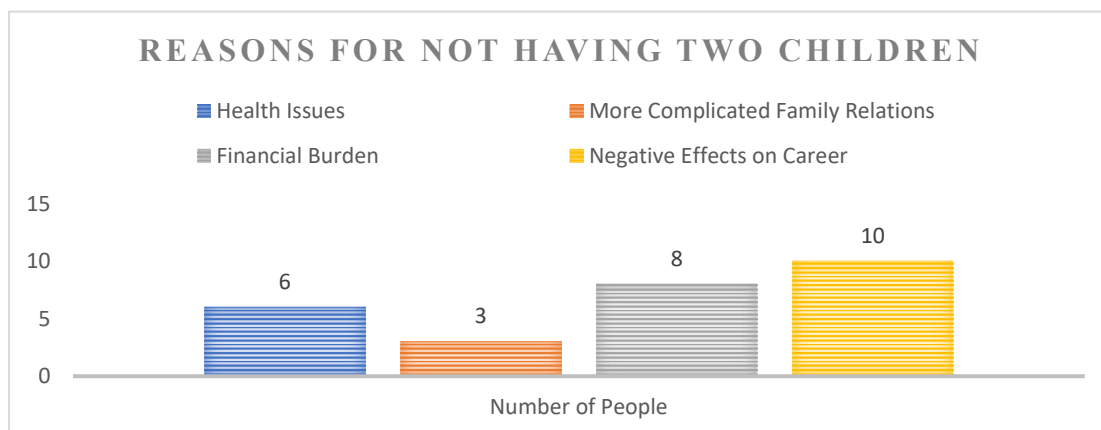


Figure 3. Reasons for women not to have two children according to interview data

## 5.1 Impacts on Family Life

According to information obtained from the interviews, the impacts of the Universal Two-child Policy on Chinese professional women's family life were multi-faceted. Part of informants gave positive comments on the new regulations: relaxing the number of children for couples indicated that Chinese women's reproductive rights started to be emancipated to a certain extent; more children in the family tended to provide more guarantee for home-based elderly-care in the future, and promoted some women's family happiness. However, negative influences of the policy were also discussed by the informants: more burden of childbirth and parenting might lead to more physical and mental health pressures to professional women; rising cost of raising children have resulted in big financial crisis to some parents; the two-children model can even make family relationship more complicated and less harmonious.

### 5.1.1 Emancipation of Reproductive Rights

When it came to the positive significance of the Universal Two-child Policy, more than 4/5 of the informants believed that, compared with the One-child Policy, the new population regulations emancipated Chinese women's reproductive rights to some

extent, meanwhile the policy satisfied some families' demand of having more children. Half of the mothers of two children who joined the interviews mentioned that they had no longer worried about being forced abortion, fined, or dismissed when noticing they were pregnant with a second child.

During the family planning period, people's reproductive rights were largely controlled by the state and citizens were deprived of rights to make decisions about their own reproduction. Women had always been considered as the most immediate victims of the One-child Policy. The forced abortions and sterilizations not only caused health damage to them, but also resulted in great negative effects on their daily life and work (Lorna S. Wei. 2019). The 2013 partial two-child policy, meant that part of the reproductive rights started to be returned to individuals gradually. In 2016, the Universal Two-child Policy further loosened restrictions for couples who were willing to have two children, citizens' decision-making rights for reproduction was more expanded. Although there still exists limitations to people's reproductive rights, the arrival of the Universal Two-child Policy indicates that, the formulation and implementation of China's population policy starts to be more humanized.

### **5.1.2 More Guarantee for Elderly-care**

When answering "Why will (did) you choose to have a second child?", ten informants, including all the seven mothers of two children, talked about the elderly-care issue. They showed worries and dissatisfaction with current social public welfare and pension insurance system. These informants emphasized that traditional home-based elderly-care mode would still be their first choice of elderly-care in the future, which could make them feel more reliable and secure.

China is currently facing serious population aging crisis, with 176 million people aged over 65 in 2019, however, the social public elderly-care service has lagged far behind. As of 2020, there were only 34,000 nursing homes in China. The number of people who

had been enrolled in the national pension insurance system was 986 million, there were still more than 100 million people were not covered by public pension insurance system (Zhiyan Consultation, 2020). As the population ageing accelerated, governments' elderly-care budgets have been raised year by year, which already brought enormous pressure on national finances. In 2019, the World Social Insurance Research Center of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences published the *China Pension Actuarial Report 2019-2050*, and pointed out that the cumulative balance of China's basic pension insurance fund was 426 billion USD by 2019, and it is predicted that the money would run out in 2035 (*China Pension*, 2019). Coupled with the fact that home-based elderly-care has been a long-standing tradition in China, most Chinese people still prefer to rely on family elderly-care mode. Under the background of the Universal Two-child Policy, couples get chances to have two children, which may provide more security for their elderly life in the future.

During the interviews, two informants mentioned their concern about "shidu" (失独) family. In order to avoid the tragedy of the "shidu" family happening to themselves, they chose to have more children to reduce the risk of their elderly life. In China, parents who have lost their only child are known as "shidu" families. The One-child Policy had prevented around 400 million childbirths (Alice Z, 2020), but also left bereft mothers and fathers who lost their only child to illness or an accident, and were too old to conceive again. As of 2018, the total number of China's only children aged 15-30 was about 190 million, four out of every 10,000 died for various reasons each year, which means adding 76,000 "shidu" families every year. By 2018 the number of such families had exceeded 10 million in China (CADAC, 2018). Those parents who lost their only child had to face big challenges from all sides of life such as problems with finances, physical and mental health care.

In addition, four mothers of two children who were interviewed believed that the change of family structure affected by the two-child policy could help to relieve the stress of family elderly-care, parents of two children would get more access to financial



support and life care from children in the future. One informant gave an interesting analogy,

“After giving birth to the second child, my family structure changed from an inverted triangle (4-2-1) to an inverted trapezoid (4-2-2) which looked more stable than before, my two children would be able to share the duties and cost of family elderly-care together in the future”.

(Informant 1)

As mentioned before, the home-based elderly-care mode has always been dominated in Chinese society, the traditional culture of “filial piety” (孝道) emphasizes children’s responsibility of supporting parents. Affected by the One-child Policy, the majority of Chinese families have a 4-2-1 family structure, which means, two middle-aged adults supporting four elderly people and one child in a family. According to the 2018 national survey statistical data, 35.00% of Chinese families had to support four elderly people, while 49.00% of families need to support two to three elderly people. 35.60% of families spend at least more than 10,000RMB on the elderly-care each year. Most Chinese middle-aged people were burdened with heavy pressure from supporting their parents (CADC, 2018). Some people believed that the two-child policy could help with reducing the burden of family elderly-care to some extent, as the number of children increased in a family, children’s duties of taking care of parents could be shared.

### 5.1.3 Improvement of Family Happiness

According to the *Report of 2017 Happiness Index Survey on China’s Two-child Family*, 60.00% of China’s two-child families agreed that the arrival of the second child significantly enhanced their family happiness level (*Report*, 2017). During the interviews, six people agreed that having a second child would promote their family happiness, one of them especially talked about enjoying the experiences of accompanying children’s growth. According to Catherine Gueguen, daily parent-

children interaction can effectively increase women's satisfaction, joy and comfort level in family life. More companionship from children plays a positive role in alleviating mothers' stress and enhancing their mental health and physical function. In addition, children can also help couples to divert attention from each other, thereby reducing the conflicts between themselves (Catherine Gueguen, 2016).

During the interviews, I also found a typical case about "the two-child policy improving women's family happiness". A mother of two children talked about her own experience:

"I had been indifferently treated by my husband because I gave birth to a girl during the One-child Policy period. Three years ago, I gave birth to a boy, both my husband and mother-in-law felt excited about it. My status in the family has been improving since then, the two-child policy can be described as a life-saving straw to me, which not only saved my marriage, but also improved my "family happiness".

(Informant 2)

As mentioned in Chapter 2.2.2, affected by the Chinese traditional culture of patriarchy (父权), patrilocal residence (父居) and patrilineal lineage (父系), many Chinese families have strong desire to have sons. In the One-child Policy period, some women who gave birth to a girl had always been with low family status. However, with the implementation of the Universal Two-child Policy, they seem to see a turning point in their life.

### 5.1.4 Increased Physical and Mental Health Burden

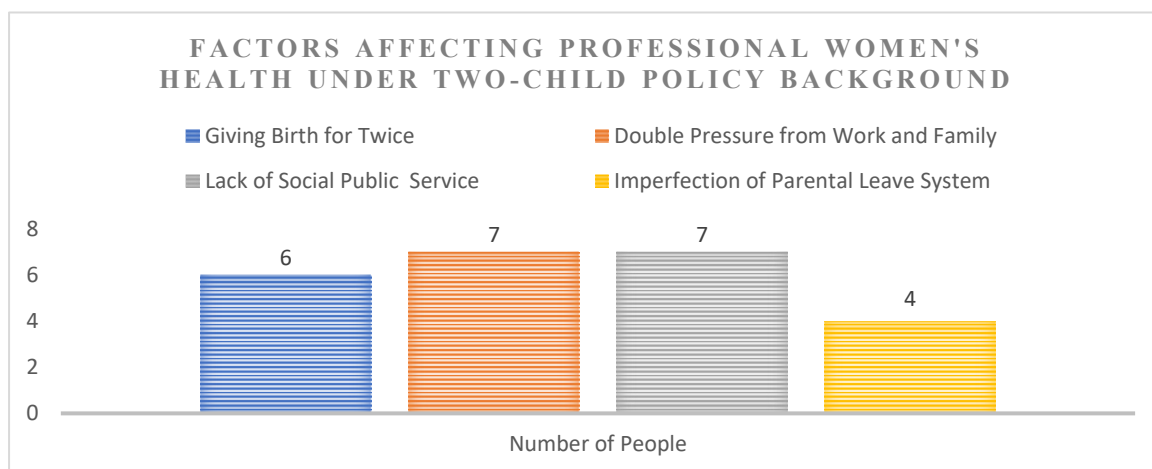


Figure 4. Factors affecting professional women's health under two-child policy background according to interview data

According to the interview data, six people, including three mothers of one child and three unmarried women, talked about their worries about health issues that may be caused by giving birth twice. Two women over 40 years old mentioned their hard experiences after giving birth to the second child, except for the long postpartum recovery period, they suffered from severe postpartum depression.

Women's physical and psychological burden would be increased during the entire process of pregnancy, childbirth and lactation. Giving birth to a second child means to bear such burden once more. Based on the *Statistical Bulletin of China's Health Development*, as of 2020, there were 334 million women of childbearing age in China, the fertility rate of second-child was only 2.95%. Among those who chose to have a second child, people aged 35-49 accounted for 70.00% (National Health Commission, 2020). The analysis report of *China Women's Daily* argued that the best childbearing age for Chinese women is 24 to 30. Female over 35 years old can be regarded as elderly parturient women, whose reproductive risk increases significantly, including miscarriage, premature birth, pregnancy complications and Down's syndrome. As the probability of natural birth for elderly parturient women has decreased, cesarean section

may cause severe harm to parturient women's physical health, especially for those who had already experienced cesarean section before, who might face more risks during the second childbirth (China Women's Federation, 2018).

During the interviews, seven out of eleven mothers complained that except for taking care of children, they had to handle with huge pressure from the workplace, and therefore they had suffered from various degrees of physical or mental health problems after having children. China's patriarchal culture requires women to take on more duties of taking care of family and children, "parenthood" has been not regarded as a responsibility to be shouldered as a family unit, but a label attached to married women. Due to the dual stress from both family and workplace, many Chinese professional women are facing unprecedented health challenges.

There were also seven informants, including five mothers of two children and two mothers of one child, who complained about the insufficiency of public child-care facilities for infants aged 0-3, which objectively increased their burden of parenting, especially physical and psychological pressure. According to the *Analysis Report on Market Prospects and Investment Strategic Planning of China's Child Care Industry* released by the Qianzhan Industry Research Institute, in 2017, the number of children aged 0-3 in China was close to 40 million, but there were only 55,100 nurseries. Among these nurseries, private ones of chain brands accounted for the majority, but their high price exceeded affordability of most ordinary families; crèches affiliated to state-owned enterprises, which were opened during the planned economy period have been gradually shut down; small nursery institutions with lower price accounted for only less than 10.00% of the total. As of 2018, the nursery attendance rate of Chinese children aged 0-3 was only about 4.00% (Qianzhan Industry Research Institute, 2019). Therefore, the task of caregiving for 0-3 years old infants in China are mainly undertaken by families, and mothers have been considered to take on more child-care responsibilities, which undoubtedly causes great physical and mental challenge for most Chinese professional women who have only three months of statutory maternity

leave. Based on the interviews data, all professional women with two children who participated in the interviews spent an average of 8-9 hours in the workplace, 1-2 hours on housework, 6-7 hours on taking care of children per day. Their average sleep time was less than 5 hours per day, long-term lack of rest and sleep led to their weakness and depression.

During the interviews, four informants including two college students pointed out that China's parental leave system needed to be further improved. They believed that the shared parental leave system might help to alleviate family pressure, especially physical burden on professional women. At present, China offers new mothers at least 98 days of maternity leave, but does not have unified legislation for paternity leave. Paternity leave regulations are implemented on a municipal or provincial level, and can vary from anywhere between 0 to 30 days. "In large part, men's ability and willingness to take time off has been influenced by their workplace culture and the attitudes of their superiors" (Jiang Lai, 2020), therefore, the implementation of paternity leave still remains a big challenge in China. Proposals about shared parental leave system, which was raised by Lin Yong, the professor of South China Normal University, had elicited doubt, criticism and even ridicule. People believed that the new proposals went against China's traditional gender order, in addition, there were also employers who were worried about the increasing hiring cost of male employees (Jiang Lai, 2020).

### **5.1.5 More Complicated Family Relationship**

In the interviews, all the mothers of two children agreed that, their family relationships became more difficult to be dealt with after they gave birth to the second child; three women who were not intending to have the second child believed that more children in the family would cause more family conflicts.

Among the informants mentioned above, three of them talked about that their family relationships even experienced serious disharmony due to the dispute among family

members over the issue about whether to have a second child. Since the Universal Two-child Policy was implemented, the first thing that many Chinese families have to face is deciding whether to have a second child. In China, family members involved in such decision-making generally include husband, wife, and their respective parents. Family members' different considerations and demands on the two-child issue can easily cause quarrels and conflicts, which makes the family relationship be more complex and disharmonious.

All the eleven mothers in the interviews mentioned that they often squabbled with other family members over child-care issues. It is common that conflicts happen between husband and wife because of their different childbearing ideas. However, there is another kind of representative "family war" in most Chinese families. As mentioned in Chapter 5.1.4, due to the lack of public child-care institutions for infants, many professional women have to leave their young children under the care of the elderly in the family. Because of different parenting ideas between the two generations, conflicts between children' parents and grandparents can happen a lot. This phenomenon makes some people feel that more children in the family would undoubtedly lead to more complex family relationship.

In addition to the above mentioned, a mother with one child talked about her worries as follows:

"Me and my husband have been used to the life with only one child. After we made the decision to have the second child, we have been both seriously anxious about how to balance the relationship between two children."

(Informant 3)

In most only-child families, the child can generally get all love from parents. However, with the arrival of the second child in the family, parents are bound to transfer part of their love and attention to new the family member, which may lead to a sense of loss in

the first child. If the relations between the two children could not be balanced well, it is likely to cause conflicts between siblings. In addition, in some families with boy-preference, the son tends to receive more love and attention, while the daughter would be unfairly treated, which also can add disharmonious factors in the family relations.

### **5.1.6 Increased Financial Burden**

During the interviews, of all the informants who did not plan to have a second child 4/5 mentioned that they were unable to afford the high payments of supporting two children, while all the mothers of two children complained about the increasing cost of raising children, especially the expensive school fees, extracurricular cram classes expenditure, and the high housing price in a top school district.

In 2015, China National Health and Family Planning Commission conducted statistics on the cost of raising children aged 0-5 in Chinese families. Statistical data showed that the average annual direct expenditure on raising 0-5 years old children was 10,500RMB in a Chinese family, this amount rose to over 15,000RMB in urban areas (China National Health and Family Planning Commission, 2015). According to the China National Bureau of Statistics, in 2015, the per capita disposable income of Chinese citizens was 21,966RMB, and 31,195RMB for urban residents (China National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). On the basis of the above statistics, I made a conservative estimate: in a double-employed family, the expenditure of raising one pre-school child accounts for 1/4 of the total disposable household income; while the cost of rearing two children takes up nearly half the disposable household income. This estimate only took account into the direct spending on children, not included indirect or abstract cost such as time and energy investment without compensation, as well as the loss of income led by interrupting one's career. As more and more professional women gave up jobs to take care of children, their overall household income decreased as a result. Under such conditions, it was even more difficult for them to raise two children at the same time.

When posed the question “Do you think the state subsidy (childbirth allowance, maternity leave benefits etc.) will help to relieve your financial pressure for having a second child?”, all eleven mothers and two married women without children gave negative answers. They believed that, compared with the high cost of childbearing and child-rearing, the level of social welfare was far from enough. According to the Social Insurance Law of the People’s Republic of China, “Each employee shall enroll in the maternity insurance system. The employer shall make maternity insurance contributions as set by the State.” (Social Insurance Law, 2010). Employees who are engaged in formal jobs are eligible to be involved in the maternity insurance system, however, there are still people who are employed in “informal ways”, such as part of rural migrant workers in cities and part-time workers, have not been covered by the national maternity insurance. Maternity insurance benefits consist of maternity medical expenses and maternity allowances. The expense beyond which prescribed by laws and regulations during childbirth shall be stood by individuals. “Maternity allowance shall be calculated and paid at the monthly mean wage of the prior-year of the employees from the unit where the beneficiary works” (Social Insurance Law, 2010):

Maternity allowance = monthly mean wage ÷ 30 (days) × days of leave

Due to the social and individual factors, Chinese women’s average wage are generally low, which results in their maternity allowance is relatively few. According to the survey statistics of *Zhaopin.com*, the average monthly income of urban Chinese women was just 1,125 USD. In addition, there are no unified benefits or allowance for supporting family child-rearing in the society, except the Shenzhen municipal government grants conditional subsidy to local children aged 3-6 years old (Shenzhen Education Bureau, 2020). Due to the lack of social financial support, many women have to face tremendous financial pressure after giving birth.

When talking about cost of child-raising, all the mothers interviewed mentioned the high expenditure invested in children’s education. At present, there is still no unified



system of free compulsory education from primary school to university in China. The whole society and schools advocate the so-called elite education and encourage competitive study among students. Fierce competition and huge pressure of National College Entrance Examination (高考) forces Chinese parents to invest lots of money in children's education, which not only for improving their individual quality and skills, but also for creating better objective conditions for children's future development.

In June 2019, the *51JOB* released a report of *Survey on Investment in Children's Education of Chinese Families*. It showed that 38.80% of the surveyed families spent 20.00%-30.00% of their annual household income on children's extracurricular training each year (*51JOB*, 2019). At the beginning of 2020, the *Wenhui bao* and Fudan University jointly launched a survey about Shanghai parents' investment on children's education. It was found that many parents had great obsession with the elite education, 87.00% of parents in the survey sent their children to various kinds of extracurricular cram schools and training classes (*Wenhui bao & Fudan University*, 2020). In addition, the big cost of studying abroad and the surprisingly high housing prices in top school districts inevitably bring more economic pressure to most Chinese ordinary families. Faced with such high cost of raising child, couples who can't foot the bill will naturally choose to have fewer children, or even forgo them altogether.

## **5.2 Impacts on Career Development**

All the people who participated in the interviews agreed that "having a second child would definitely influence women's career progress negatively". Women's willingness to work may decline after them giving birth to the second child. The interruption of career by maternity leave would reduce women's career capital accumulation, which leads to a weakness in their personal competitiveness. The Universal Two-child Policy intensifies the original invisible gender discrimination in the workplace, the behavior of employers to reduce risk of hiring cost has been ultimately reflected in the hindrance

of women's job-seeking and career promotion. The traditional gender order makes some women have to give up opportunities for career development, and return home to take care of children. The lagging public service cannot effectively protect two-child mothers' rights to work, nor provide necessary support for their re-entering into the labor market.

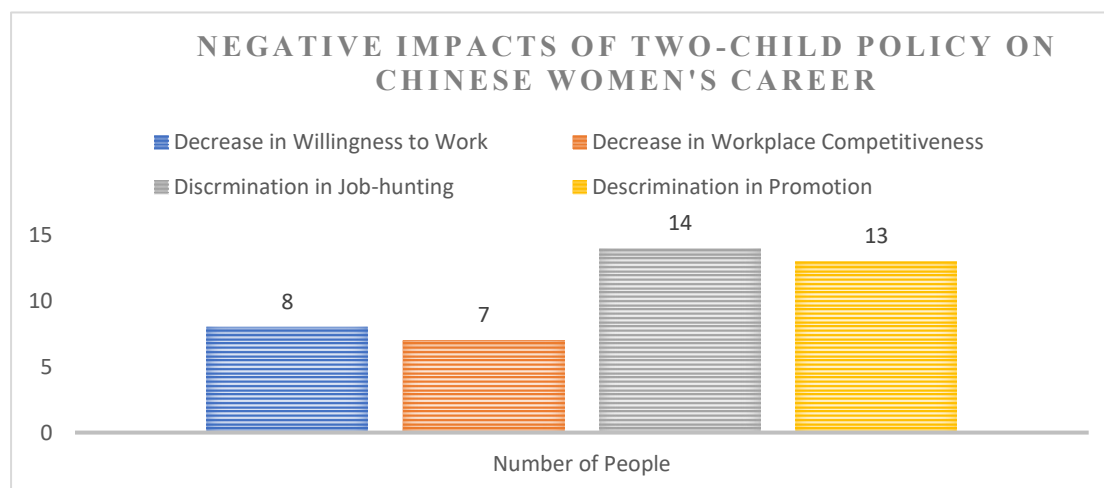


Figure 5. Negative impacts of two-child policy on Chinese women's career according to interview data

### 5.2.1 Decreased Work Willingness and Personal Competitiveness

During the interviews, four informants mentioned that their willingness to work had dropped after having two children, mostly because they were unable to balance family and work at the same time. In China, there are many professional women who are unable to devote themselves to work due to their exhaustion from taking care of children, which leads to their low work efficiency and decreasing enthusiasm for the workplace. According to the data of *2017 Survey on Chinese Women's Fertility and Employment Status* issued by the Institute of Population Economics of Capital University of Economics and Business, around 8.00% of Chinese mothers with two children no longer had any willingness to work after giving birth (*2017 Survey, 2017*).

According to my interviews, more than half of the two-child mothers had been treated

unfairly in workplace due to their pregnancy and/or childbirth, which made them feel frustrated, and unwilling to work. Three of them were transferred to lower-paid positions after taking maternity leave; one informant's employer deliberately made troubles for her when she was pregnant with the second child, intending to force her to quit her job. As more and more discrimination against pregnant women and mothers happened in the workplace, many professional women began to feel unmotivated to work.

Different from the above mentioned, there are also women who give up jobs voluntarily after giving birth to a second child. An unmarried informant said that she was willing to be a full-time mother if she gave birth to two children. Affected by the patriarchal culture, some Chinese women tend to give up job voluntarily after giving birth. They believe that women's main duty is to care for the family, the more children in the family, the more responsibilities they are supposed to undertake. In addition to this situation, some women with older age attach great importance to their health, they are unwilling to take health risk to engage in high-intensity job. A 45-year-old informant mentioned that due to health reason, she would not spend much time or energy on work, nor pursue any career achievements.

Among all the informants, five mothers of two children and one mother of one child agreed that their professional knowledge and technical skills fell behind other colleagues after taking maternity leave, and that their competitiveness in the workplace had been weakened. According to Su Mengmeng, the golden age of female's career generally happens to be their optimal age for childbirth. Taking maternity leave makes them face career interruption, which may weaken their competitiveness in the workplace (Su Mengmeng, 2017). Professional knowledge and technical skills are the main components of human resource elements. During the period of maternity leave, female employees could neither continuously gain work experience nor update their professional knowledge or skills. Taking maternity leave for twice means two interruptions in the accumulation of human resource elements, which can bring more

disadvantageous influences to professional women (Su Mengmeng, 2017). When two-child mothers return to the workplace, it is hard for them to spend much time and energy on improving their professional qualities since they have to look after two children. From the perspective of employers, it is not worth giving such employees opportunities of training or promotion, because they are unable to create more profits and value for companies.

### 5.2.2 Discrimination in the Workplace

As discussed in Chapter 5.2.1, more than half of the two-child mothers interviewed had been treated unfairly in the workplace due to the pregnancy and/or childbirth. All informants agreed that women who have two children may encounter more employment discrimination. Even women who have not yet given birth also face flagrant discrimination, since employers worry that they may take maternity leave one day.

#### *Decreasing Job Opportunities*

One young informant talked about her real experience, which can be regarded as a representative case of job-hunting discrimination.

“My ex-employer took gender and age as the basic threshold in the recruitment. For certain positions that were particularly suitable for female, recruiters limited the age of candidates for those positions to under 25. I was asked about plans of marriage and childbirth during the recruitment interview, they even suggested me not to have children during the first three years at work”.

(Informant 4)

Under the market economy system, except for state-owned enterprises, most companies operate independently and are responsible for their own profits and losses. Capitalists

usually put economic benefits in the first place and follow the principle of “minimum cost and maximum profit” (Lin Jianjun, 2014). The Universal Two-child Policy gives each woman two chances to give birth, under such situation, hiring more females may increase employers’ potential human resource costs. As reproductive behavior has been regarded as labor without market value, employers are bound to be reluctant to pay for the non-market labor (Lin Jianjun, 2014). Therefore, quite a lot of employers try to avoid hiring females, they tend to choose male employees who come with lower hiring cost and can create more profits for the company.

In addition, during the interviews, a 43 years old informant complaint that:

“In the process of job seeking after I gave birth to the second child, I had always been told that my age and capability did not meet job requirements, and been rejected for many times in the labor market”.

(Informant 5)

According to Liu Jinfeng, most of elderly parturient women experienced longer postpartum recovery period, their working skills, physical quality and learning ability declined obviously after giving birth (Liu Jinfeng et al., 2018). In the highly competitive job market, good opportunities are rarely left for them, especially in the labor market where supply already exceeds demand, they have even fewer chances. In China, there are many elderly mothers of two children, who are facing serious job-hunting difficulties.

#### *Reduced Promotion Chances*

After the Universal Two-child Policy was issued, in addition to the decreased job opportunities for women, their promotion chances have also been decreasing. During the interviews, a young informant gave an example of this: her company required that “all candidates for executives of departments must be male”. Regardless of the female employees’ fertility willingness, women have been always considered as the potential

risk group that may affect company's benefits due to pregnancy and/or childbirth.

According to the professor Yang Juhua of the Renmin University of China, on average, a Chinese mother generally spends at least three years on taking care of one child before the child goes to kindergarten. Looking after two children means the mother cannot devote herself to work for at least 5-7 years, which accounts for almost 1/5 of a Chinese female's career life. From the perspective of employers, if an employee was unable to create enough profits for the company within 5 to 7 years, this person is not worth investment of training or promotion. Employers prefer to offer more promotion chances to those who devote themselves more to work and are able to create greater benefits for the company (Yang Juhua, 2014).

Based on the study of *Discussion on the promotion dilemma of female employees*, employers generally invest much time and money to train a female executive, once the female executive takes maternity leave or quits job due to pregnancy or childbirth, the loss of human resource to the company can be huge. Whether re-finding suitable substitute or re-investing in training new people, it is not in line with the original intention of employers to pursue the greatest benefits (Quan Wenjun et al., 2016). Therefore, most companies do not want to take risk to train female employees. The Universal Two-child Policy undoubtedly enhances the potential possibility of female employees' maternity leave, under such situation, more promotion opportunities are left to male candidates, who can be more stable at work and with lower investing risk. And those mothers of two children who have to spend most time on taking care family, have always been excluded from the list of suitable candidates for higher positions.

In the interviews, when it came to career pursuit, a mother of two children who worked part-time job said:

I have given up my career ambition after giving birth to two children. I'm engaged in part-time job now, the informal employment circumstance could

not leave any promotion space for me.

(Informant 6)

In China, it is quite common for many mothers of two children to choose flexible jobs with lower entry threshold in the informal job market. The unstable employment relationship and chaotic company management can hardly provide employees with any space for career development.

### **5.2.3 Lack of Social Support**

It can be found from the interviews that under the background of the Universal Two-child Policy, the protection and support provided by the society for women's labor rights is still insufficient. When posed question "Will you take legal actions to solve problems of employment discrimination?", only two informants gave positive answers. Most of the informants believed that legal means could not help them to solve problems fundamentally, but might waste their time. A young woman said that she had encountered discrimination during job-seeking because of her childbirth plans, but she had to swallow the humiliation silently because there was lack of exact legal basis to support her to fight for her rights.

At present in China, employers' avoidance of hiring female generally will not be sanctioned by laws. According to the Labor Law of the People's Republic of China, the scope of labor dispute case is based on the premise of the signed labor contract, or the established factual labor relationship (Labor Law, 1995). Since job seekers have not signed labor contract or established labor relationship with employers, gender discrimination during recruitment cannot be resolved by labor arbitration. Gender discrimination which happens in the workplace can only be filed in the name of labor dispute, but not sexism (Labor Law, 1995). There is no a specific law against employment discrimination in China, existing laws lack of identification standards and corresponding punishment provisions for employment discrimination. Although the

Women's Federation plays a role in protecting women's rights and interests, it only has power to supervise and advise. In the first year after the Universal Two-child Policy issued, *Contemporary Workers* conducted a survey about the implementation situation of the *Special Provisions on Labor Protection for Female Employees* in China. As a result, 70.00% of professional women who participated in the survey had suffered from unfair treatment in terms of salary, benefits and promotion because of their pregnancy and/or childbirth (*Contemporary Workers*, 2016).

Regarding to the public facilities and services, in addition to the lack of child-care institutions, which has been mentioned in Chapter 5.1.4, some informants also talked about the serious shortage of baby care rooms, which had brought big inconvenience to most mothers' daily life and work. According to the research of *China Business News·New First-tier Cities*, in 2019, there were totally 2,643 standard baby care rooms in China, only seven cities had more than standard 100 baby care rooms. Most of baby care rooms were located in airports or big shopping malls, there were few in the workplaces (*China Business News·New First-tier Cities*, 2019).

Part of the informants gave their own suggestions on helping to improve the professional women's rights protection during the two-child policy period. One people suggested the state to share childbearing cost with individuals and employers together, especially to establish national funds to share the cost of maternity insurance. Most mothers of two children hoped that the government would provide more legal support to protect women's labor rights, especially to help mothers of two children to re-enter the formal labor market. Some other informants hoped that the period of maternity leave could be extended, the maternity allowances could be increased, and the paternity leave could be approved formally by law.



#### 5.2.4 More Job Quitting Due to Traditional Gender Order

When answering “How will you choose if you could not handle with work and family at the same time?” More than half of the informants gave priority to the family. Seven of them mentioned female’s subordinate status and service role in the family, they thought that the more children in the family, the more responsibilities they should take. Four informants believed that compared with career success, raising children would make them feel more satisfied.

Patriarchal culture created the Chinese traditional gender order, which emphasized women’s subordinate position in the family and society. The traditional view of “Men work outside and women take care of family (男主外，女主内)” has been a consensus among the society, and many women have been forced to give up job by their husbands after giving birth. Besides of this, even now there are still some Chinese women hold the traditional feudal marriage views, they give priority of serving family and taking care of children in their marriage life. However, no matter giving up work passively or returning to the family voluntarily, both are for catering to the traditional gender order. The increasing number of children in the family caused by the two-child policy is likely to lead to an increase in the female quit rate in China.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

Based on the analysis of empirical research, the final part of this thesis concludes the impacts of the Universal Two-child Policy on Chinese professional women, conducts discussions on how to protect Chinese professional women's rights and interests better during the Universal Two-child Policy era. Chapter 6.1 gives conclusions, while Chapter 6.2 puts forward advices on protecting Chinese professional women's rights and interests in the new social policy circumstance.

### **6.1 Conclusions**

According to the empirical analysis, the impacts of the Universal Two-child Policy on Chinese professional women's family life and career development are multifaceted. Although the new population policy has brought positive changes to some people's lives, in general, it increases burdens to most professional women, who have to face more obstacles and challenges in their life and work.

The Universal Two-child Policy emancipates Chinese women's reproductive rights to a certain extent, provides more support in home-based elderly-care and helps to enhance people's family happiness level. On the other hand, it brings adverse impacts at the same time. Most professional women's physical and mental health has been more or less affected negatively after having two children, many families are facing great financial pressure led by child-raising, some family relationships have becoming more complicated during the two-child policy period.

Under the background of the Universal Two-child Policy, Chinese women's career development has also been affected negatively. Some professional women's work willingness and workplace competitiveness declines significantly after having two children. The new population policy intensifies the original invisible employment

discrimination, more professional women have been treated unequally because of pregnancy and/or childbirth, and those who have not given birth are also seen as potential risk which can affect company's profits. Influenced by the Chinese traditional gender order, many women choose to quit job after childbirth for looking after the family. Due to lack of corresponding social support, most professional women encounter more difficulties in both family and society in the Universal Two-child Policy period.

## **6.2 Suggestions on Protecting Professional Women's Rights in Two-child Policy Era**

In contemporary China, women are still the disadvantaged group and their rights and interests are affected by the Universal Two-child Policy. The thesis believes that, in the context of the new social policy, targeted improvements in both subjective and objective aspects may help to protect Chinese professional women's rights and interests better, thereby enhancing their fertility willingness to a certain extent, which would contribute to promote the more effective implementation of the two-child policy and boost the birth rate. The thesis gives suggestions on protecting Chinese professional women's rights during two-child policy period from angles of individuals, employers, social support and public opinion.

### *Individuals*

For most Chinese women, the improvement of their own qualities can help to enhance their self-recognition and gender awareness. The thesis argues that it is very necessary for Chinese women to keep learning new knowledge and skills; strengthen competitiveness, participate in social competition with aggressive spirit, especially give play to their autonomy, enthusiasm and creativity; eliminate patricentric constraints and feudal ideas. Under the Universal Two-child Policy background, women not only have

the right to have more children, but also have the right to participate in social labor equally. When faced with unfair treatments, it is important for women to know how to protect their legitimate rights and interests.

The family is supposed to give more care and support to professional woman with two children. Especially the husband, who is supposed to take more responsibility for looking after children and participating in more parent-child interaction. In addition, the traditional family pattern of “Men work outside and women take care of family.” should not be kept as a social stereotype any more. The old division of family labor needs to be changed, both husband and wife should share family responsibilities equally.

### *Employers*

Under the background of the Universal Two-child Policy, employers are supposed to follow relevant regulations on gender equality in the labor market, protect women’s labor rights, help and support two-child mothers to return to work after childbirth. Companies are suggested to determine the number of female employees reasonably when formulating recruitment plans, eliminate gender discrimination in the recruitment, and ensure equal pay for men and women.

It is recommended that employers make reasonable predictions of possible staff changes and labor supply trends based on the number and age of female employees in the company, so as to make corresponding arrangements in advance to deal with the position vacancies caused by female employees’ maternity leave. It is also suggested that employers conduct flexible and humanized management for pregnant female employees and those who are not in good health after giving birth. For women who actively pursue career progress, employers are supposed to offer fair training and promotion opportunities, to ensure that women enjoy equal promotion rights with men in the workplace.

In addition, the thesis believes that a more humanized performance appraisal system

can help to improve women's promotion space. Performance appraisal is an important way of measuring working capability of employees. Under the background of the Universal Two-child Policy, the original general assessment system may lead to unfair results on women. For example, if the company referred to the performance appraisal of the most recent year to select candidates for promotion, but there were female employees taking maternity leave that year, the fairness of the assessment will not be guaranteed. It is recommended that companies adopt more reasonable assessment methods such as a multi-dimensional or multi-stage appraisal system to choose candidates for promotion.

### *Social Support*

This thesis strongly recommends that the child-care service to be included in the social public service system. The society is supposed to share more responsibilities of raising children, especially to increase the number of public nurseries and kindergartens. In addition, it is also advised to extend women's maternity leave and increase maternity allowances; adjust the cost-sharing mode of maternity insurance, reasonably determine the proportion of maternity insurance cost shared by the state, enterprises and individuals; provide growth allowances for infants, children and adolescents; improve the welfare for the elderly, introduce supporting measures for the social elderly-care.

Governments are supposed to develop diversified employment channels and create more work opportunities for women; promote the continuing-education system for two-child mothers, help them with re-employment, support their entrepreneurship, provide necessary funding or technology to help them to start new business. It is also suggested to expand the duties of Women's Federation and relevant public welfare organizations in protecting women's rights and interests.

Laws and regulations are suggested to made for establishing unified paternity leave system and stipulating men's parenting responsibilities and obligations, which may not only help women to reduce child-care burden, but also contribute to promoting of

gender equality. Meanwhile it is necessary for legislative departments to revise and improve existing laws to stop employment discrimination, so that law enforcement agencies would be able to penalize violations of women's working rights in accordance with exact legal basis. It is also important to establish specific supervision agencies which provide more protection for women's working rights.

### *Public Opinion*

In China, the traditional gender order led by patriarchal culture has lasted for thousands of years and even been acquiesced by the contemporary society. Under the background of new social policy, national propaganda agencies, which lead public opinion, are supposed to promote the concept of gender equality into the social mainstream ideology. It is the responsibility of mass media and educational institutions to publicize advanced gender awareness extensively and in-depth, guide people to have awareness of gender equality, break the shackles of traditional gender view in the whole society. Government departments are suggested to listen to the female's voices more, and create a fair public opinion environment and supervision system for protecting women's rights and interests.

All in all, this thesis advocates to combine social resources and family resources rationally to set up more effective population regulations, to alleviate China's current demographic crisis without damaging women's rights, meanwhile to promote gender equality. The whole society is supposed to provide more targeted and stronger legal support, as well as humanistic care for Chinese professional women in both life and work, which would help to improve their life quality and career progress in the two-child policy era. So that they may respond to the population policy change more actively, which would contribute to promote the more effective implementation of the two-child policy and boost the birth rate.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Interview Script in English**

#### **Basic information**

Year of Birth:

Occupation:

Marital status:

Education level:

Number of children:

Gender of children:

#### **Questions:**

1, What do you think of China's Universal Two-child Policy?

2, How many children are you willing to have?

3, Why will/did you choose to have a second child?

4, Why don't you choose to have a second child?

5, Do you think giving birth for twice will cause/already caused pressure on your physical or mental health? Why?

6, Will/Has having two children bring/brought financial burden to your family? If yes, how will/does it influence your household expenditure?

7, Do you think the state subsidy (childbirth allowance, maternity leave benefits etc.) can help to relieve your financial pressure for having two children?

8, How will/does the Universal Two-child Policy affect your family relationship?

9, Will/Has having a second child influence/influenced your job-hunting? If yes, how will/does it affect?

10, Will/Has having a second child influence/influenced your work efficiency or career promotion? If yes, how will/does it affect?

11, What difficulties have you encountered in returning to work after having two children?

12, Will you take legal actions to solve problems of employment discrimination?

13, Will a second child intensify the conflict between work and family? How will you choose if you could not handle with work and family at the same time?

***Note:** Any of the questions which is not suitable for your actual situation can be skipped.*

## APPENDIX 2

### Interview Script in Chinese

#### 基本信息

出生日期:

职业:

婚姻状态:

教育程度:

子女数量:

子女性别:

#### 问题:

- 1, 您是如何看待中国的全面二孩政策的?
- 2, 您打算生育几个子女?
- 3, 您为什么生育二胎?
- 4, 您为什么不打算生育二胎?
- 5, 您认为两次生育行为会对您的身体和心理健康造成一定的负面影响吗?
- 6, 生育两个孩子会为您的家庭带来经济负担吗? 它是如何影响您的家庭支出的?
- 7, 您认为国家的相应补贴会帮助您减轻生育二孩的经济压力吗?
- 8, 全面二孩政策是如何影响您的家庭关系的?

- 9, 生育二孩将会/已经影响到您的求职了吗? 如果是的, 它是如何影响的?
- 10, 生育二孩将会/已经影响到您的工作效率或是升职了吗? 如果是的, 它是如何影响的?
- 11, 您在生育二孩后重返职场时遇到过哪些困难?
- 12, 如果您遭遇到了职场歧视, 会采取法律手段维权吗?
- 13, 二孩的到来会加剧工作与家庭的冲突吗? 如果您不能够同时平衡工作与家庭, 您会做出怎样的选择?

*注: 任何不符合您自身实际情况的问题均可跳过。*