The Role of Narrative in Identity Formation among New Generation Rural Migrant Women in Chongqing, China

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Zhou Li

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This dissertation titled
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by
ZHOU LI

has been approved for
the School of Communication Studies
and the Scripps College of Communication by

Raymie McKerrow
Charles E. Zumkehr Professor of Communication Studies

Scott Titsworth
Dean, Scripps College of Communication
Abstract

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The Role of Narrative in Identity Formation among New Generation Rural Migrant Women in Chongqing, China

Director of Dissertation: Raymie McKerrow

In this dissertation, I focused attention on the narratives of what I defined as “these new generation rural migrant female workers.” In explaining their existence, I addressed the issue of significance in highlighting what I have termed “macro discourse”—the One-Child policy, the Household Responsibility System, and the discursive reality that they have been embedded in, along with the “micro discourses” that were represented in the discourses of the rural migrant female workers. In order to approach these new generation rural migrant female workers’ identity (re)construction in both macro and micro narratives, I engaged in a rhetorical analysis of the two policies and the social-historical discourse that they were embedded in as well as went to the field to conduct 20 in-depth interviews with members from this group of female workers.

Under the guide of Nietzsche’s understanding of discourse and language as well as Foucault’s theory of discourse, I asked: 1) What and how image(s) of new generation rural migrant female workers have been constructed in the One-Child policy and the HRS? 2) How, if at all, the policies are reflected in the stories told by these new generation rural migrant female workers? 3) What, if possible, alternative understanding of the relationship between discourse and agency can be offered as rural migrant female workers talk about their way of acting/negotiating/reconstructing their identities? and 4)
How might questions 2 and 3 provide a deeper conception of these new generation rural migrant female workers in this particular historical time?

Nietzsche’s aesthetic language philosophy as well as Foucault’s theory of discourse offered me lenses to carefully examine the texts of the two policies and the social-historical discourse that they were ensconced within. Meanwhile, the abductive nature of grounded theory offered me insights as I was analyzing the raw materials collected from the field about what to focus on when examining the texts of the two policies and the interview data.

Therefore, as I analyzed the two political texts—the Open Letter and the HRS, I answered the first research question in Chapter Four. I noted that these new generation rural migrant female workers, a group born after the launch of the OL and the HRS, were described in the OL to be “the origin of problems” for the family and for the country as they would definitely jeopardize the progress of the “Four Modernization” and retard economic development.

In Chapter Five, through analyzing the 20 in-depth interviews with these new generation rural migrant female workers, I answered the second research question as I argued that the rural migrant female workers’ stories were around two themes: receiving love and care from their parents, and experiencing hardships in the discourses that they have lived in. While the love and care that they received was mainly embodied with the authenticity of parenting, the hardships that they have suffered as they grew up were mixed with issues from gender to economy, and politics to rural/urban dualism.
In the last chapter, after juxtaposing Chapters Four and Five and doing a comparison study on both macro and micro narratives, I offered answers to research questions three and four. Being described as sacrifice-able individuals even before their birth, these new generation rural migrant female workers left the governmental portrayal alone and learned to be authors for their own lives. In order to do so, they focused on the construction of “a complete home,” “jia” in their words, the whole meaning of their lives. For my participants, “jia” means 1) all the reasons that they wanted promotions in their jobs, 2) the careful protection of every family member’s heart, the well planned family life, and the comfortable and cozy place, and 3) where life is. In addition, they started to narrative their own understandings of “peasant-worker.” “Peasant-worker,” the word for word translation from the Chinese phrase “nong min gong,” the term that was first brought up in 1984 was finally left in that period of history.
Dedication

To my grandpa 外公,

and all family ancestors who were born before me and made “me” possible
Acknowledgments

I thought that I would have so many things to say when the day of writing “acknowledgments” comes; but in fact, when it was finally here, I am lost for words. I wouldn’t say that getting my Doctoral degree, of course including finishing the writing of this dissertation, would be THE most important thing in my life but it is certainly one of them. Therefore, for those individuals who have helped me get through this significant “life course,” how should I use my plain words to express the special thanks that cannot be expressed in words? You may not believe it, but at this moment I truly envy those who are in the major of English Literature since their words are always rich and beautiful. I am also jealous of those who have a nice voice as they can sing a song to express their appreciation. I, as a non-native speaker with imperfect English grammar, would still try my best to express my deep thanks even though the words are plain.

I would like to express the deepest appreciation to my committee chair, my dearest advisor, Dr. Raymie E. McKerrow, who has shown the attitude and substance of a true scholar and caring grandpa: he continually and persuasively conveyed a spirit of adventure in regard to research and life. Without his supervision and constant help this dissertation would not have been possible. I probably would still be wandering in different topics and couldn’t make a choice.

I remembered that it was in an afternoon, Dr. McKerrow and I sitting in the Buffalo Wild Wings across the street chatting casually. It was in that conversation that he helped me realize where my interest has located: identity. All the time, Dr. McKerrow has encouraged me to follow my heart and do the research. As he said, if the research
comes out from the personal interests, it would go further. He meant what he said. During my studies in Oho University, no matter what research topic I was interested in, Dr. McKerrow always encouraged me explore first, to see what was out there, and what more I could contribute. Not only verbal encouragements, he would send me information that he thought was relevant and I might be interested in. It was him who helped me to see my greatest strength and weakness although they are the two sides of one thing. He told me that I have been blessed because interesting research ideas would consistently jump out of my mind as well as cursed since I couldn’t keep my passion for one topic for a longer time. Therefore, in those years, Dr. McKerrow has not only been a qualified advisor but also a responsible supervisor who helped me to focus: finish one thing first and then move on.

Besides, Dr. McKerrow has truly been my “mentor of life.” His caring for me made Athens a “home” away from home. He would cut off a section of the newspaper that he was reading in the morning and place that in my mailbox because he wanted to remind me not to walk along during the night as reported in the news, an Asian girl was walking home after a nighttime class and was assaulted by a random Caucasian male. His caring was genuine and I was lucky for I have been “spoiled” by my advisor for all these years.

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. William Rawlins, whose work demonstrated to me how powerful narrative can be. As a narrative scholar, Dr. Rawlins has weaved in episodes that happened in his life into his teaching in order to make the impenetrable class readings more approachable. As a great storyteller, Dr. Rawlins has
also been true listener, a humble man who listens whole-heartedly to every single one of his students and says, “We are co-learners here.” I enjoyed every class that I have taken with Dr. Rawlins and appreciated the chance to learn from him. His unique perspective on narrative helped me to construct the comparison between macro and micro narratives in this dissertation.

I would also like to thank my committee member, Dr. Jerry Miller, whose rigorous scholarship has influenced me significantly. Dr. Miller would remind me consistently to define some cultural specific terms, as my audiences here are mainly non-Chinese. I especially appreciated the chance to take an independent study with him on content analysis. Although I didn’t use this method in my dissertation, in order to be a well-trained scholar, I believed that this is one of the techniques that I shouldn’t miss.

In addition, a special “thank you” to my committee member, Dr. Risa Whitson, my scholarly mentor and life-time friend who I have placed close enough to my heart. Dr. Whitson, a simple “thank you” would never be enough to represent all those words that I wanted say to you. As I was reading the recommendation letter that you wrote for me, I cried for all the details that you wrote down. You remembered all of them from my performance in your class, my excitement as I found my dissertation topic, to the work that I have done in our first WGSS graduate student conference. You have witnessed my every step to become a real scholar and cheered for me along the way. It was in your Global Feminisms class that I started to see how much I was concerned about the issues that feminists have been focused on and made up my mind to devote my future research into this area. And it was you who listened to my concern of going back to China and
missing the linguistic environment here in the U.S., and helped me realize that it was the linguistic personality that I was missing. It was a part of me who speaks and thinks in English that I adore and cannot just let it go. Having you on my dissertation committee has been a blessing for me.

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A special thanks to my family members. Ms. Zhou and Mr. Li, if it was not your decision to respond to the government’s advocacy in the 80s to only have one child, then I probably wouldn’t have the chance to study abroad for so many years and get my Doctoral degree. Thank you two for being my parents. Also, I would like to thank my supportive family members. Without them, it would never be possible for me to get into the field and conduct the interviews. And of course, my dear participants, no matter out of what reason that they eventually took part in this study, I thank them from the bottom of my heart to make this study come true. Finally, my writing-buddy Isabella, a fuzzy and cute little rabbit toy who has accompanied me uncountable days and nights as I was in the process of writing this dissertation.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The surge of rural migrants into major cities after 1978, as a byproduct of China’s reform for achieving modernity, has attracted a great deal of attention from scholars both inside and outside China. As Nancy Y. Kim described, “A new, younger generation of migrant workers in China aspires to move beyond the factory floor to more ambitious careers, such as managers and entrepreneurs.” Various disciplines, including economics, political science, sociology, and anthropology have all exhibited a strong interest in this topic. Although the surge of rural migrants has been more than 35 years, those rural migrants, especially rural migrant women in this surge of migration, have still been portrayed negatively.

As Florence noted, “Previous works on the media representation of migrant workers have pointed to the largely homogenizing descriptions of rural masses penetrating cities to threaten law and order, and social stability in general.” Starting with Chinese government officials, as Li recorded, the congregating zones for migrants on the outskirts of Chinese cities are viewed as problematic because of the migrants’ “relatively autonomous socioeconomic practices in these newly formed community spaces.” Images associated with peasantry have always been negative. For instance, phrases like “low class (cengci di),” “low quality (suzhi di),” “primitive” or “unenlightened” (yumei), “ignorant (wuzhi),” and “backward (luohou)” are usually applied to the construction of the rural migrants.

Among rural migrant workers, the position of female migrants has always been conceptualized as “the lower among the low.” Focusing on rural women’s life span after
the economic reforms, Cheung, Heinonen and Liu found that rural women, as a social category, occupy the most disadvantaged position compared with rural men and urban men and women.6 As Harriet Evans noticed through examining contemporary female images in the Chinese women’s magazines, the “young, health and beauty” images of “modern women” in the trend of China’s coupling with capitalism were constructed through images of “subordination and exclusion, most notably of the rural, uneducated, and poor.”7 Moreover, as China Labour Bulletin portrayed, rural migrant female workers are “vulnerable to exploitation by employers and local officials.”8 Specifically, they were unaware of their rights and were not able or willing to use those rights and fight against the powerful forces that control their access to employment.9

As China has been through momentous changes in terms of economic development and political reform within the last thirty years, in this dissertation, I question the monolithic understanding of rural migrant women, especially rural migrant female workers in the new generation, as traditional/backward and as never changing. Therefore, in order to understand how their identities have been rhetorically (re)constructed, I studied two policies that are closely connected to the experience of rural migrant female workers as they moved to the city and worked there; in addition, as noted in more detail later, I conducted interviews with members of this generation. I drew on a combination of perspectives of communication, gender, and Chinese history. The purpose of this study was not to narrowly propose an academic understanding of local Chinese women as a product of my study. But rather, it should serve as a valuable chance
to provoke wide-ranging discussion among academic scholars and between scholars and
the broader audience in understanding locals in their own development.

This chapter defined who they are as “new generation rural migrant workers”
along with the historical discussion on Chinese household system hukou in terms of its
relationship to their situation first. I, then, addressed the significance of this study as
bridging the macro discourses, the two policies mentioned above (the One-Child policy
and the Household Responsibility System [hereafter will be HRS. In essence, it was an
economic policy for peasants to sign a contract with the government in order to rent land
for farming]), with the micro individual understanding of the (re)construction of identities.

Chinese New Generation Rural Migrant Female Workers

Introduced in the 1950s, China’s household registration system allowed for two
ways to classify Chinese citizens based on their place of residence, and as belonging to
either agricultural or non-agricultural households. The term “floating population (liu
dong ren kou)” was used to refer to anyone who has moved, either temporarily or long-
term, away from their registered place of residence without a corresponding transfer of
official residence registration, or hukou. As Chan noted, China opted for the traditional,
Stalinist growth strategy of rapid industrialization centered on heavy industry in cities
and extraction of agricultural surpluses from the peasantry after the Communist
Revolution in 1949. In order to prevent a rural exodus because of this strategy, the
Chinese government, in 1958, set up a comprehensive registration system, which is
hukou in Chinese, to control population mobility. “The hukou mechanism,” said Chan,
“as a central instrument of the command system established for the big-push
industrialization, was intended to prevent what were held to be ‘undesirable’ rural-to-
urban migratory flows.” However, the effectiveness of the hukou mechanism in limiting rural-to-urban migration was greatly eroded with the emergence of a market economy in the late 1970s as a result of launching the Reform and Open Up policy.

At the beginning of the reform, with “the efforts to stimulate diversification, specialization, and commercialization of agricultural production,” rural areas experienced a rapid improvement in rural incomes, living standards, and a narrowing of the rural/urban income gap even though income inequalities between different rural areas still increased after the first ten years of reform efforts. As Gao noticed, the first ten years of reform from 1978 to 1988 propelled the rise of town and township enterprises that led to the industrialization of the countryside. Despite the economic development within the first few years in the rural areas, instead of narrowing the gap between rural and urban incomes, the Reform and Open Up policy increased the gap a step further. As Jacka noted in her book, “real incomes in rural areas stagnated, while both intrarural and rural/urban income inequalities grew” beginning in the late 1980s.

With the propelling of the reform and the widening gap of the urban-rural disparity, more and more rural people wanted to move into cities to improve their material life, to see the world, and/or to escape oppression or familial conflict. Furthermore, the demands of urban lifestyles had been a great attraction for labor migration moving from rural to urban areas. Besides those, another factor that increased the amount of the “floating population” significantly, according to Jacka, was the expansion of the urban economy that resulted in a huge need for unskilled and cost-
effective labor.²¹ This massive population migration around 1989 was the first massive rural-urban migration and the rural migrant workers in this generation were referred as the “first generation nong min gong”.²²

The term “nong min gong” first showed up in 1984. A professor from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences named Yulin Zhang initiated the usage of this phrase in one of his published articles to describe the rural migrant workers.²³ Since then, this phrase has been widely adopted and used even in official documents. Translated word-for-word, “nong min gong” means “peasant-worker.” Even though the term “nong min gong” captured the situation for the rural migrant workers, at the same time it framed their status as the rural-urban duality that was impossible for them to change as long as they were people with agricultural hukou working in the city. If the phrase “nong min gong” can be generally applied to both rural migrant male and female workers, then the creation of the term “da gong mei (working sister)” was created specifically for rural migrant female workers and has been and continues to be used for the “first generation nong min gong” in coastal districts.

Yet, the experience of the “first generation nong min gong” in city life was not as positive as one assumed it to be. Chan described the migrant rural laborers as “satisfy[ing] labor needs” in cities.²⁴ According to Chan, these “temporary contract workers” who did not have an urban hukou were allowed to work in the cities to fill those unwanted (almost totally manual-work) positions.²⁵ Gao focused his study on rural migrant female workers and noticed that the occupations that they took in the cities did not demand much skill; neither did they receive any technical training.²⁶ In addition, as Fu, Chang and He stated
in their study, it is common for migrant workers to experience unpleasant social encounters with the urbanites because of their negative and uneducated images portrayed in the media.\textsuperscript{27} Being rural migrant workers also, these new generations maintain their uniqueness.

More recently, a so-called “new generation of migrant workers” has emerged as a mainstay labor force in most of the major Chinese cities. The term “new generation of migrant workers,” as Xiong noted, refers to migrant workers who were born between 1980 and the early 1990s.\textsuperscript{28} For these new generations, great changes have taken place in the education, farming experience, self-awareness and expectations, rights awareness, and career choices. Based on his study of migrant workers in Shanghai, Xiong generated five differences between the “first generation nong min gong” and the “new generation.” These new generations shifted from “being survival-oriented to being development-oriented”; new generation in Xiong’s study differs from the first generation in their need for self understanding, and in their rights awareness to what they think is worthy of spending their money on.\textsuperscript{29}

The Significance of the Study

As an indispensible part of everyday life, the topic regarding “work” or “workers” is one of the major themes in organizational communication in recent years. Understanding humans as organizational beings, scholars like Patrice Buzzanell, Sarah Tracy, and Kristen Lucas are interested in how organizational cultures influence worker’s personal identities and experience.\textsuperscript{30} Even though studies focusing on the working class in the United States have increased, the situation of workers in China is still understudied,
not to mention a focus on the female workers in the new generation. As Jacka and
Gaetano argued, fewer studies have examined the impact of gender on the experience of
migration in China. ³¹

Additionally, research on identity has never been unpopular in Communication
Studies. Scholars like George Herbert Mead, Kenneth Burke, and Erving Goffman, in the
first half of 20th century, had primary roles in identifying communication as the way
human beings construct identity.³² Being interested in the construction of identity, I
emphasize its “rhetorical” taste and argue that it functions as a (re)construction instead of
a simple construction. Emphasizing the process of (re)constructing identities, I, on one
hand, examined two political statements—the One-Child policy and the HRS—while on
the other hand, I conducted interviews with individuals in order to understand their
standpoint on changes that happen in their lives moving from a rural to urban settling.

I focused my study of the One-Child policy specifically on the Open Letter (here
after referenced as OL) sent out by the Central government on 25th September 1980 to all
the Party and Communist Youth League members in terms of rationalizing the urgency
for conducting the One-Child policy³³ rather than any specific policy for two reasons.
First of all, the significance of the OL is undeniable. Not only did it rhetorically frame the
historical and societal situations in China during the early 1980s, as a crystallization of
Deng Xiaoping’s personal preference, the scientification of policy, and Guanxi—the
special Chinese work style. The OL also presented the governmental understanding of the
nation’s overview in general and the relationships among individuals, nation, and the
future development of the nation. It was the origin of all specified and local-adopted
policies of birth control. Second, in order to build up the sense of urgency, it gave a vivid description of the rapid growth of population as a determinant disaster in the achievement of “Four Modernizations,” building up the connection between the nation’s prosperity with individual’s fertility choice. Meanwhile, it promoted the idea that giving birth to baby boy and baby girl are the same in terms of getting closer to the liberation of Chinese women. So, reading the OL served as a good start in terms of understanding the meaning of being female in the new generation and the construction of the new generation as a consequence of letter’s encouraging image of women and their role. Furthermore, as Chapter Two elaborates, after the One-Child policy, the study of the HRS not only provide a background of economic situation for these new generations’ childhood, but more important, it helped me to connect all the dots like Mao Zedong’s and Deng Xiaoping’s personal experience, their vision of China, hukou system, and the One-Child policy together.

Additionally, most studies done before on the topic of rural migrant workers were either too macro in their focus on the demographic, economic, and political effects of migration or too micro in focusing on the intersubjectivity among individuals. Few of them tried to bridge those two and even fewer could find an effective way to bridge the separate foci. My research, in this sense, filled in the gap by focusing on the rhetorical sense of identity (re)construction to connect both macro and micro as a continuum rather than polarizing them. The bridging of the macro policies and the micro individuals’ narratives benefited me in terms of seeing the intersection of personal understanding and national creation of the identity as being rural migrant female workers in the new
generation in multiple layers, not just how individuals and their private memories were integrated into a public whole. Only when both the macro and micro narratives are heard would we be able to construct a better and more complete understanding of Chinese rural migrant female workers and their life in modern China. The theoretical discussion on rhetorical (re)construction of identity that follows provides a framework for this analysis.

Rhetorical (Re)construction of Identity

As background, McKerrow argued for the relationship between Foucault and the study of rhetoric. He stated the possibility for rhetorical scholars to use Foucault’s interpretation of discourse in terms of understanding “the rhetorical construction of self and society.” In order to understand the image(s) of Chinese new generation rural migrant female workers that has been figured out in those two policies, I apply Foucault’s theory of discourse to analyze the texts closely. In this sense, Foucault’s theory of discourse describing the relationship between language and knowledge serves as an essential guide for me to capture the ways that the two political statements come to have their truth-values regarding these new generation rural migrant female workers.

Claiming himself to be a Nietzschean, Foucault has been greatly influenced by Nietzsche’s ideas. For Nietzsche, rhetoric is central to the formal function of language. Believing there was no “unrhetorical ‘naturalness’ of language,” Nietzsche argued that language is rhetorical since it conveys an attitude or opinion, a partial understanding rather than an essential knowledge of thing. For Nietzsche, the goal has never been to find out the “unvarnished truth” since he didn’t believe in the existence of such a thing. “What then is truth?” questioned Nietzsche, “…a sum of human relations which have
been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding.” Here, Nietzsche tried to warn us not to take epistemology as ontology. Just because we know the language that has been used to describe something doesn’t mean we know the thing itself. In fact, we possess nothing but “metaphors” for things. If Nietzsche was right about the truth as a conventionalized discourse, then what insights would it offer to us about “nong min gong” and the image(s) constructed in the two governmental statements?

Focusing his theory of discourse in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault discussed the formation of objects specifically. Taking the discourse of psychopathology as an example, Foucault explained three interrelated processes of conceiving the object constructed in the discourse. As Foucault noted, “first we must map the first *surfaces* of their *emergence*: show where these individual differences, which . . . will be accorded the status of disease, alienation, anomaly, dementia, neurosis or psychosis, degeneration, etc., may emerge, and then be designated and analyzed.” In other words, discourse constructs the knowledge of object (in this case, the identity of Chinese rural migrant female worker) on the basis of how the object differs from others on the surface. The differences, Foucault reminded us, need to be contextualized. Second, as Foucault argued, we need to identify the authorities that draw the map of this object. The thing to keep in mind is the plural form of the word “authority.” “Last,” said Foucault, “we must analyze the grids of specification.”

In terms of the current study, Foucault would say that the focus shouldn’t only be on the female workers, but how the two relevant policies – the OL and the HRS – came
into being. In this context, the actions by core political leaders issuing the policies, the materiality of the rural migrant female workers’ rights along with their social welfare, and even the difficulties that they faced every day, are all worthy of being analyzed in order to understand the grand discourse of China’s urbanization as being propelled by industrialization. However, those three interrelated processes did not cover the whole picture. As Foucault argued, the inadequacy of those three interrelated processes “could not of themselves form objects” for the discourse. Instead of figuring out what exactly form the objects, Foucault was aiming to understand “how to decide what made them (the consequences of a discovery) possible, and how these ‘discoveries’ could lead to others that took them up, rectified them, modified them, or even disproved them.” In short, Foucault suggests that the relations that operate in the discourse made the “formation of a whole group of various objects” possible.

Research Questions

Specially, under Nietzsche’s aesthetic language philosophy and Foucault’s theory of discourse, I asked: 1) What and how are the image(s) of new generation rural migrant female workers constructed in the One-Child policy and the HRS? Meanwhile, by conducting grounded theory interviews with 20 members from this new generation, I continue asking: 2) How, if at all, are the policies reflected in the stories told by these new generation rural migrant female workers? Through a rhetorical analysis of the political statements and the interview transcripts, I am aiming to answer the questions: 3) What, if possible, alternative understanding of the relationship between discourse and agency can be offered as rural migrant female workers talk about their way of
acting/negotiating/reconstructing their identities? and 4) How might questions 2 and 3 provide a deeper conception of these new generation rural migrant female workers in this particular historical time?

Structure of this Dissertation

In this Chapter, I have introduced the group of Chinese new generation rural migrant female workers and the social-historical period of their emergence. Meanwhile, as I was building up the rationale for my research, I briefly touched on the meaningfulness of using Nietzsche’s aesthetic language philosophy and Foucault’s discourse and knowledge in terms of helping me understand the two political texts—the OL and the HRS—as they had great influence on these new generation rural migrant female workers in China. At the end of this chapter, I have listed four questions to guide research and analysis.

In order to approach answers to the research questions, I set the stage in Chapter Two through discussing the historical overview of the One-Child policy and the HRS. In other words, the emphasis was on how the policies came into being. These two political statements, I argue, have interrelated connections to both the household registration system and the subject of my research: new generation rural migrant female workers. The discussion on the historical situations of the policies consequently function as a foundation for the later analysis of the policies.

After the discussion on the societal-historical contextualization, in Chapter Three, I present a more detailed discussion on Nietzsche’s aesthetic language philosophy and Foucault’s discourse and knowledge as they assisted in not only understanding the texts
of the political statements but also the historical specificities the statements were embedded in. I also note the importance of using grounded theory in conducting interviews with rural migrant female workers in the new generation; these are the material bodies that have been living through the discursive constitution of reality.

In Chapter Four, Nietzsche’s aesthetic language philosophy as well as Foucault’s theory of discourse provided lenses to carefully examine the texts of the two policies—the OL and the HRS—and the social-historical discourse that they were in. Through carefully analyzing the two texts, I answered the first research question, “What and how are the image(s) of new generation rural migrant female workers constructed in the One-Child policy and the HRS?” These new generation rural migrant female workers, a group who were born after the launch of the OL and the HRS, were described undoubtedly in the OL to be “the origin of problems” for the family and the country as they would definitely jeopardize the progress of the “Four Modernizations” and retard economic development. Influenced by local Party officials who served as “the active propagandist and responsible educator,” Chinese people were able to qualify their citizenship to be high suzhi (quality) since they were the “reasonable and considerate” people who understood the difficulties that the nation faced and were willing to sacrifice those who were “the origin of problems.”

Even though the HRS didn’t define these new generation rural migrant female workers itself, it helped to constitute this generation indirectly as it implied a changing situation in the rural areas: as the economy was getting better, more and more rural folks wanted to have more children regardless of what the government said. The collapse of the
OL and the HRS on these new generation rural migrant female workers’ identity constitution indicated the impossibility for the government to escape from the effects of the rhetoricity of its discourses as Nietzsche reminded us.

I answered the second research question, “How, if at all, are the policies reflected in the stories told by these new generation rural migrant female workers,” In Chapter Five. Conducting 20 in-depth interviews with these new generation rural migrant female workers during the summer 2014, I presented my analysis of the hundred pages of their interview transcripts. Sharing their growing-up experience with me as they have lived through the One-Child policy and the HRS, the rural migrant female workers’ stories were around two themes: receiving love and care from their parents, and experiencing hardships in this discursive constituted reality. While the love and care that they received was mainly embodied with the authenticity of parenting, the hardships that they have suffered as they grew up were mixed with issues from gender to economy, and politics to rural/urban dualism. As indicated in their stories, hardships that they have experienced and still have vivid memories of were so embedded in the discourses that the government was created in the OL and the HRS. However, by experiencing, the hardships, the love and care from the parents has been delineated clear and strong. And only when a family was surrounded by love and care, could it be able to go through all those difficulties. In consequence, hardships and parents’ love and care went hand in hand in terms of constructing these new generation rural migrant female figures within this discursive world.
In the last chapter, after I summarized what I have done in this dissertation, I juxtaposed Chapters Four and Five in order to answer the third and fourth research questions. As much as these new generation rural migrant female workers were aware of the portrayal of them in the political statements, they left the policies alone without further commenting but tried to be the authors of their own lives as they focused more on promoting themselves instead of being satisfied with what they have been assigned to, protecting and maintaining a complete life (“jia”), and actively positioning themselves between the rural area and city. Undoubtedly, the urbanization discourse eventually produced its subjects as these new generation rural migrant female workers have been subjected within the specific discursive regime and historical period. Nevertheless, those female migrant workers refused to place themselves in the position produced by the discourse where it makes most sense. Their refusal of being captured in the term “peasant-worker” has been achieved through projecting the “peasant-ness” to the first generation rural migrant workers.
Chapter 2: The One-Child Policy and the HRS

Since the policies that I examine here, especially the One-Child policy as a part of the Family Planning Policies, had been created under Mao Zedong’s and Deng Xiaoping’s governance, a brief discussion on both of their childhoods and personalities is helpful in order to understand how the policies came into being.

Born in 1893 in Hunan Province, as Schell and Delury indicated, Mao Zedong’s early years were influenced by two quite different wellsprings of influence. According to them, these two wellsprings of influence were: his experience growing up in a state of struggle in the household, as it was presided over by a demanding and unyielding patriarchal father, and the writings from revolutionary thinkers like Liang Qichao and Chen Duxiu. As Schell and Delury noted, from Mao’s earliest years “he was constantly on guard against the tyranny of his father, who regularly beat him,” and that “fraught relationship” with the “stubborn and powerful father bred within” Mao “a deep-seated antiauthoritarianism.” Mao loved to read what he called the “romances of Old China” and in particular, he liked the character Sun Wukong, the rebellious Monkey King who arose from the earth and possessed supernatural powers that enabled him to rage against heaven, in the book Journey to the West. Not long before Mao died, he wrote a letter to his last wife, Jiang Qing, who served a major role as part of the “Gang of Four” in the Cultural Revolution, and compared himself to the tiger, a symbol of power, while added that he was also just a monkey. As Schell and Delury noted, Mao was “deeply influenced by the romantic historical novels peopled with their larger-than-life martial heroes that had filled his head as a boy.”

Susan Shirk also noted that during Mao’s era,
China was a personalistic dictatorship that Mao ruled with an iron hand.\textsuperscript{7} From this, Mao not only presented his nature of being rebellious but also the emphasis on the efficacy of individual will, which had eventually resulted in his ambivalent attitude toward the Family Planning Policies.\textsuperscript{8}

Born in 1904, Deng Xiaoping was raised in a local gentry family in their village. As Deng was talking about his earlier life, he said that he had a really good life before he was studying abroad in his sixteenth years, living like a child; in addition, his parents treated him as a treasure.\textsuperscript{9} It was his father’s decision to send Deng Xiaoping to an innovative work-study program that sent young Chinese to postwar Europe. From his five years in France and one year in the Soviet Union, Deng developed a better understanding of developments around the world and far more perspective on China than Mao had garnered.\textsuperscript{10}

Similarly, both Mao’s and Deng’s experience with their family members, in particularly their fathers, was reflected well in their later political lives—especially the orientation of the nation. As Schell and Delury stated:

Mao’s first act of self-definition came through rebellion against his father, and his earliest writings called for revolt against the Confucian social hierarchy and the rigidities of filial piety. Deng, by contrast, bore no such animus against his father, “feudal society,” or Confucian patriarchy. . . . Growing up without the kind of familial strife that had marked Mao’s youth, Deng was throughout his life a far steadier person, a family man.\textsuperscript{11}
Mao and Deng’s different experience with their families reflected in their orientations for China’s development. As Schell and Delury argued, “If the self-absorbed Mao was a riot of self-contradiction—an ostentatious aficionado of Chinese classics while militantly demanding that his people liberate themselves from old thinking and feudal values,” Deng was not like that at all.¹² Deng explained the reason to his father for going to France on the eve of his departure, “China was weak and we wanted to make her stronger, and China was poor and we wanted to make her richer. . . . We went to the West in order to study and find a way to save China.”¹³

Deng Xiaoping, who truly believed the saying that Stalin brought up in the speech—The Tasks of Economic Executives—in 1931 that those who fall behind get beaten,¹⁴ made up his mind that all he should do was to make China become stronger. Unsurprisingly, both Mao and Deng’s personalities and those early years’ experience showed profoundly in their ways of making policies that would affect how China dealt with its citizens. One principal policy, which both of them dealt with during their eras (with Mao roughly from 1949 to 1976 and Deng from 1978 to 1989),¹⁵ was the Family Planning Policy that was later specified as the One-Child policy during Deng’s time.

One-Child Policy

If women did not marry, they were ridiculed; if they did and had children, they were chastised for holding political posts rather than being at home with their families; if they remained at home for a number of years, they were slandered as
backward. Whereas in the old society they were pitied, in the new one they were condemned for a predicament not of their own making.

--Ling Ding

Compared with the generations before, more and more members of these new generation rural migrant female workers come from families with only one child or at most two because of the strict 1980s One-Child policy. As a part of the Family Planning Policies that started in the 1950s, the One-Child policy was the strictest birth limitation policy that the Chinese government has ever conducted.

As Greenhalgh and Winckler argued, from 1949 to 1976, birth policy was dominated in practice by Mao Zedong. As they claimed, “Under Mao Zedong, a large but ‘poor and blank’ population appeared sometimes an asset and sometimes a liability.” At the beginning of New China (from 1949 to the mid-1950s), Mao Zedong was the one who strongly opposed the family planning policy. Responding to a White Paper by the U.S. State Department arguing that population was China’s primary problem, Mao said, “The fact that China has a huge population is a really good thing. . . . Under the leadership of the Communist Party, as long as there are people, every kind of miracle can be performed.” Following that, in 1952, People’s Daily published an article named “限制生育会灭亡中国(Controlling birth will destroy China).”

Although Mao rejected the need for family planning programs in the 1950s and said that China needs more labor power, family planning was available in some urban areas, especially among the female cadres in Yan’an who believed the uncontrolled fertility posed a threat to their pursuit of active political careers. Frustration captured in
Ding’s words demonstrated the women’s concern for birth control that went far beyond the Party’s stance. Likely, words like these questioned the short-term “liberation” that the Party brought to Chinese women. As Greenhalgh and Winckler noted, “In May 1954 . . . Deng Yinchao wrote Deng Xiaoping stating the case for contraception. In reply, Deng Xiaoping instructed that contraception was ‘necessary and appropriate’ and that the government should ‘take effective measures’ to provide access to it.”

Meanwhile, Yinchu Ma conducted a 3-year study in the Shanghai and Zhejiang Province and collected abundant evidence in order to support his argument that China needed birth control. In the mid-1950s, Mao switched from opposing an effort to limit population growth to endorsing it, in principle. Describing Mao’s endorsement of family planning as “in principle” is appropriate because the high population growth rate of 2 percent per year only came into Mao’s eyes as it raised serious questions about how to meet the performance goals of the First Five-Year Plan.

Mao delivered a speech in February 1957 to the Supreme State Council, which was his first speech to other regime leaders of the possibility of birth planning. Although the excerpt below from Mao’s speech demonstrated his understanding of the population problem in 1957, because of his growing optimism about rapid agricultural advances as the completion of the collectivization process in the rural areas, the passage shows Mao’s commitment to the coexistence of both birth control and birth planning. After Mao talked about six other issues in his speech “On the Correct Handling of the Contradictions Among the People,” he spent the shortest coverage on calling for comprehensive population planning. Said Mao:
Our plans, work, [and] thinking all should start from the point that we have a huge population up to 600 million. . . . Here [we] advocate birth control; it would be great [if we] could lower the birth [rate] a bit; if [we] need to give birth, then give birth in a planned way. . . . Perhaps the government needs to have a department, a department for birth planning—would that be a good idea? Or [we] can establish a committee, a committee for birth control as an organ of the government. Or [we] can organize a people’s group and let the people’s group to advocate… 

Quickly, Yinchu Ma picked up his 1954 idea and presented it at the 4th session of the First National People’s Congress. He concluded that further population growth at such a high rate would be detrimental to China’s development.

However, by July 1957, Mao had decided to launch an anti-rightist movement because he thought that intellectuals had gone too far in criticizing the party on its leadership and this soon included advocates of birth control, which turned his endorsement of the birth planning into a fleeting one. By January 1958, Mao concluded that a large population was still useful and addressed anyone who advocated for birth control that doing so was not yet feasible. Even though birth planning revived along with Bureaucratic planning, the conversation on birth control shifted quickly from an academic discussion to a political fight. Within the following three years, Yinchu Ma’s theory suffered numerous attacks in terms of whether his Ma was following the “Ma” of “Marxism” or the “Ma” of “Malthusianism.” In March 1960, Ma was finally removed from the presidency of Peking university.
Although the roughly ten years history (1949-1960) of the birth control policy didn’t cover everything that happened during Mao’s term, Mao’s way of making policies was shown profoundly as the birth control one went through several transformations. As rebellious as Mao was, relying on science as a sound foundation for his policies was not his style of working. In fact, as Greenhalgh stated, “Under Mao, science was decimated; party policy was made on . . . more political and ideological grounds.” And as much as Mao would emphasize the efficacy of individual will, specifically his will, Mao consistently changed his stances on the birth control policy. Considering Mao’s ambivalent attitude toward birth control, program leaders created the moderate and flexible “later-longer-fewer” policy that allowed two children, well spaced and timed. However, this “ideological” policy was soundly rejected after Mao’s death. Until then, even though Mao invented the idea of state birth planning, because of his ambivalent attitude toward it, the state birth planning failed to get fully under way during his term.

With the rise of Deng Xiaoping, he and his party tried their best to put everything “back in order.” But as Greenhalgh claimed, “During the devastation of the Cultural Revolution, people had lost faith in the party and the Marxian ideology that justified its right to rule.” The serious problem that was lying in front of the Party was: how could the Party rebuild its legitimacy, the right to rule the whole country? Not surprisingly, “science” was shown to be Deng Xiaoping’s first choice based on what young Deng had experienced. As I mentioned above, young Deng was sent to postwar Europe at his father’s demand to be part of an innovative work-study program. This experience made young Deng realize what “西学中用 xi xue zhong yong” means, that is, how the West’s
military technology and economic techniques might be harnessed to China’s own national self-strengthening effort. Deng was exposed to the idea of “science” during that time. Therefore, Deng found his salvation of the Party’s leadership in “modern science,” its new legitimacy that sharply distinguished it from Mao’s party. Despite the fact that the moderate and flexible “later-longer-fewer” policy created during Mao’s time achieved some demographic, ideological and political accomplishments, the new leadership still rejected this approach in favor of a much more forceful policy based on modern science because of the political legitimacy the government wanted to build up after Mao’s death.

Deeply believing in the saying that those who fall behind get beaten, in order to help China get off the fate of being beaten by other stronger nations, Deng set his life goal as making China become stronger and more prosperous in order to achieve the rejuvenation of the nation. In this sense, to Deng Xiaoping, the One-Child policy was not about a strong state or its coercive practice but Western science. It was about the nation’s “dreams for transforming a poor, downtrodden nation into a prosperous, modern, global power through selective absorption of Western science and technology.” As Feng, Cai, and Gu argued, the chief goal at all levels of government during that time was for GDP growth; therefore, the population was made as a lifeless number instead of an aggregation of individual lives.

Consequently, through studying the policymaking of the One-Child policy, one could learn “how a policy concept that may have been initially proposed by a leader is then ‘scientifically’ shaped and transformed in the hands of experts.” In other words,
said Greenhalgh, “for the scientists it was the authority to articulate ‘the truth’ on demographic matters, while for party leaders it was the legitimacy to govern the country and its population affairs.” Banister had a similar idea on how the One-Child policy was made. She argued:

They [China’s leaders] were determined to raise living standards . . . as fast as possible, and the prospect of continuing population growth eating up hard-won production increases. . . . Therefore, before they had thoroughly considered all the consequences, they decided that the one-child family would be promoted with determination throughout China.\textsuperscript{44}

Zhongtang Liang, who was recruited as an expert on the State Family Planning Commission said:

Many people believed that the government would approve their petition or project. But that is not the case. The leaders approved our project because that was what they wanted. One point in my suggested plan happened to meet their ideal birth planning policy. They adopted my plan because they thought it would be easier for them to make policies.\textsuperscript{45}

Thus, what this suggests is that the decision to adopt the One-Child policy was rooted not so much in “the facts” as in the politics behind the constitution of some numbers as “facts.” A brief history of the policymaking process of the One-Child policy can make this argument clear.

As Greenhalgh noted:
Soon after Mao’s death, top leaders in a series of speeches set the directional policy on population for the new era: the rapid growth of the nation’s population must be brought sharply under control if China was to achieve its central goal of the “Four Modernizations” by century’s end. In working out specific policies to fit this overarching guideline, actors within subordinate agencies of the government created a series of population plan targets and birth rules designed to encourage and advocate one-child families.46

In order to have a better comprehension of the paragraph above, three terms and their relationships in the Chinese context need more clarification: directional policy, guiding ideology, and specific policies. Directional policy is the general statement for policies of a certain area by the top party leadership; guiding ideology provides the overarching framework for the formulation of specific policies.47 That said, the guiding ideology under Deng’s control during the post-Mao era was the achievement of the “Four Modernizations”—strengthening the fields of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology—that Zhou Enlai had spelled out in the 3rd National People’s Congress report.48 Following the overarching ideology during Deng’s era, the direction of policy on the nation’s population was to sharply control its rapid growth. Given the order from the Party’s top leadership, subordinate agencies started to work on a series of specific policies in order to achieve the goal of strictly controlling the nation’s population for the realization of the “Four Modernizations.”

Originally, the subordinate agencies worked out three plans. First, the statisticians brought up their solution as a rapid elimination of third birth and gradual increase in first...
births on the basis of Marxian statistics and population thought. Second, the
cyberneticists borrowed ideas from the Western and from China’s strategic defense
science, defining the population problem as a crisis of modernization whose only solution
was one child for all. Third, the Marxian humanists proposed a two-child-plus-long-
spacing scheme while emphasizing the serious social political costs of a one-child-for-all
policy. However, it was the cyberneticists that finally lobbied their way through to
become the necessary solution for the nation’s rapid growth of population because it
scientized Deng’s worries.

Winckler promoted the success of the cyberneticists’ One-Child policy and said
that it was adopted because most senior members of Deng’s coalition agreed that drastic
limitation of population growth was necessary to achieve core regime goals within the
“Four Modernizations.” In other words, the One-Child policy was chosen because it
represented the collective will of the ruling leaders. Besides the scientification of the top
leaders’ collective will, the One-Child policy was chosen also because of how Guanxi,
personal connections, had worked in the Chinese context. If it was not Qian Xuesen, who
introduced his student Song Jian to Chen Muhua, Song’s plan for One-Child policy
would not be entering into Chen’s vision. In the letter that Qian Xuesen wrote to Chen
Muhua on January 8, 1980, Qian said:

Vice-premier Chen Muhua, . . . our country’s automation theorists Comrade Song
Jian and several other comrades sent a copy of their recent projections and
analysis on China’s population along with brief illustration. I think this is a good
starting point for natural science and technology to get into the field of social
science, and work with social scientists in order to solve national economic problems. [It] should be supported. [I] Know you are in charge of works in this area so [I] refer the whole material to you, for your reference. 52

Chen Muhua expressed her satisfaction with Song Jian’s projections in noting they were “very good” and “have great reference value” for policy-making, adding that she had “already prepared a special report for the Politburo.” 53 Thus, on 25th September 1980, the Communist Party sent out an open letter to all Party and Communist Youth League members and rationalized the urgency for conducting the One-Child policy. 54

Household Responsibility System [HRS]

As I noted while reviewing the policymaking process of the One-Child policy, the guiding ideology of the realization for the “Four Modernizations” was not limited to the area of national population but referenced all the aspects of the nation. The emergence of the HRS in the 1960s as a complement to China’s traditional economic system, the People’s Commune System, told us the inefficiency of the People’s Commune System. More than that, the different treatments that the HRS received under both Mao Zedong’s and Deng Xiaoping’s eras demonstrated the relationships among the One-Child policy, the household registration system in 1958 and the HRS. A brief history of how the HRS came into being helps the construction of the complicated web of relationships built up between it and other policy actions.

Soon after the new government was born in 1949, Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi initiated the Land Reform movement to destroy the feudal system. In particular, as Feng described:
All of the landlords were “deleted” as the useless characters, and the rich farmers were forced to keep just an average amount of land and other assets . . . farmers who had no land or less land got a lot of land and other assets, so that they were soon encouraged to work hard for themselves and the new society.  

As Feng also noted in describing the land as a “present” from the government, a new style of the relationship between the farmers and the government was built up and farmers were made to believe that the government would serve for the poor people. For Feng, this was a main characteristic of the new society. As Greenhalgh noted, the policymaking process under Mao was based more on political and ideological grounds than others. The Land Reform movement started to show disadvantages very soon after it had been launched. The government realized that most of the poor farmers who “just obtained the land from the landlords or rich farmers” started to sell the land because they want to “get some money to buy goods or means of productions.” The new government leaders believed that if they didn’t take any actions, the small number of rich men would own most of land again and that was not what the government wanted to see, the duplication of old land systems. Therefore, policies aiding the process of Collectivization were articulated in 1953, and were viewed by the leaders as a major way to approach Socialism. This was the process of the state to recover the ownership of the land.

Under the advocacy of the top leaders for Collectivization, as Feng noted, “The local leaders competed with each other, in order to increase their own performance record.” With the complement of the primary collectivization (the “mutual-aid team” and the elementary/primary cooperative), the Central Committee of Communist Party
endorsed the advanced collectivization in claiming it was designed to transform traditional agriculture through setting up sufficient advanced cooperatives. And because of the fast speed of Collectivization, a lot of farmers accepted and took part in it as they didn’t have time to think it over. However, problems soon emerged with both primary and advanced collectivization. For instance, Feng recorded one problem with the advanced collectivization in the work-point-distribution-system. He noted:

Second, the work-point-distribution-system was the main style of the distribution system in most of the advanced cooperatives, which meant every member would be given different number of points according to his/her amount and quality of work finished in one day. At the end of the year, members would get their harvest or income according to their different amounts of points. But it is very difficult to supervise and calculate their quantity and quality of work one by one and day after day.

Therefore, what every member tended to get was an average point and an average amount of harvest or income. This unfairness discouraged a lot of members to continue their hard work. Farmers kept dropping out from the Collectivization process. As Feng noted, many farmers started to drop out from the collectivism cooperatives in 1956. Many places even had more than 5% of the farmers who dropped out from the advanced cooperatives.

Thus, almost at the same time, the HRS soon emerged as a complement. Although it showed its efficiency in particular when compared with the cooperatives, there soon came some criticisms and discussions all over the country. Mao and Maoists thought the HRS meant a return to the private economy and capitalism and didn’t belong to
socialism’s structure. To prevent farmers from dropping out, Mao gave a speech in February 1957, “On the Correct Handling of the Contradictions Among the People” (正確处理人民内部矛盾问题). In the “third issue” of his article, Mao specified the reform of socialism as the situation of collectivization in the rural areas and reassured his people that the only way to be richer is through socialism. Gradually, peasant farmers stopped dropping-out and no one was advocating the HRS after that.

As I introduced while covering the One-Child policy, Mao switched his stance from opposing an effort to limit population growth to endorsing it in the mid-1950s. Connecting to what happened in the rural areas in the same time, this was the time that the issue of less-efficiency of the advanced cooperatives became salient and peasants dropped out most frequently from the process of collectivization. Mao delivered a speech in February 1957 to the Supreme State Council in terms of the possibility of birth planning but changed his mind very soon in July 1957. Mao switched back to his original position and in January 1958, he made the claim that a large population was still a useful thing for China. While at the same time, peasants from rural areas stopped dropping out from the advanced cooperatives and the advocacy for the household responsibility system was stopped as well. Noticing the results brought up by both political momentums—Collectivization and the Great Leap Forward, White argued that they led Mao to “feel more optimistic about China’s population and the capacity to maintain an adequate food grain supply. In contrast to his statements in 1957, therefore, by August 1958 Mao’s view on the population burden had shifted.” In the same year, the government set up a
comprehensive registration system, *hukou* system, in order to control the undesirable rural-to-urban migratory flows, in other words, ground rural folks on the land.

“In 1978,” as Feng noted, the HRS “was remade in Anhui Province and developed quickly all over the country.” In 1978, as Deng Xiaoping started to take over the top leadership from Hua Guofeng, who was chosen by Mao as his successor, Deng proposed his series of new policies regarding the issue of reform in China. In the rural places, the focus of this reform was on the promotion of the HRS. The development of this system could be divided into three phases and they were: the work-quota contract phase, the output-quota contract phase, and the responsibility contract phase. As Lin, Fang and Li described:

Under the group work-quota contract, the production team assigned certain work quotas with pre-specified requirements for time, quantity and quality to groups of workers, and then rewarded or punished groups according to their performances. . . . In the household output-quota contract, a specific output quota and plot of land were assigned to a household. . . . Under the household responsibility system, land was assigned to each household according to its number of members. . . . it was required by the contract to pay state tax, fulfill state procurement quotas, and submit to the production team a certain amount of public accumulation funds, public welfare funds, and so on. As Feng stated, “The rebuilt household responsibility system under which every household could own the using right of the collective land and keep the surplus after paying their taxes and fees soon became efficient.” Even though HRS had been through
ups and downs, according to Lin, Fang and Li, “Statistical data shows that from 1978 to 1984 . . . It was the period of the most rapid agricultural growth seen since the founding of New China in 1949.” After the One-Child policy, the study of HRS will not only provide a background of economic situation for the new generation’s childhood, but more important, it will help me to connect all the dots discussed above.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the historical overview of the two political statements—the One-Child policy and the HRS and how they had been made in the special social-historical context from 1949 to early 1980. As I demonstrated, these two policies were made under the guiding ideology as achieving the “Four Modernizations,” strengthening the fields of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology. In other words, the One-Child policy was brought up not because of the concern for the “population” as human beings but as a means of ensuring the nation would become richer and stronger. Similarly, the HRS was launched because only if the issues relevant to rural folks could be solved, could China move forward. Therefore, interviewing rural migrant women who were born in the same time as these two policies were launched makes it possible to examine how the two policies have influenced this generation’s understanding of their identity issues. The next Chapter outlines the methods to be utilized in carrying out this purpose.
Chapter 3: Theoretical Orientation and Method

As I have argued, the topic of Chinese rural migrant workers is still understudied. Most studies done before were concerning either with macro discourses like the demographic, economic, and political effects of migration or were too micro as focusing on the intersubjectivity among individuals. ¹ Few of them tried to bridge these two and even fewer could find an effective way to do so. This study, therefore, fills in the gap by focusing on the rhetorical sense of identity (re)construction to connect both macro and micro as a continuum rather than polarizing them. As such, the heart of this study is the analysis of the two political statements—the open letter for One-Child policy and the statement for the HRS—and obtaining stories of members from these new generation rural migrant female workers through conducting in-depth interviews. This chapter delineates the steps that I employed in undertaking this study.

Theoretical Orientation

In order to study the One-Child policy and the HRS, two rhetorical artifacts were identified: (1) the open letter (OL) that the Central government sent out to all the Party and Communist Youth League members on 25 September, 1980, and (2) the summary of the national conference on rural works published on People’s Daily on April 6, 1982. Both of them could be located on the website—News of the Communist Party of China.² Both of the statements were closely read and rhetorically analyzed under Nietzsche’s aesthetic language philosophy and Foucault’s theory of discourse since they helped me to sort out various relations in the Chinese urbanization discourse and how it has
constructed the “knowledge of the object,” in this case, the “truth” value of being rural migrant workers.

The theoretical orientation for emphasizing these new generation rural migrant female workers’ material experience in the discursively informed reality could be viewed as originated with Nietzsche. As Nietzsche argued:

When we speak of trees, colors, snows, and flowers, we believe we know something about the things themselves, although what we have are just metaphors of things, which do not correspond at all to the original entities… the origin of language… in any case not from the essence of things.³

Although Foucault didn’t restore the subject to its position as the center, he did include the subject in his writing. In fact, as demonstrated in the development of his work, Foucault became more and more concerned with “the subject”; one that is produced within discourse, cannot be outside of discourse and must be subjected to discourse.⁴ The Foucaultian subject seemed to be produced through discourse in two ways: 1) The discourse itself produces subjects as they are “subjected” within specific discursive regimes and historical periods, and 2) the discourse produces a place for the subject from which the discourse’s particular knowledge and meaning makes sense. Not all individuals in a particular period will inevitably become the subjects of a particular discourse. However in order for them to do so, they must locate themselves in the position from which the discourse makes most sense, and thus become its “subjects” by “subjecting” themselves to its meanings, power and regulation. Therefore, all discourses construct subject-positions from which alone they make sense.⁵
Foucault’s understanding of the “subject,” to a large extent, disregarded the possibilities of agency as agency emphasizes the ability of individual and/or collective discourse actors to effect change while subjectivity emphasizes the limits from the structural elements of discourse on agency that reinforces existing relations of power/knowledge. Yet, Foucault shifted to an acceptance of agency. Specifically when talking about power resides within relations, Foucault identified, “Where there is power, there is resistance…” As Motion and Leitch argued, “From a Foucaultian perspective, individuals have the potential to choose beyond the range of subject positions offered within a discourse”; in other words, everybody both thinks and acts.

Regardless of the fact that language has been granted power, by no means did Foucault ever try to get rid of its materiality. Indeed, in his last chapter of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault was not to out to deny the relevance of the physical body but, on the contrary, to show how the deployments of power are directly connected to the body—to bodies, functions, physiological processes, sensations, and pleasures. . . . Hence, I do not envision a “history of mentalities” that would take account of bodies only through the manner in which they have been perceived and given meaning and value; but a “history of bodies” and the manner in which what is most material and most vital in them has been invested.

As much as I emphasize Foucault’s theory of discourse and knowledge, I do not equate his understanding of “discourse” to language. As Karen Barad argued from a Foucaultian perspective, “Discourse is not a synonym for language.” Continuing her
argument, Barad said, “Discourse is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said. Discursive practices define what counts as meaningful statement…. Statements and subjects emerge from a field of possibilities.”

Explaining Foucault’s discursive practices in a more detailed fashion, Barad noted:

> According to Foucault, discursive practices are the local sociohistorical material conditions that enable and constrain disciplinary knowledge practices such as speaking, writing, thinking, calculating, measuring, filtering, and concentrating. Discursive practices produce, rather than merely describe, the “subjects” and “objects” of knowledge practices.

In addition, my determination to conduct interviews with members from these new generation rural migrant female workers in order to understand their material experience was greatly influenced by the perspective of material feminism. As postmodernists made the turn to the linguistic and discursive, it has been productive and fruitful for feminists as it allowed feminists to understand gender from a new perspective. However, as Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman argued, “Although postmoderns claim to reject all dichotomies, there is one dichotomy that they appear to embrace almost without question: language/reality.”

More over, speaking of Foucault’s idea on power and knowledge, Gayatri Spivak argued, “The word ‘power’ points toward what we call the empirical in the history of the language. Poststructuralist nominalism cannot afford to ignore the empirical implications of a particular name.”

Arguing for the movement from epistemology to ontology in contemporary feminist thought, Hekman asserted the necessity to have an ontological perspective that
brings the material back into the forefront of feminism. In her book, Linda Alcoff argued for a shift in emphasis from epistemology to ontology. She built up her argument on the discussion of a “robust coherentism” that avoids the problems of both foundational philosophy and epistemological nihilism. In her piece, “Cassie’s Hair,” Susan Bordo suggests that the physicality of bodies can itself beckon us toward more complex understandings of how the personal, the political, and the material are braided together.

Therefore, I engaged with stories told by members of these new generation rural migrant female workers. Not only so, my analysis of their stories in Chapter Five mingled with my feelings, my sensation and my reflective thoughts during the time when I interacted with them in order to show how individuals reconstruct, renegotiate, or reinvent their identities within such constraining discourse. Thus, carrying the heavily westernized higher education that I have been immersed in for almost 6 years, I conducted 20 interviews of these new generation rural migrant female workers in Chongqing in the summer vacation of 2014.

Steps to Conduct Local Interviews

Chongqing—The Interview Site

I chose Chongqing as the site to conduct interviews based on several reasons. First, since the One-Child policy plays a significant role in this study, an area that has been seriously conducting this policy is highly favorable. According to Zhigang Guo’s analysis of the 1990’s population census, Bao pointed out that Chongqing was one of the six areas that strictly conducted the One-Child policy.
Second, the state’s plan of setting Chongqing as the experimental district for propelling the speed of urbanization started in 2007. On June 7th, 2007, the State Council approved Chongqing to be the experimental district of the balanced urban-rural development. Based on Chongqing’s situation, the Chongqing city government made a plan focusing on solving the urban-rural dual structure problem. The State Council replied to the plan and said that Chongqing’s government should speed up the development in Chongqing in order to make it as a central city in the west of China and also explore the new ways of the balanced urban-rural development for the whole country. These historical, political, and economic factors are the main reasons for me to locate my study in Chongqing.

As the youngest provincial-level city after Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai, Chongqing was separated from Sichuan province in 1997 and became directly controlled by the Central government. Named as “Chicago on the Yangtze,” Chongqing is the only city that enjoys the provincial treatment in China’s vast and undeveloped west (compared to the development in the east coastal areas). After being independent from Sichuan province, Chongqing has received tremendous attention and help from the Central government. As the experimental district, Chongqing city government aims to explore a new way to develop both urban and rural areas and lessen the problems brought up by this dualistic structure in order to set a successful exemplar for the whole country. After the State Council selected Chongqing to be one of the experimental districts, China Development Back signed a financial cooperation agreement up to 140 billion yuan
(more than 23 billion US dollars) with some investment groups in Chongqing in order to propel the balanced urban-rural development.\textsuperscript{22}

With the large investments into Chongqing, more and more people were coming (back) to this megacity and trying to find jobs. Many administrative districts\textsuperscript{23} in Chongqing have had an increase of more than 15 thousand laborers every year.\textsuperscript{24} Some of them were coming from the rural areas for the first time while others are coming back, especially from the east coast. With the increasing migrant laborers every year and the pressure from the Central government, the major preoccupation for Chongqing government was to solve the problems caused by the urban-rural dualistic structure while speeding up the pace of urbanization.

**Recruiting Participants**

In order to recruit my participants, I asked my family, friends, and acquaintances in Chongqing to distribute the general information of my research and leave my personal contact information for the potential participants.

As the information spread out, one of my high school classmates contacted me and said that he has some rural migrant workers in his factory and I can interview them if I want to. I was so excited and thought to myself, “Finally, I can talk to individuals now.” As he provided general information on the rural migrant female workers in his factory, he double-checked with me if I was sure that I did not need his “help,” by which he meant to use his power as a factory manager to command those female workers to participate in my interview. Never giving the offer a second thought, as a well-trained interviewer in the U.S. educational system, I refused his “help” since I believed that the “ideal” way of
conducted an interview as described in any qualitative research method textbook would
definitely emerge in my experience as well. Holding this belief close to my heart, I only
asked for the potential participants’ names and their contact information.

Thinking about a common worker’s weekly schedule that my classmate told me, I
waited until the next Sunday to make my first phone call in order to do the screening. At
10:30 a.m., I thought that a normal person should have been up and might be doing some
small things already. So, I called. After ten beeps, when I almost gave up, someone
picked up the phone. A lazy and unclear voice with the effort of clearing one’s throat
floating into my ear,

--Hello? Who is that?

--Oh, yes (I was too excited to hold my breath), this is Zhou Li. I am a Doctoral
student in the School of Communication Studies in Ohio University, in the U.S.

--I don’t know you. You dialed the wrong number (the voice got irritated).

--No, no, please don’t hang up. I got your contact information from your factory
manager because I am looking for participants who are willing to take part in my
study. My study is about…

Before I even finished my sentence, I heard the short beep sound. Obviously, she hung
up. “Not everyone will be that unfriendly,” I comforted myself.

Still believing the “ideal” interview in the textbook would happen to me, I dialed
the second number on the name list. After two beeps, the phone was picked up. “What a
nice start,” I smiled.
--Hello, who are you looking for?¹

--Hello, I am a Doctoral student who is doing the research on the rural migrant female workers’ identity issues. I got your information from the factory that you are working for and was wondering if you have time and would like to participate in this study or not (learning from the failure of the first phone call, I tried to state my purpose succinctly before the person decided to hang up).

--I don’t have time…don’t have time.

Beep…beep…beep, she hung up. It would be a lie if I said that I was not disappointed at all. On the contrary, I was. I was so disappointed and started to question the steps taught in the qualitative method textbook about how to contact a potential participant. The easiest step looked so difficult and impossible to reach. However, as a typical Taurus, my greatest strength was being stubborn. I made phone calls to all the individuals on my name list. 10 out of 10, no miracle happened. Either they didn’t let me finish what I was saying and hung up or they would tell me that they didn’t have time. Feeling sorry for myself and being worried about the study could dry up like this, I almost burst into tears.

**Introspection**

I spent a whole day recovering from the deep sorry that I had for myself. And the next day when I got up, I said to myself, “Look, American way won’t work here. When in China, do like Chinese do.” It was not even possible to have the rural migrant female workers talk to me as I introduced myself as a Doctoral student, an identity that would be

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¹ Instead of being impolite, the sentence “who are you looking for” is a typical Chinese way of greeting people via phone call.

² The “fined girl” here is coming out of the “one couple, one child” as the economic punishment for the family who had more than one child. Other ways to describe the
“othered” at first sight: I am not one of them. Plus, as my high school classmate said, based on his several years’ experience with migrant workers, “A study without benefit (here he meant money specifically), don’t expect too much from them (the rural migrant workers).” Therefore, the most important thing for me to do at that moment was to find individuals who could bring me to the field where the rural migrant workers spent their everyday life.

In the meeting of my proposal defense before I left the U.S. to China, I told my dissertation committee members that as a girl who was born in 1986, I am in the same generation as all of my participants. But growing up as a city girl, I have been fully and consistently aware of my performance of the social class that I came from: I dress it, I talk it, I drive it, etc. Although I realized that social class would be a gap between the rural migrant female workers and me, never did I ever want to hide this from my interview participants. This time, the awareness stood out strong and salient. Because of my social class, the individuals who I had connections with and could bring me into the field in which the rural migrant workers spent their everyday life were all coming from the same social class as mine. In other words, they were managers of factories, the senior employees who were in charge of the rural migrant workers, or family member—a national review specialist—who controlled various enterprises’ “life or death” issues, such as issuing and reviewing the production license for the enterprises. That said, no matter in what ways that I entered into the field, I entered as an honored guest.

I thought about to write my method section in a simpler fashion as “copying and pasting” from the “standardized steps” recorded in any qualitative research method.
textbook because that was the way acceptable to my western academic audience. But why should I? As I have been through so much in terms of getting an interview chance with my possible participants, why should I still romanticize the dogmatic learning in those method books? As I consistently fell into the comparison between what I learned in those method books and how I conducted the interviews in the field, I wrote the method section in a fashion of what I “DID” instead of what I was “TRAINED.”

**Again, Recruiting Participants**

As soon as I made up my mind, I called my relatives who worked as a manager or executive to see if they had any rural migrant female worker in their work places. Typically, they responded to my inquiry with a supportive attitude and asked for details in terms of what kind of individuals I needed. Therefore, I gave them the three criteria that I would use to screen the qualified interviewees: 1) the female’s household registration is categorized as agricultural; 2) she works in the city of Chongqing; 3) as new generation, she was born in the 80s or early 90s. They told me that as far as they were concerned, they did have workers who fell into my criteria but before they gave me a definite answer, they needed to double-check with their personnel managers. It should be noted that I didn’t make a preference as I was contacting my relatives because 1) I didn’t want to stereotype my potential interviewees in terms of the jobs that they often take in the city, 2) I wanted my participants coming from a variety of occupations so that they would share different work-related experiences when talking about how they (re)construct their identities, and 3) I was afraid that I wouldn’t be able to find enough interviewees as I had initially proposed.
Within the next one or two days, I heard back from them one after another saying that they did have the rural migrant female workers, the ones that I have been looking for, in their work places, either in the factory or beauty salon. Then, they asked me more details like the length of each interview, the topic of it, and how I would like it to be arranged. I told them that the interviews were supposed to be anywhere between 30 minutes to an hour and the topic that I have been studying is the rural migrant female workers’ identity issues. However, just like an unsaid rule, “a guest should suit the convenience of the host,” indicated, as a guest (me) steps into my relatives’ work place (my relatives as the hosts), it was better for me to stay quiet in terms of the decision-making things: arrangement for the interviews. Therefore, all I said about the arrangement was: it is up to you. However you feel convenient, I am okay with it. Right after the sentences came out of my mouth, I realized two things: 1) it wouldn’t matter whether these rural migrant female workers were willing or not, but they eventually would become my participants, and 2) neither I nor these rural migrant workers would have control over the settings in which the interviews would take place.

First, different from an “ideal” interview, that as interviewer I need to check with my potential interviewees to see if they are willing or not to take part in the interviews, this time, it was all about whether my informants (here my relatives) were willing or not to help me arrange the interviews and bring me into their work places in order to conduct the interviews. Although I still emphasized the individual’s willingness to participate with every single interviewee before the interview started, we all understood that they would never drop out of the interviews since it was arranged by their director, manager,
or executive. Therefore, the interview was more like a command for them, something that
they had to cooperate with and finish.

Second, in an “ideal” interview, participants would be informed to choose any
location as their desired place for the interviews to take place. I stated in my proposal that
I didn’t want to choose any location for my participants because I wanted the interviews
to be conducted in places where my participants felt comfortable and safe to talk. I even
cited Elwood and Martin saying that valuable information would be conveyed in the
choice of the interview locations that my participants made as Elwood and Martin argued
that the interview site itself “embodies and constitutes multiple scales of spatial relations
and meaning, which construct the power and positionality of participants in relation to the
people, places, and interactions discussed in the interview.” As I gave in to the reality in
terms of having the interviews done, the possibilities for my interviewees to choose the
interview locations were sacrificed. I even had no clue how the information conveyed in
the location could be valuable to my research.

**Conducting the Interviews**

As I mentioned above, I had no clue how the interviews would be arranged as I
said to my informants (my relatives): it is up to you. But it did shock me as I entered into
every interview site and saw myself being treated like an honored guest. Without
exception, everywhere I went, I was offered either a nice office or a well-decorated
meeting room to have interviews conducted. Even though I didn’t ask my participants, I
highly doubted whether they had access to those nice-looking offices before, as workers
were supposed to stay in the factory and work. It was then that I started to re-think about
the argument Elwood and Martin made, as they suggested that the interview sites “provide a window on salient power structures operating in a particular community, among particular social actors, at a variety of social scales.” However, Elwood and Martin forgot to tell us how to deal with the situation when an interview site over-exhibits the salient power structures.

For most of the places I went to, my relatives would ask their subordinates to prepare tea, fresh fruit, and candies for me, only for me. I did prepare myself, mentally, for a kind of situation where the power difference was overt but not exaggerated to this extent: the materialization of our distinguished social statuses. The tea, the fresh fruit, the candies and the well-decorated office suggested to my participants “valuable information” in terms of how different we were through manifesting the macro social structure, the rural-urban duality. While the study was about the identity formation of rural migrant female workers, their counterpart, the urbanites, were constantly made present in this kind of interview site.

In order to eliminate the strong feelings of being different between my participants and me, I usually offered my participants the fruit and candies that were prepared for me. I welcomed them by the door if the interviews took place in a meeting room. If it was in an office, I stood up as they walked in and greeted them by shaking hands with them, and signaled them to take a seat while saying, “Please.” and walked them to the seat. I thanked them several times when the interviews ended and walked them to the door again. All I wanted to achieve was to build up a positive image of myself as someone trustworthy, someone who they would feel comfortable talking to.
Since I have already given up the control over the interview sites, I didn’t want to give up my personal image.

All I have done as I mentioned above benefited me in return. My participants opened themselves to me gradually as the interviews progressed. Some of them even started to complain about their working situations and the low payments. I sat quietly and just listened. At the end, they even thanked me for giving them a chance to complain.

**The Content of the Interviews**

My questions for the participants focused on their memories of the experience as moving between rural and urban spaces and how the two governmental policies—the One-Child policy and the household responsibility system—as they perceived, influenced their lives. The understanding of the relation between a statement and our memory can be traced back in those old times. As Nietzsche explained:

A statement is always an event that neither the language (langue) nor the meaning can quite exhaust. It is certainly a strange event: first… it opens up to itself a residual existence in the field of a memory, or in the materiality of manuscripts, books, or any other form of recording…

The statement regarding rural migrant workers did not only resituate in the form of the texts, but also lived vividly in my participants’ memories.

Another point indicated in Nietzsche’s words was that memory, to some extent, is always materialized. In ancient Greek and Roman, people started to invent and develop mnemonics. For example, Simonides of Ceos’ developed his “memory palace” to help public speakers memorize more things based on the different locations in the palace.
Even though, as Carole Blair stated that we understand the relationship between memory and communication quite differently nowadays, one thing that stays the same is memory’s attachment to materiality and this was significantly reflected in the interviews I had with my participants. No matter whether it was the pen/notebook they were not able to afford, the tuition and fees that they paid late to the school, or the rural places where they felt free to call “jia,” they (re) constructed their identity.

Although I had two questions specifically regarding the two policies—the One-Child policy and the HRS—towards the end of each interview since I believed that having questions on the two political statements could be a way to bridge the macro policies and the micro individual narratives, they didn’t function as well as I thought they would. But rather, it was through questions like “Tell me about your childhood, what impressed you most?” that I found my participants feeling ease and comfortable to talk.

**Analyzing the Collection of Stories**

In terms of the transcription, memo writing, and analysis, I used what have been stated in Kathy Charmaz’s grounded theory (but it was possible that Charmaz might not think my interview process as her definition of grounded theory). Going into the field with my full awareness of the differences between a urbanite and a rural migrant worker, I consistently reflected on what I did and said. Kathy Charmaz noted researchers “have long advocated acknowledging and grappling with our starting points and standpoint.” As Charmaz argued, “Researchers and research participants make assumptions about what is real, possess stocks of knowledge, occupy social statuses, and pursue purposes that influence their respective views and actions in the presence of each other.” Besides
my understanding of myself as an urban individual, my studies on Nietzsche’s indeterminate nature of language, Foucault’s theory of discourse, the repeated readings of the two political statements had already formed my partial knowledge of the Chinese new generation rural migrant female workers. And this partial knowledge had always been with me, influencing how I saw, heard, felt or thought as I was conducting interviews.

Although the logic of grounded theory serves as guidance for researcher’s methods of data-gathering as well as of theoretical development, it was an overstatement that all grounded theorists are working to construct theory.\textsuperscript{33} Still until now, I wouldn’t say that I have had a “theory” on the identity formation for the Chinese new generation rural migrant female workers. I just came to understand them more, from the subject—new generation rural migrant female workers—created in the government’s urbanization discourse to the position that they have placed themselves as they shared their own stories. In other words, grounded theory’s flexibility provided me a chance to focus more on process of knowing/understanding them than the results.

The second reason for me to use grounded theory was because it is primarily a method of analysis. Specifically, I emphasized its coding process in my research. According to Charmaz, grounded theory interviewing differs from in-depth interviewing greatly in the sense that it helps the researchers narrow the range of interview topics in order to gather specific information as they proceed with conducting the interviews.\textsuperscript{34} Being equipped with grounded theory, I started my coding process right after the first day that I was done with the interviews. After interviews during the day, I went back at night and played the interviews that were recorded in the recorder again and again as I was
transcribing them. Deeply immersing myself in the conversations, I even found myself wiping tears when hearing some heart-breaking stories. More important, what I was encouraged by grounded theory to do was to code for meanings and actions instead of themes or topics.\textsuperscript{35} Thus, instead of capturing my understanding of the gathered information in static words like nouns, I used gerunds as I describe my analysis.

Even though Charmaz discussed three major coding processes in the initial coding, I used line-by-line coding since it worked particularly well with detailed information.\textsuperscript{36} As Charmaz argued, line-by-line coding forces the researcher to look at the information anew since it frees the research from becoming so immersed in his/her respondents’ worldviews and accepting them without question.\textsuperscript{37} More important, through the line-by-line coding process, I became clearer with respect to what kind of information to look for next. It helped me to distill the information and gear me towards my participants’ understanding of what they meant by “a complete home” (Chapter Six focuses on this). After I finished the initial coding, I took the next step: the focused coding. As the name indicated, focused coding was more “directed, selective, and conceptual” than the initial coding, which requires researchers to make decisions on which initial codes to take as they make analytic sense of the gathered information.\textsuperscript{38} Through focused coding, I was able to move across interviews and compare my participants’ experiences, actions, and interpretations in order to reach a more abstract and conceptual level of understanding by focusing on their “going OUT to work in the cities” and being so peasant (here peasant works as a derogatory adjective) in the term “peasant-worker.”
More so, the analytical nature of grounded theory, as Charmaz conceptualized, offered me alternative perspectives as I re-read the two political texts: the OL and the HRS. I have read the two texts several times before I went into the field and conducted the interviews. Even so, I had no clue in terms of analyzing them. I struggled in the sense of defining my rhetorical phenomenon. In other words, what should I focus on in the two texts instead of reading or analyzing them aimlessly. As I started the analysis of my participants’ stories, the repeated comparison across different interviews made me notice two subjects that they addressed in their stories very often: their loving and caring parents, and the bandit-like local Party officers. Although they didn’t talk about themselves in a direct way, their stories of others, their perspectives of understanding the One-Child policy and the HRS, their memories of their childhood and their definition of “a complete home,” all indicated something about them—these new generation rural migrant female workers. My realization of that, to a large extent, helped me define the rhetorical phenomenon in the two political statements as “the reasonable and considerate people,” “the origin of problems,” and “the active propagandist and responsible educator.” I devote Chapter Four to my analysis of these phrases.

The third reason to use grounded theory was because of one crucial method—memo writing. As Charmaz conceptualized it, writing memos are those analytic breaks that our research process takes for us to stop and write informal analytic notes. It was a crucial method for grounded theory since it prompts the researcher to analyze the gathered information and codes early in the research process. I started to write memos after I made the ten phone calls. Even though I failed in terms of setting up any interview,
I wrote my failure in the memo. Although I had no idea how that would help my study of these new generation rural migrant female workers at that moment, writing about my experience and feelings as I had contact with this group of individuals provided a space for me to actively engage with all I gleaned from the field, a time to have deep reflective thinking on what I saw, heard, smelled, felt and even said when I was with them. In my memos, I wrote about how I got the access to the field, how I got to know them, how the interview sites looked like, how they dressed, talked to me, and interacted with one another, when they paused, laughed, or even wiped tears. In other words, I kept my memo-writing just like diaries. Between fifteen pages of memo writing and one hundred and twenty one transcripts (in Chinese), my experience in the field with these new generation rural migrant female workers counted up to one hundred and thirty six pages.

Through the comparative and abductive nature of grounded theory, I was not only able to read closely and deeply into the information gathered from interviews but also to bridge Chinese government’s two political texts with the individual rural migrant worker’s lived experience. Through analyzing the interviews, this dissertation demonstrated not only how rural migrant female workers, as subjects, were created in the governmental texts but also how, at least perceived by the women themselves, these migrant female workers have tried to be the authors of their own lives through negotiating the subject positions that they became their lived experience in the context of the social-historical discourses.
Chapter 4: The Narrative from the Government

In order to understand the identity formation for these new generation rural migrant female workers, the narrative from the government, which contributed greatly to how those females have been perceived and categorized, is one unique “reality” that cannot be missed. In this chapter, I focus, in particular, on two political statements—the Open Letter (hereafter addressed as OL) and the Household Registration System (as HRS). As I introduced both of the two political statements in the earlier chapters, since the days that the OL and the HRS were mandated, they functioned as landmarks that have significantly influenced the individuals from the 1980s and 1990s.

When a rhetoric scholar addresses the issue of identity formation, one topic that is inevitable to talk about is the discursive process—the construction, maintenance and transformation of human subjectivity. In this chapter, under the guidance of Friedrich Nietzsche’s aesthetic language philosophy and Michel Foucault’s archaeology, I examine the unconscious limits of our understandings of the human subjects implied in the OL and the HRS, specifically these new generation rural migrant female workers, and the political institutions from the Central government to the local, and eventually investigate the structures that made this particular knowledge possible and sustainable at specific historical moments. In doing so, I do not simply aim to provide an alternative knowing or understanding of the governmental statements, the political institutions, or the subjects constituted in these discourses but rather, like Nietzsche would say, piercing through these texts to discover a level of meaning, to promote our personal engagement and interaction with these texts.\footnote{1}
Even though it was not obvious, as Ernst Behler argued, Nietzsche “had the ‘courage’ in this early text to point out ‘that even the most beautiful figures of Sophoclean tragedy—an Antigone, an Electra, an Oedipus—engage at times in barely tolerable trains of thought, that the dramatic characters are altogether more beautiful and magnificent than their articulation in words.’” In so doing, Nietzsche’s contribution to the study of rhetoric and language is acknowledged as deconstructing the Platonic philosophy, “an inversion of the value hierarchy that places truth and essences prior to interpretation,” and offering “a theory of interpretation that follows the logic of the supplement, demonstrating how Platonic truth is always an artistic construction of human subject.” In doing so, as Whitson and Poulakos observed, “Nietzsche was able to show that knowledge is nothing more than a rhetorical fabrication, one of the many in which human beings trade.” Nietzsche’s critique of “objective knowledge” as an illusion frames the first point in this discussion of the rural migrant female workers’ identity formation: the fabricated subjects and subjectivity.

Scholars who have studied the One-Child policy from a critical perspective have asked an ethical question: how were individuals treated while the policy was created and executed? As Wang Feng, Yong Cai, and Baochang Gu noted, “The planning mentality, treating population simply as a number that can be planned and regulated, was clearly evident.” Jingbao Nie critiqued the government’s argument in the OL, saying that there was no inseparable relation between the population control and the “common good” for all the human beings as the government propagandized. According to Nie, it is unethical for the government to treat its people only as population, a means to reach a so-called
“common good” defined by the government. In order to do so, he followed Mencius’ influential principle, *minweigui* (the paramount importance of the people), “treating person—one self or others—never as a means only but always as an end in itself.”

Even though Nie was right to direct our attention to the differences between “people” and “population,” he failed to point out the fact that even Mencius forgot to define who the “people” are in his own texts. As Guoyong Fu carefully studied Mencius’ works, Fu argued that Mencius did not clearly define what he referred to specifically as “the people.” Even though I am aware of the strategic usage of the “people” and its ambiguity that the government has always tried to maintain, it is the government’s use of “our people” in the OL that I want to pay attention to. Different from the ambiguous delineation of the term, “people,” the very clearness that the government made the “people,” “our people,” in the OL contrasted sharply with the portrayal of the growing population in the same statement.

The “Reasonable and Considerate” People

In order to show that how citizens started to respond to the government’s call for “one couple, one child,” the OL said:

From 1971 to 1979, in those 9 years, as our country tried its best to control the population growth, 56 million fewer births happened. From 1979, millions of young couples responded to the government’s call and said that they were willing to only have one child. . . . Our people have proved that they are reasonable and considerate, knowing how to consider the general interests, understand the country’s difficulties, and caring about the future generations.
In those words, a picture of high suzhi (high-quality) citizens in the flesh was sketched out. As Andrew Kipnis noted, the word suzhi, justifying social and political hierarchies of all sorts, has become central to contemporary China governance and society, especially during the post-Mao era. Kipnis stated, “the CCP increasingly claims its own legitimacy in terms of producing a strong nation by individually and collectively raising the quality of its citizens.” Also, as Nie specified, the reason that China’s population control has been so unchallenged was because the low quality of the population has always been argued to be a huge obstacle for the whole country’s economic development. Differing from the government’s all-the-time portrayal of the population as large in quantity and low in quality, in the OL, the government shifted its position to acknowledge the “reasonable-ness and considerate-ness” of its people.

It shouldn’t be overlooked here that although the government was praising its people, it still didn’t define who those people were. The only thing that we knew about the “people” who were “reasonable and considerate, and knowing how to consider the general interests . . . and caring about the future generations” was that they were “young couples.” But nothing was told about whether they were Party members or not, or whether any consequences would follow if they happened to not respond to the government’s call. As Nietzsche would remind us, “Language projects itself aesthetically because it ‘never expresses something completely but displays only a characteristic which appears to be prominent to it.’” The “prominent” aspect of the “people” described in the OL was “reasonable and considerate,” and the only way to be so is through responding to the government’s call for “one couple, one child” to show one
knows “how to consider the general interests, understand the country’s difficulties, and exhibit caring about the future generations.”

Besides, our understanding of the text shouldn’t be limited only to what has been said in the text. Exploring what has not been said or made obvious in the text should be viewed as critical as what has been said. Raymie McKerrow argued for the importance of the “absence” as well as the “presence.”13 According to McKerrow, “Terms are not ‘unconnected’; in the formation of a text, out of fragments of what is said, the resulting ‘picture’ needs to be checked against ‘what is absent’ as well as what is present.”14

Reminded by McKerrow, what we should pay attention to in the OL is not only limited to what has been stated but also the implied message. While the government was praising the “millions of young couples” who were “reasonable and considerate,” what was behind the text was the government’s standard for its “people.” In order to qualify one’s citizenship, the right thing to do as the OL was sent out was to show one’s commitment to the long-term campaign for “one couple, one child.” In other words, the subject, the qualified Chinese “people,” as McKerrow concluded both Derrida’s and Foucault’s points and stated, “emerges as an effect, as something constructed rather than constructing.”15

The OL never worked alone. Before the OL, earlier in the second half-year of 1978, the promotion for “one couple, one child” had already been started by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. Citing an article published on the People’s Daily on January 27, 1979, *Jinyibu kongzhi renkou zengzhang sudu* (Further control the population growth rate), Judith Banister focused her analysis on the governmental
attitudes to the one-child family vis-à-vis families that had more than one kid. The article stated clearly, “Women who give birth to one child only will be publicly praised, those who give birth to three or more will suffer economic sanctions.”\textsuperscript{16} I felt the necessity of citing Banister in length in order to show how the reward and punishment systems were working together along with the OL to “arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework.”\textsuperscript{17} As Banister explained:

Realizing that the idea of stopping at one child per couple would be unpopular, the government announced financial incentives to encourage this practice and devised the “single-child certificate.” Couples with one child sign a pledge stating that they will have no more children receive the single-child certificate entitling them to economic benefits. . . . In urban areas, the rewards for signing the one-child pledge are supposed to include a monthly cash payment while the child is growing up, preference in housing allocation and job assignments, free medical care for the child, priority for kindergarten and school enrollment, and free schooling for the child. In rural areas the promised benefits are more vague, because the rural collectives, which were still in place when the policy was announced, could not afford to pay such expensive benefits for their members. Rural couples who signed the one-child pledge were supposed to receive extra work points while the child is growing up, a private plot of land as large as that of other families with more children, and a larger proportion of the team’s collectively produced grain than would normally have been allowed for the age of the child.\textsuperscript{18}
As Banister noted, the punishment was conducted more harshly than the rewards. In commenting on the rural places, Banister said:

In rural areas work points were supposed to be reduced for all the years the child was growing up, the family’s private plot was to be no larger than for smaller families, the child was to be allocated no grain ration, the child was barred from participation in the cooperative medical system, the child’s schooling fees had to be paid by the couple, and large families in financial difficulties were supposed to get no welfare assistance.¹⁹

The excerpts from Banister’s observation on reward and punishment systems along with the OL created what Foucault would say, “the contingent historical circumstances.”²⁰ It is in such a unique historical situation, “our reasonable and considerate people” were formed as an effect. “Thoroughly historicized,” as McKerrow argued, “the subject that acts does so as a being already interpellated within a set of social practices.”²¹ While the government publicized the recognition of its “reasonable and considerate people,” it didn’t forget to diminish the growing population.

“The Origin of Problems”

The government didn’t portray its existing population as problem, but it did point out that the growing population as a problem that should be controlled. Even though Chairman Mao didn’t mention birth control after 1957 because he considered that birth control was against the Marxist philosophy that he had always believed. But he recognized the problem brought by human beings who were not able to control their
reproduction. In a speech that Mao delivered to the Supreme State Council in February 1957, as Mao said:

Here [we] advocate birth control; it would be great [if we] could lower the birth [rate] a bit; if [we] need to give birth, then give birth in a planned way. Based on what I see, humans are bad at managing themselves. They have plans for the production of factories…however, they have no plan for the reproduction of themselves, which is absolutely anarchism, anarchy, no organization, and no discipline. 22

Although realizing the potentiality to control the population growth, as I argued in the earlier chapter, Mao’s growing optimism about rapid agricultural advances as the completion of the collectivization process in the rural areas disenabled him to face the historical situation at that time. Differing from Mao’s take on the issue of population control, Deng’s strong attitude and his have-to-implement command clearly showed in the OL. As a milestone for the new leadership during the post-Mao era, the OL functioned as crystallization for the new leadership’s preference: prioritizing development, in particular, economic development.

As Nietzsche reminded us, “only with society does the ‘need for truthfulness’ begin, does the belief in truth become necessary for the human being.” 23 Therefore, the “true facts” of the growing population described in the OL framed in a seemingly scientific style is only a “social need,” the need for the government to intervene in our “reasonable and considerate” people’s private life to enact population control for the nation’s development. The portrayal of the growing population as “the origin of problem”
in the OL was along with the solutions that the government came up with under the name of “science.” The government was promoting mainly two steps in this statement.

Controlling is the first step that the government advocated for population growth. In the second paragraph of the OL, it stated, “However, since we haven’t conducted proper control on the speed of the population growth, it will result in a fast speed of population growth.” What has been implied in this is that a desired speed for the population growth was expected. But what was the desired one and how did it come out? Stated at the beginning of the OL, “controlling the population of the nation within one billion and two hundred million by the end of this century.” Since the letter was sent out in 1980, “the end of this century” indicated the last day of 1999. But then how did this specific number of population come out and whose desire did it represent? In order to answer these two questions, a review on the style of new leadership, specifically policymaking process, and relations among key figures involved in population control is indispensable.

Undoubtedly, the new leadership under which the OL was sent out refers to the Party’s second generation of central collective leadership with Comrade Deng Xiaoping at the core. As Deng described:

Any leadership should have a core. Leadership without a core is undependable. The core in the first generation leadership was Chairman Mao. Because of him as the core, “Cultural Revolution” couldn’t beat the Party. I am, in fact, the core for the second generation.”24
Therefore, when addressing the issue of leadership style, it indicates the emphasis on “the core.” As I discussed in chapter two, because of their distinctive growing-up experiences, Deng Xiaoping’s leadership style shifted significantly from Mao Zedong’s. As Mao’s growing-up involved consistently fight against his father’s tyranny, Mao compared himself to the tiger, a traditional symbol of power, and also a rebellious monkey, the character who arose from the earth and possessed supernatural powers that enabled him to rage against heaven in the *Journey to the West.* Differing from Mao’s antiauthoritarianism, Deng had concerns about issues like socialist construction and “Four Modernizations” all his life since he firmly believed Stalin’s words that those who fall behind get beaten.

Although Chairman Mao passed away on September 9, 1976, his thoughts, especially those mistakes that Mao made during his last years, still have had profound influence in- and outside of the Party. In the Party, Hua Guofeng, who was chosen by Mao as his successor, stuck firmly to Mao’s teachings including Mao’s Left-leaning Errors in the “Cultural Revolution.” In order to protect Mao’s thoughts and further strengthen his position as the top leader of the Party, Hua Guofeng came up with his “Two Whatevers” on January 21, 1977. In his “Two Whatevers,” Hua said, “Whatever decisions made by Chairman Mao, we must maintain; [we] cannot disobey. Whatever words and deeds that make damage to Chairman Mao must be resolutely stopped; cannot be tolerate.”

Hua’s doctrine didn’t aim to help the whole Party to recognize the Left-leaning Errors that Mao made during his last few years but confirmed what Mao had done during
the years of “Cultural Revolution” as great achievements. Because of the “Two Whatevers,” many mistakes made during “Cultural Revolution” couldn’t be corrected, which was a huge obstacle for the Party’s continuous works. Realizing the serious problem that “Two Whatevers” brought, Deng Xiaoping and other critical leaders in the Party, along with three major newspapers in Beijing, started a significant discussion on “Practice is the sole criterion for testing truth,” which spread out to the whole country very soon. Eventually, when it came to the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist China, from December 18 to December 22, 1978, no matter how hard Hua Guofeng tried to orient the discussion in terms of avoiding the discussion on “Practice is the sole criterion for testing truth,” he failed.

Party members who were attending the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist spontaneously started the discussion on “Practice is the sole criterion for testing truth.” In that situation, Hua had no choice but to admit his fault in making such a statement as “Two Whatevers.” The 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist China in 1978 has always been viewed as a milestone in the history of the Chinese Communist Party because the second generation of leadership was formed with Deng Xiaoping as the core.

After the “Cultural Revolution” from 1966 to 1976 and the denial of the successor of Mao Zedong and his ideas, the whole country was in difficulties in finding not only faiths but also the mainstream values. Moreover, Mao’s flat denial of Confucianism during the “Cultural Revolution” made it impossible for Confucianism to hold the whole
country together in a short period of time. Then, what else could Chinese people hold on to?

Although Mao’s ideas were still propagandized as guiding thoughts for the country, individuals didn’t hold to Mao’s words as “imperial edict” as they used to. In order to reclaim its legitimacy to rule the country and help the whole nation to rebuild mainstream values, the leadership of the Party looked up to the value of the developed countries: science. Although the decision to use “science” was made by the leadership of the Party, Deng Xiaoping was the one who first referred to it in the post-Mao’s time.

Emphasizing the importance of science and education, Deng said:

In order for us to realize the modernization, the key point is to improve the science and technology. If [we] don’t take education serious, science and technology won’t have development. Depending on empty talks cannot achieve modernization but only knowledge and qualified people. How the improvement can happen without knowledge, without qualified people? [We] must admit our backwardness and only when we face the fact, we can see the hope. As far as I see, comparing with the developed countries, our science and technology, and education were twenty years behind.\textsuperscript{31}

Therefore, the ideology of ruling the country was no more as Confucians promoted, rule a country of virtue,\textsuperscript{32} but a scientific way to running a country. As “science” was promoted greatly by Deng Xiaoping, the satisfaction that the leadership had toward Song Jian and several other comrades’ proposal for population control and the decision to use it are easy to be understood. Chen Muhua, the vice-premier in China, who was put in charge of a
new and enlarged Birth Planning Leading Small Group in June 1978 expressed her satisfaction with Song Jian’s proposal on “One-child” and noted it as having “great reference value” for the government’s policymaking.33

In fact, re-reading the following excerpts from different news agencies in chronological order will be helpful in terms of understanding Chen’s words: great reference value. On August 11, 1979, Chen Muhua published an article in *People’s Daily*. In that article, representing the government, she brought up the aim for population control by the end of 20th century and the two-phase plan. She said:

> From our actual situation, [we should] consciously control the population growth in a planned way for a long time. This is our principle. We must adhere to it and strive to achieve zero for the natural population growth by the end of this century. That is, the population is not growing anymore. To achieve this goal, we envision two phases’ effort. The first one: striving to reduce the natural population rate from the current 12/1000 to about 5/1000 by 1985. The second one: fighting to drop the natural population rate to zero by 2000. . . . [We] must advocate for “one couple, one child.” This is the main approach that can bring the natural population growth rate down to zero and one that can be accepted by the people.34

After Chen Muhua’s advocacy for “one couple, one child,” on February 13, 1980, Xinhua New Agency issued a piece of news on the various estimates of China’s population growth trend in 100 years. The news emphasized that the result of the research was a cooperative work of both natural and social scientists. It said:
Recently, several scientists in the capital [Beijing] have drawn upon cybernetics to estimate different ways of our population growth trend in 100 years. Their large amount of data shows that [if we] strongly encourage couples to only have one child from now on, then to 1985, generally [every couple] will have one child; then to the end of this century, the natural population growth rate can almost be zero and the whole population of the country can be controlled at one billion and one hundred million or even less.35

As Zhongtang Liang noted, in a not-too-long piece of news, the report quoted four times that it was Song Jian and other comrades’ who advocated “one couple, one child.”36 On March 7, 1980, Song Jian, Tian Xueyuan and other comrades published a paper in *People’s Daily* and said:

[If] every woman in the childbearing age can achieve the goal of having only one child as soon as possible, then by the end of this century, the natural population growth rate of our country can be reduced to zero with the total amount staying no more than one billion and one hundred million.37

Reading through all the news articles in 1979 and 1980, Liang argued that only one piece of news about “one couple, one child” was published in 1979 and that was brought up by Chen Muhua, the vice-premier in China, while in 1980 there were six articles on “one couple, one child” and three out of six came from Song Jian and his colleagues.38

Framing political desire in terms of science, the two-phase plan of reducing the population growth rate sounded so systematic and reasonable. Plus, the goal seemed not difficult to achieve at all: only if every woman in the childbearing age were to have one,
and only one, child. In that way, the natural population growth rate of the country would be reduced to 5/1000 by 1985 and zero by 2000. As a result, this well designed and presumably accurate calculation of the birth control plan would benefit the whole country because it is a scientific way to run the country.

As BBC portrayed, “the West is the violence instigator for China’s One-Child policy.” As it stated, the mathematical projection model that Song Jian used to calculate population growth was directly taken from the book published in 1972, *The Limits to Growth.* As scientific as Song Jian and his colleague’s mathematical projection model sounded, there is no doubt that a government who tried to build its legitimacy on science would adopt it and wrap its political purpose up. In this way, “one couple, one child” sounded scientific rather than political. It was not the government but the scientists who calculated in a scientific way and found the “truth.” It was the “objective facts” that everyone, every “reasonable and considerate” Chinese individual, should understand.

However, as Behler noted in *Nietzsche’s Study of Greek Rhetoric,* Nietzsche argued, “Written language is artificial and dead.” Although Nietzsche believed that a certain hierarchy exists among the various modes of language, for him, “the highest level of feeling cannot be expressed in words…because every word merely signifies.” In other words, nothing is capable “of reaching the true essence of things” but only “remain on the surface within the realm of anthropomorphism, appearance, language, and images.”

Here, Nietzsche helped us to see through the blind belief of science that the government has tried to inculcate in the people. Just because the conception and the logic
of “one couple, one child” was constructed upon “science,” this doesn’t make it stay in the realm of “objective” as this very “science” was conveyed to us via its “scientific language.” For Nietzsche, language “is based just as little as rhetoric is upon that which is true, upon the essence of things.”

Nietzsche’s understanding of language, subject and object is tremendously valuable as it reveals to us that subject can never use language to express things completely but can note stress where a subject stands in relation to things rather than what it knows about them. That said, Song Jian and his colleague’s accurate calculation and scientific estimate didn’t mean that they knew the “real fact” of the Chinese population growth situation.

Nevertheless, language can never be the essence of an object and only creates the appearance for it. Nietzsche reminded us that he didn’t mean that this appearance is opposed for “reality.” Instead, what Nietzsche held was that this appearance is one true and unique reality of the object out of all the possibilities. As Nietzsche was elaborating how the appearances turn into reality, he realized the “greatest trouble” in his words that “what things are called is incomparably more important than what they are.” As Kenneth Burke emphasized, naming is a key to understand persuasion:

naming is done, not for the sheer glory of the thing, but because of its bearing upon human welfare. A different name for snow implies a different kind of hunt. Some names for snow imply that one should not hunt at all. And similarly, the names for typical, recurrent social situations are not developed out of “disinterested curiosity,” but because the names imply a command (what to expect, who to look out for).
This connects well to the second step that the government took in the OL as the name “the origin of problems” formed for the growing population: problematizing.

The OL described children as burdens and problems for the family and for the country and its people. The OL started off problematizing the phenomenon of population growth in terms of linking it to the project of the “Four Modernizations,” to future generations’ health and happiness, and the whole country’s long-term and current interests. As the OL argued, “The fast growth of the population makes it difficult to improve people’s living standards within a short time.”

More than that, in order to create a stronger impression of the growing population as an urgent problem, the OL problematized the phenomenon of population growth as the end of the world. The letter stated:

Take the food supply for example. In order to ensure urban and rural people’s food, food for the industrial usage and others, an average of the future food should be at least 800 jin (almost 900 pounds) per person every year. If one hundred million more people will be born, it is a must to produce eight hundred tons more of grain. . . . Under the current situation, it is quite difficult to produce an average of eight hundred jin of food per person every year and also have a sufficient number of other economic crops.

In addition, in order to express the government’s powerlessness to change the current poverty situation if it will face such a huge number of the population, the letter said:
If the productivity of the industry and agriculture of the country still stays at a low level and the material resource is not rich, the speed of the population growth will directly affect the accumulation of funds needed for modernization. That said, the government did not only achieve its goal in terms of problematizing the growing population but also turn over the responsibility of the country’s development to its people. Only when our “reasonable and considerate” people realized how closely related their personal choices of having kids to the future prosperity of the nation, the modernization could be achieved. From this, it legitimized the government’s intervention into individuals’ private life, specifically, the personal choices of childbearing. As the OL indicated:

In addition to increase family support payments, as the population grows, the nation needs to increase funding for the growing population’s education, investment, and social utility equipment and funds in order to solve the schooling, employment and other everyday issues.

In fact, as Linda Gordon noted, “birth control has always been primarily an issue of politics, not of technology.”48 In particular, as Jingbao Nie noted, this was the case in China “as every aspect of the life of the Chinese people has had strong political and ideological coloring.”49 Hence, rather than taking the process of problematization of the growing population as the government’s objective, more significantly, we should see political motivation behind the surface: justifying the government’s intervention through turning the “private choice” into “public concern.”
As Whitson and Poulakos explained Nietzsche’s critique of perspectivism, they said:

For Nietzsche, however, it is absurd to think that we can have “the right perception—that would mean the adequate expression of an object in the subject…. [B]etween absolutely different spheres such as subject and object, there can be no expression but at most an aesthetic stance.”

Foucault’s well-known concept of power-knowledge, which looked into “the political status of science and ideological functions which it could serve,” also challenged this normative framework of “objective truth.” In contrast to the understanding that truth and knowledge stand outside of power and political and social relations, Foucault reminded us that truth is produced by individuals occupying specific social positions. According to Foucault, “truth isn’t outside power, or lacking in power…. Truth is a thing of this world…. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth.”

Once again, the government’s rhetoric of the growing population and the national conditions didn’t show how much the government knew about, as the knowledge can never stand outside of power and political and social relations, but only the government’s preference to development, specifically economic development, over its citizens’ wellbeing. This preferred stance could further be seen in the accusation that the government had to the growing population. In the Open Letter, the government attributed the economic backwardness to the overpopulation solely:

With the fast growth of the population, the people of the country have met bigger and bigger problems in the areas like food, clothing, housing, transportation,
education, and sanitation. This will make it more difficult for the whole country to change its poverty and backwardness. . . . In addition, the fast growth of population will not only increase the difficulties for the schooling, but also cause the excessive consumption of the energy, water, forests and other natural resources. Meanwhile, the fast growth of population will increase the environmental pollution, which will worsen the production conditions and people’s living environment and make them hard to be improved.

The subjects who were constituted directly after the problematization of the growing population were individual Party and Youth League members. Facing such a huge “problem,” one efficient way to maximize effect of “one couple, one child” that the leadership of the government believed was via its Party and League members. Reading closely how the government endorsed its Party and Youth League members to “educate” the public not only helps us see crystal-clearly how the government masked its political desire and avoided the accusation of the very intervention into people’s private lives as unethical but also the formation of the growing population, the subject as “the origin of problems.” Therefore, the third subject constituted in the OL is “the active propagandist and responsible educator.”

“The Active Propagandist and Responsible Educator”

In the OL, it used words like “propagandize” and “educate the public” in terms of the Party and the Youth League members’ advocacy for “One-child policy.” That said, individuals no longer had a say on having a child. Again, the government intervened into individuals’ private life, even though words employed in the OL indicating the
intervention were just “calling for,” and “advocating.” But in the context like late 1970s and earlier 1980s, democracy was like a joke for the Chinese. As professor Cangping Wu, specializing in the study of population and development, noted, although the OL was a milestone document in the history of our nation’s birth control, it could be further developed. As she argued:

The OL was sent out in a form of “family letter” from the Central government to all of the Party and Youth League members because the Central government wanted the members to genuinely convince, educate and advocate the public to follow the “one couple, one child.”… However, in a situation like that, [we] have to admit that the proponents of administrative decrees and management were much stronger than democracy and service.54

Wu was right to point out the historical situation in 1980s. Immersed in the aftermath of the persecutions from the “Cultural Revolution,” Chinese people merely thought about the possibility of democracy. However, just because the OL was sent out in the form of a “family letter,” one could not jump to the conclusion that the leadership of the Central government wanted its members to convince, educate and advocate the public in a “genuine” way. As Nie noted:

When “real action,” “effective measures,” and “practical results” are emphasized by the central policymakers in order to carry out the family planning program “strictly,” “firmly,” “resolutely,” and “effectively” local cadres, in direct confrontation with the strong will of many people to have more than one child, must choose between using coercion and losing their positions.55
In fact, continuing to read the OL discloses the unobtrusive but unyielding intention. The letter started off with some soft words like “advocate” and “call for” but ended with strong phrases like “In order to control the population growth, the government has already decided to make some particular policies.” As Foucault noted, “To pose the problem in terms of the state means to continue posing it in terms of sovereign and sovereignty, that is to say, in terms of law.”56 That said, Foucault reminded us that it was obvious that the government would take actions toward the growing population as it has been described as a crisis for the whole nation. Moreover, the government’s tone of the childbearing decision at the end of the letter was not one for negotiating with individuals but one of informing the public that the government would surely intervene in their personal lives:

In the areas of nursery, school, medical care, recruitment, enrollment, urban housing and rural residential base allocation, the only child and its family should be taken care of…Relevant departments should take prompt and effective measurements to produce high-quality contraceptives to meet the needs of the people.

In addition, worrying about some members’ hesitation in terms of carrying out the rights endorsed by the government to be “the active propagandist and responsible educator,” which in return would affect the results of popularizing the “one couple, one child” policy, the government warned its Party members against misunderstanding the policy. Denying that the “one couple, one child” would exacerbate the aging problem, the letter noted, “The aging problem won’t happen in this century…. The fastest time for
aging problem to show up will be in forty years.” In order to reassure the audience, it continued, “We can definitely take some actions to prevent this [the aging problem] from happening.” Yet, it didn’t mention any specific measurement throughout the whole letter.

In order to deny the problem of gender ratio imbalance, the letter said:

After the Liberation of China, it has been proved by the population statistics in the past years that the gender ratio is almost balanced with the number of males is slightly more than that of females. After the advocacy for the Only Child policy, some department did research in some areas on the gender of the first babies and found out that boys are still slightly more than girls.

Not even giving a try to specify what it meant by “some department,” all the government strived for was to be perfunctory with its people while addressing the price that the “one couple, one child” would cause. In doing so, the government hoped to minimize the possibilities of the confrontation from its people as the Party and League members carried out the advocacy work among the people.

As I mentioned earlier, regardless of its indefensible argument that “one couple, one child” would not come at a high price, the government pushed its members to the frontline to confront the public and be responsible for the whole birth control project. As Nie stated:

For the authorities, the program is “guided” by the policies of the central government and participated in “voluntarily” by millions of Chinese people. As for those cases in which coercion and violence have been employed, it is not the policy but local cadres who are responsible.57
Even though the government remembered to ease its tough tone at the end of the letter and said, “The contraception should be the major one to use among all the birth control measures. But individuals can choose whatever kind of method out of their willingness,” it spent the last whole paragraph on motivating the members and reminding them to play the role of “the active propagandist and responsible educator.” As it stated:

The Central government requires all Party members and Youth League members, especially leaders in every level, to concern about the nation’s future, and be responsible for the people’s benefits and the happiness of our future generations. [They must] have a thorough understanding of the meaning and the necessity of this big event and serve as an example to others. Party members should take the initial in terms of overcoming the feudal thought that without boys, the generations cannot roll. Young cadres should start with their own behaviors and elder cadres should educate and supervise their kids. Every cadre should try to persuade the people around in an active and patient way. Every cadre who works for the family planning work should be the propagandist, help people resolve their ideological and practical problems…

While it stated at the very end that “every cadre who works for the family planning work” shouldn’t do lawless things like forcing the individuals to take the orders and also they should persuade others to quit doing things like that, it hardly worked, as coercion and violence have always been an inherent part of the family planning program.58

Until now, I have examined the OL under the guidance of Friedrich Nietzsche’s aesthetic language philosophy and Michel Foucault’s archaeology and his well-known
concept of power-knowledge. Throughout the analysis, three subjects constituted in the letter were discussed in depth as “reasonable and considerate” people, the “origin of problems,” and the “active propagandist and responsible educator.” The constitutions of both “reasonable and considerate” people and “active propagandist and responsible educator” further explained the stance that the leadership of the government took on the issue of the “origin of problems,” namely, the growing population.

If it were not the leadership of the second generation, in particular Deng Xiaoping, who connected the issues of development mainly to the population growth, then the policy wouldn’t even have been drafted. Similarly, if it were not for a better control of population growth, the “reasonable and considerate” people and the “active propagandist and responsible educator” wouldn’t have been created. We have seen the efforts that the government made to problematize the population growth by creating the so-called “objective facts” in order to justify its intervention into individual’s private life as a timely necessity that was scientifically crafted. However, in order to better capture these new generation rural migrant female workers as a formed identity, HRS should be considered.

The difference between the rhetorical fabrication and the epistemic fabrication, as Whitson and Poulakos argued, was that the producers of the epistemic fabrication “have consistently denied their artistry and impulses, insisting all along that they operate outside art and above rhetoric.”59 That said, Nietzsche demonstrated to us “the producers of knowledge do not, indeed, cannot escape the rhetoricity of their discourse.”60
As I noted in earlier chapters, during the post-Mao era, achieving “Four Modernizations” was set to be the guiding ideology under Deng’s term. One major reform that Deng had issued in 1978, HRS—every household could own the using-right of the collective land and keep the surplus after paying their taxes and fees. As a complement to China’s traditional economic system, the People’s Commune System, the HRS emerged in the 1960s. Its emergence not only revealed the inefficiency of the People’s Commune System, but more important, transformed the situation of the stagnant economy in rural places to some extent. Nevertheless, as scholars looked back into the policies that had been put in action during the early post-Mao era, more and more came to realize the contradictory effect that the HRS had brought against the “one couple, one child” policy and to re-examine the amendment that the government made to the original “one couple, one child” policy as the HRS was being carried out.

As Xiaohong Ma and Chao Sun argued, “While because of the household responsibility system, the life of the peasants had improved a lot. With the improvement of their life, their desire to have more kids became stronger.” Similarly, Yiping Chen noted the conflict in the rural places as both the “one couple, one child” and the HRS were conducted almost at the same time. As Zhongtang Liang noted, “the practice of HRS quickly changed the People’s Commune System under the State’s planned economy system, which pushed an overall reform for our agriculture.” However, Liang didn’t forget to address the problem caused by the two contradictory policies: the HRS and the “one couple, one child.” Liang noted the family planning forum in September 1981 in Beijing and said:
During the sessions, [Party members] realized that after the different forms of the HRS in the rural places, the conduct of the birth control practice has met some new difficulties. In the sessions, [members] proposed for two plans in order to relax the family planning policy in the rural area. First, advocating for “one couple, one child,” allowing the second one, but forbidding the third one. Second, advocating “one couple, one child” generally; but for those who have real problems, they are allowed to have a second one.\textsuperscript{64}

However, because of the critical discrepancy that these two plans had to the Central Government’s guiding ideology, neither of them had been proved. Finally, with the intensification of the contradictions between the HRS and the “one couple, one child” in the rural area, the government had to pass the second plan in the 1982 saying that “one couple, one child” still should be advocated in the rural area but for those who have difficulties, after the local government’s examination and approval, can have a second child in a planned way.\textsuperscript{65} This amendment with the original “one couple, one child,” as Liang stated, “have been the core content for China’s contemporary family planning policy.”\textsuperscript{66}

Even though the starting point to issue the HRS was for agricultural reform, it did have a huge but unexpected influence on the “one couple, one child” policy. As Nietzsche reminded us, no matter how hard the producers of knowledge try to deny their artistry and impulses and escape from the rhetoricity of their discourse, they cannot do so. No matter how the leadership of the government tried to cover its political desires under the seemly objective coat of science, as if it had nothing to do with the “scientific
estimates and solution,” it fell into the trap set by the effects of the rhetoric of its discourse: the contradiction of the “one couple, one child” policy and the HRS.

Summary

In this chapter, Nietzsche’s aesthetic language philosophy as well as Foucault’s theory of discourse offered me lenses to carefully examine the texts of the two policies—the OL and the HRS—and the social-historical discourse that they were in. Through carefully analyzing the two texts, I answered the first research question, “What and how are the image(s) of new generation rural migrant female workers constructed in the One-Child policy and the HRS?” These new generation rural migrant female workers, a group who were born after the launch of the OL and the HRS, were described undoubtedly in the OL to be “the origin of problems” for the family and the country as they would definitely jeopardize the progress of the “Four Modernizations” and retard economic development. Influenced by local Party officials who served as “the active propagandist and responsible educator,” Chinese people were able to qualify their citizenship to be high suzhi (quality) since they were the “reasonable and considerate” people who understood the difficulties that the nation faced and were willing to sacrifice those who had been designated as “the origin of problems.”

Even though the HRS didn’t define these new generation rural migrant female workers itself, it helped to constitute this generation indirectly as it implied a changing situation in the rural areas: as the economy was getting better, more and more rural folks wanted to have more children regardless of what the government said. The collapse of the OL and the HRS on these new generation rural migrant female workers’ identity
constitution indicated the impossibility for the government to escape from the effects of the rhetoricity of its discourses as Nietzsche reminded us.

That said, individuals who were affected most under the “one couple, one child” policy and the HRS texts were rural folks as they lived through both policies. How did they, if at all, try to qualify their citizenship in terms of the “reasonable and considerate” people? How did they balance the traditional value, “more kids, better fortune,” with the “scientific” understanding that kids are burdens and problems for the family? How were the accomplishments that the “active propagandists and responsible educators” had in the rural places? Finally, what possibility(ies) does all these answers offer to understand rural migrant female workers’ identity formation? In order to answer the questions listed above, I analyzed the 20 in-depth interviews that I collected in talking with these new generation rural migrant female workers. Their responses are discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 5: The Stories that New Generation Rural Migrant Female Workers Told

When I refuse to listen to how you are different from me, I am refusing to know who you are. But without understanding fully who you are, I will never be able to appreciate precisely how we are more alike than I might have originally supposed.

--Linda Martin Alcoff

In the last chapter, I analyzed the OL and the HRS, in which three subjects—the “reasonable and considerate” people, the “origin of problems,” and the “active propagandist and responsible educator”—were constituted. However, showing the appreciation of the discursively constituted subjects alone would most likely make the mistake, as Susan Heckman noted, of turning to discourse at the expense of the material. In order to overcome the discursive/reality dichotomy, Heckman stated, “What we need now is not a return to a modernist conception of reality as an objective given, but rather an understanding of reality informed by all we have learned in the linguistic turn.” In other words, a better apprehension of these new generation rural migrant female workers should not be solely dependent on the stories told by the government nor by viewing them as out-there objective figures. Instead, understanding them as human beings whose identities have been constructed discursively before they were born, and who have been informed and perceived in the linguistic turn and will continue to live their lives in the discursively-constituted reality will be necessary and helpful. And only in this way, a research question like “How, if at all, are the policies reflected in the stories told by these new generation rural migrant female workers?” can be answered.
In order to answer the research question as well as balancing the discursive and the reality, I conducted 20 in-depth interviews with these new generation rural migrant female workers during the summer 2014. In the hundred pages of their interview transcripts in Chinese, the rural migrant female workers shared their growing-up experience with me around two themes: receiving love and care, and experiencing hardships. While the love and care that they received was mainly embodied with the authenticity of parenting, the hardships that they have suffered as they grew up were mixed with issues from gender to economy, and politics to rural/urban dualism. Even though my analysis of the interview conversations fell into two sections as receiving love and care, and experiencing hardships, it was not my intention to make a clear-cut division between those two. Only experiencing through the hardships, has the love and care from the parents been delineated as clear and strong. And only when a family was surrounded by love and care, could it be able to go through all those difficulties. In consequence, hardships and parents’ love and care went hand in hand in terms of constructing these new generation rural migrant female figures.

A close examination of these two themes will not only help us to see the stories as they contrast to the ones narrated by the government. Because the analysis will be grounded in the historical moments that those individuals have lived through, it will also demonstrate why they have become the individuals we see today. Meanwhile, the demonstration of their stories combining with the narratives told by the government in Chapter Four will facilitate a better understanding of the formation of their identities as the rural migrant female workers avoid talking about peasant-worker, value the
The Authenticity of Parenting

The conversations that I had with my participants have always been entangled with their understandings of how authentic the parenting they have received in terms of love and care. The authenticity of parenting spectrum ranges from their parents’ childbearing choices in terms of having more than one child to the insistence on sending the children off to schools, and even when the children grew up to go out to work. Thus, the participants’ descriptions of their loving and caring parents will be displayed following this chronological order. But before jumping to childbearing choices, Yan Mo’s capturing in his novel *Frog* of rural women’s strong desires to have children will help to fill out the continuum of stories even better.

Yan Mo, whose real name is Moye Guan, is a Chinese novelist and short story writer. In 2012, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his work as a writer “who with hallucinatory realism merges folk tales, history, and the contemporary.” In the form of a letter to Sugitani Akihito sensei, Mo wrote the novel named *Frog* based on the history of the one-child policy in his hometown Gaomi County in Shandong province. In the novel, Mo portrayed several female characters’ pregnancies and their responses. Yan Mo’s description of rural women figures demonstrated what a fervent desire they had in terms of being mothers. Here, I felt the necessity to quote at length an
excerpt that Duran and Huang had in their book as they took the “root-seeking” movement in terms of the historical contextualization in which Mo’s works are embedded. The following is what they generalized from Mo’s account in the book *Frog*:

Wang Renmei, the first wife of the narrator Tadpole, is deeply influenced by the traditional fertility culture. After giving birth to a daughter, she dreams of getting pregnant again to give birth to a son. She is unable to conceive, however, because Wan Xin inserted an intrauterine contraceptive device (IUD) into her [while Wang was ignorant about that device]. But she subsequently has her IUD taken out stealthily [as it was done by a local butcher who used to operate this kind of surgeries for sows]. . . . Wang Renmei’s intentional [omission of contraception] results in a successful pregnancy. Her pregnancy puts both her husband and Aunt [Wan Xin] in awkward position: her husband’s military career is jeopardized and her Aunt’s job of birth control seems less convincing. While Wang Renmei is a strong character, she capitulates under the extreme pressure by the chief representatives of society to abort her pregnancy. As a resolute practitioner of the birth control policy, Aunt forces Wang Renmei’s maternal family to hand her over by intimidating them and their neighbors, threatening to pull down their houses.7

Although Duran and Huang had a strong generalization of Mo’s novel, they didn’t include enough details that appeared in Mo’s book. Wang Renmei’s desire to have more than one child starts much earlier than when she is given the contraception. When she married Tadpole, she dreamt then to have twins.
Renmei was sitting on the windowsill—the kang was too hot for her—reading a children’s book by light coming in through the window. She was giggling.

Gugu [Chinese saying for “aunt”] is here, I said.

Renmei jumped down and took Gugu’s hand in hers. Just the person I have been looking for, she said. And here you are.

What is it?

Renmei lowered her voice. I hear you have some kind of drug I can take to make me have twins.⁸

Obviously, Wang Renmei is scolded by Gugu, a staunch Party member, because of the problematic thought that she has. However, no matter how Wang Renmei is blamed, she believes firmly that she has done something right as she tries to have more children, which, she believes, is a contribution to the Wan’s family (the name for the narrator Tadpole in the novel is Wan Xiaopao).

As Beauvoir noted, “to be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view towards the world.”⁹ Wang Renmei’s unique experience of living in Gaomi County, the traditional education that she has received, and even the fierce conduct of the “one couple, one child” policy constituted Wang as such an enriched figure who pays the price, including her life, to have a second child but can only do it in a secret way. Following her body, the instrument of her grasp on the world, Wang Renmei went to the butcher to have the IUD taken out. Because of her own experience, the experience of her irreducible materialized body, Wang Renmei dreams to have more children regardless of others’ accusation.
Nevertheless she yields to Gugu who threatens her that if her maternal family refuses to hand her over to them, all the neighborhoods’ houses would be torn down, Wang Renmei’s struggle to keep the fetus cannot be ignored. Although the book isn’t focused on Wang Renmei, the portrayal of her in those earlier chapters (Wang dies during the abortion performance) built Wang as a strong figure who holds firmly to her belief—more children= more fortune—based on the embodied experience.

While Wang’s experience was not repeated by the participants that I interviewed, her desire to have more children, and her willingness to ignore the penalties enacted on parents who violated the law, parallels the stories shared by my participants about their parents. As a way to distinguish sub-themes in respondents’ stories, I will use a relevant comment in highlighting transitions from one sub-theme to another.

**Having More than One—The Fined Girl**

The conversation that I had with Perennial Coreopsis was absolutely unplanned. I went to the beauty salon to meet one of my participants who works there. But then, I saw Perennial Coreopsis. After a short chat with her about my purpose of going there, she looked into my eyes and asked, “Can I take part in the interview?” With a quick but careful check on her background, I was surprised to find out that she fit the criteria very well. “My pleasure,” I said.

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2 The “fined girl” here is coming out of the “one couple, one child” as the economic punishment for the family who had more than one child. Other ways to describe the “fined girl,” as my participants would say later in the text, are the “over-birth” or “excessive” child.
Differing from other participants, Perennial Coreopsis approached me first. Her engaging attitude showed very well in our conversation throughout the whole time. I didn’t need to ask her questions, as she was motivated to talk about her life experiences.

The most impressive thing for me when I was little was the bad situation that our family had. Because we were in the rural and the elders of my family were landlords, the Party led the people struggle against the landlords. My family situation was pretty bad. Then, I was a second child, which means the punishment for the family. Plus, my grandpa passed away. Everything came at the same time, which made the economic burden so heavy for the family. Without any choice, my mom went out to work. After almost a year, she earned more than ten thousand RMB$^{11}$ to pay back all the debts that we had. That was a lot during the 90s, the ten thousand RMB. I respected my mom so much.3

“Wow,” I cried from within, “Ten thousand RMB in the 90s China was not a small amount.” I started to understand Perennial Coreopsis’ strong will-power as she talked.

When I was a little girl, the thing that I heard those seniors in my family said most often was that I am a fined girl and how much my parents paid in order to have me. . . . They would accuse me as a fined girl and say that no one wanted me. They said that my grandpa doesn’t like me and even tried to throw me out. I said

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3 It should be noted here that all the 20 interviews were conducted in the Chongqing dialect instead of Mandarin as all of the participants spoke fluently in this dialect. Therefore, when I quoted their words, I translated the dialect directly into English and tried my best to keep their ways of communicating. Some translation might read as broken English; that does not necessarily indicate the lower education that my participants have received. Sometimes they spoke in broken sentences or failed to organize their words because they were experiencing emotional ups and downs while engaging in the conversations
to them that even though I am a fined girl, I am still here in this world. I am a 
fined girl and so what? I am a fined girl and what’s that of your business. . . . I 
don’t need you think highly of me. I know that my parents love me and that’s 

Although being classified as “fined girl” (any child who was not the first one) as 
she was born, Perennial Coreopsis didn’t grow up to be a self-belittled individual. She 
grew up as a strong and competitive person who took the leader’s role in a local beauty 
salon since she was 19. This, as Perennial Coreopsis shared, was because of the love and 
care that she received from her parents. bell hooks argued how the Black mothers made 
the homeplace a site of resistance to the White supremacy by making it a “warmth and 
comfort of shelter, the feeding of the bodies, the nurturing of the souls” in which they 
“learned dignity, integrity of being; and learned to have faith.”12 Similarly, in the case of 
new generation rural migrant workers, it was their parents’ love and care that protected 
their dignity in terms of labeling themselves as the “fined girl.”

Perennial Coreopsis was definitely not the only one who shared with me how 
much her parents have loved her even though she was a fined girl. Gypsophila Paniculata 
also shared her experience as a “fined girl.” But unlike Perennial Coreopsis, the love 
from Gypsophila Paniculata’s mother made Gypsophila Paniculata enjoy her special 
identity as a “fined girl.”

As Gypsophila Paniculata walked into the vice-president’s office where the 
interview was arranged for me by the boss of the factory, she smiled unnaturally to me. In 
order to ease the tension between us, I took the initiative and sat on the double sofa,
which was placed on the casual chatting site of the office. I signaled Gypsophila Paniculata to sit down. “Thanks,” she said without looking at me and sat on the other end of the sofa. Being reluctant and anxious at the beginning, Gypsophila Paniculata started to talk more and opened herself to me as our conversation went on.

I was a fined girl. In our place, my second brother wasn’t fined but I was. . . .

[Policy was] strict in our place. No matter girl or boy you had for the first pregnancy, you would be fined if you have a second one. . . . My two elder brothers were not fined but I was. My mom likes girl more. In fact, you have no idea about people in the rural of Sichuan Province. If you do, then you know that people preferred boys at that time because boys were the labors who could make money. But nowadays, both boys and girls can make money. Therefore, people in our place like girls more now. . . . [Comparing with boys] my mom preferred having girls. She has always wanted a girl, but almost aborted me. She asked my dad that what if she has a boy again. Since my mom always wanted a girl, my dad said to her, “Well, [let’s] have it. How about it is a girl?” So they still kept me, and I am a girl.

The happiness was revealed in her words. Her smiling eyes that made me laugh with her. “But you are still an ‘excessive kid’”; I made the comment after hearing she talking about how her mom wanted a girl since I sensed her pride as she identified being an “over-birth kid” in her words. As I wanted her to clarify that point, I accented on the word “but” in order to show her my confusion towards what she was saying.
Yes, I am. My cousin’s father likes me every much and he would invite me to their home to have dinner with them. But I got sick every often so they could only ask my cousin to send me back home. On our way back home, my cousin would say to me that I am a fined kid. I heard from her that my mom didn’t prepare to give birth to me but at the end, she still did. . . . It was like this, parents usually didn’t want the fined kids to be delivered because of the economic punishment. . . . But everyone wanted the word of “hao 好.” Everyone wanted both boy and girl. That is just it.

The same as Perennial Coreopsis, Gypsophila Paniculata knew herself as a fined girl when she was little. But different from Perennial Coreopsis, Gypsophila Paniculata’s experience of being a fined girl was a happy story. Because of her mother’s preference for girls and the maintenance of the traditional value in terms of having both boy and girl in a family in her local area, her father even encouraged her mother to keep the fetus and still give birth regardless of the heavy economic punishment.

Here comes the conflict between the subject of the “reasonable and considerate people” constituted in the OL and the ones that have lived in the reality. As we recalled the “reasonable and considerate people” constituted in the OL, it sketched out a picture of high suzhi citizens in the flesh. A qualified Chinese citizen, in the government’s term, should be reasonable and considerate as he/she would answer the government’s call, give birth, and only give birth to one child because he/she would “consider the general interests, understand the country’s difficulties, and exhibit caring about the future generations.” However, if Gypsophila Paniculata’s parents were examined under the
governmental criteria, their insistence on following their hearts to have another child regardless of the government’s punishment failed them as the qualified citizens, the high suzhi people that the government tried to cultivate.

As Heidegger reminded us, I am an “entity whose what is precisely to be and nothing but to be.”¹⁴ For Heidegger, disregarding an entity’s existence in the belief that this entity will be determined by pre-given frameworks or systems, no matter scientific, historical, or philosophical, would be the most fundamental of misunderstandings.¹⁵ In other words, what is essential to a human being—what makes an individual who he/she is—is not fixed by the constituted subject in the political statement nor in the cultural belief that “the more children, the more fortune” but by what he/she makes of him/herself, who he/she becomes. As the individuals, here specifically the parents, fought their way through to have more than one child, they might be labeled as law breaker based on the government’s “one couple, one child,” but what they have made themselves to be in terms of fighting to have more than one child speaks against to the government’s narratives. And that characterized them as loving and caring parents in the children’s eyes.

Similarly, experiencing the struggle together with their parents, witnessing how hard the parents tried to pay the fine to the government in order to make their identities registered as legal as well as maintain the families, the “fined girls,” as my participants showed, appreciated and enjoyed their identity as being the “fined” ones. As Perennial Coreopsis said, “I don’t need you think highly of me. I know that my parents love me and
that’s enough.” It was the love from parents that protected their hearts when they were little and grew up to be strong and positive human beings.

Again, the parents’ struggles with meeting the governmental requirement, surviving the economic punishment and their own sense of the traditional cultural value of their children illustrates that one’s identity is neither constituted by nature nor by culture for to “exist” is precisely to constitute such an identity. The struggles that the parents have lived through, in the eyes of their children—these new generation rural migrant female workers—are the very evidence of the parental love and care. As my participants shared, their parents’ love and care for them was everywhere, which is not necessarily limited to the action of childbearing.

All for School

Well, as far as I remember for those early years, while we were eating, my mom and dad would take the flour made of the corns [as the staple] but save the rice for my sister and me. . . . I don’t know. But the only thing that I remembered was that we didn’t have the enough grain. Anyway, not enough for eating.

--Sunflower

Meeting with Sunflower happened in an afternoon in the stuffy factory where my uncle worked. Since I went into the factory with my uncle, people there treated me with extreme respect. The chief of office led me into a well-decorated small meeting room and turned on the lights. “This is the meeting room for our leaders. Please help yourself;” she smiled to me while using the remote to turn on the air-conditioner. At that moment, her smile made me feel like a leader coming from the top to inspect the local works rather
than a researcher. “Ah, no worries. I will ask them to line up outside the room to wait for your interviews.” She turned around and quickly said that to me before closing the door. Everything happened so soon that I barely had a chance to say, “No, please don’t,” since I didn’t want the chief of office to make the interview something big and make me appear less accessible to the potential participants. But unfortunately, her “friendly” arrangement of the interview for me reinforced the rural/urban distance between the participants and me even before the interview started.

As soon as I laid out everything that I needed for the interview, I heard someone knocking on the door. “Come in, please,” I said to the direction of the door and prayed in my heart that the interview would go smoothly. Here, I saw Sunflower with a huge smile on her face. As I prayed in my heart, conversation with Sunflower went as well as I planned. Her positive attitude towards life expelled the stuffy air in the room. Her laughter at times during the interview made the humid Chongqing weather more enjoyable for me. As she reflected on her childhood, Sunflower said:

Well, how should I say about that? When I was little, the situation in my family was not good. But my mom and dad, they worked really hard for us, me and my sister. A lot of times, when it was all dark outside, [they] were still working. Later on, my mom went out [as migrant worker] to work. Only my dad took care of me and my sister. I just felt, you know, so sorry for my dad because I behaved as a disobedient girl. I started off doing well in my junior high school but when I got to the senior high school, I became disobedient. I didn’t like study anymore. My
dad was not happy about that. He beat me in the hope that I would go back to school again but in vain.

Having the stereotype in my mind that it was always the father who went out to work but left the mother and children at home, I couldn’t help but question what Sunflower just told me. “Not exactly for my case,” Sunflower said:

In my family, it was my mom who went out first and then my dad. I even forgot when my dad went out. But that time in the rural, the situation was bad overall. In order to make more money, [they] went out. We did have the field but in order for me and my sister to go to school, that was not enough. . . . As far as I remember for those early years, while we were eating, my mom and dad would take the flour made of the corns [as the staple] but save the rice for my sister and me. . . . I don’t know. But the only thing that I remembered was that we didn’t have the enough grain. Anyway, not enough for eating.

“Your parents sounded really like you and your sister,” I was amazed, “they didn’t have any thought that boys are more precious than girls.”

Not even once. In fact, my parents didn’t want me go out to work at all. They wanted me to continue to go to school. My dad even said to me that although he didn’t have money, as long as I want to study, he would find a way to send me to high school, and even college. No matter it is borrowing from others or from the bank, he would do so. But my grandparents on my father’s side were not like that at all. They didn’t like my sister when she was born. After they knew my mom gave birth to another girl, which was me, they didn’t even come to see me as a
newborn baby. . . . After that, my dad’s mother asked my dad to tell my mom to have another one. But my parents said to her that no, two is enough.

Not even once did Sunflower ever mention the word “love” that she received from her parents. But the parents’ love was shown strongly in the stories that Sunflower told. It was for Sunflower and her sister that the parents worked hard. In order to send the sisters to school, Sunflower’s parents went out to work one after another. Sunflower, instead of taking the parents’ efforts in terms of raising them up for granted, grew up to be a considerate person who viewed herself as “disobedient” for she failed to continue to go to school. Even though Sunflower knew that was what her parents wanted her to do, as a girl who was so distracted by the phenomenon of “going out to work and making money” during her senior high school time, all Sunflower thought about was to make money and share her parents’ burdens.

More important, the extra effort that the parents made in order to send their girls to school or to learn things was always in the same stories as the expensiveness of the education. For my participants, “going to school” was a real luxury for them that made them feel sorry for their parents, especially when their grades were not good, since they witnessed how hard their parents worked in order to have the children receive better education. And it became salient when a person like me getting a Ph.D. degree from the U.S. engaged in the conversation with them. The rural/urban dualism added another flavor: urban, well-educated; rural, illiterate. And the dualism came to me powerfully while I was having the conversation with Jasmine.
Jasmine was quite talkative during the whole time of our conversation. But there were times that she seemed to fall back into her own thoughts and murmured to herself. And that was when she was sharing her going-to-school experience with me.

The first day when I arrived in Chongqing, I didn’t eat. Not only the first day, but also actually even the second and the third days, I didn’t eat because of the different life styles and the high temperature. That was in September when [we were] still in summer vacation. After the summer vacation, our grades of the finals in the third year of the junior high school were publicized. My grade was…was pretty good. In our junior high school, there were more than two hundred students and I ranked second. The total grade, I was the second in the school. My father has already decided to send me to senior high school. It was already decided. I still kept the letter of admission. But during one night, the night before school, everything changed. [I did] not have the chance to think it over. In that summer, my parents were still struggling about whether they should send me to senior high school or not. They thought a lot and visited our relatives several times in order to borrow money as my tuitions and fees for school. But all my uncles didn’t agree with their decision to send me to senior high school. Although my father, my mother, and even my elder brother wanted me to continue to go to school, the economy of my family, ugh, [we] had no way. . . . If I would continue the study, then my sister would continue as well, but our younger brother was still in school at that time. [Our family] was unable to afford. Therefore, my sister and I, we decided to give up [the chance to go to school] for our parents.16
Taking few minutes to clear her mind, Jasmine continued:

If four of our siblings are all going to school, [we] must spend a lot. In fact, my father has already owed them [the relatives] money because of our earlier education. Now, since he [the father] wanted all of us to go to senior high school, he went to their families to borrow money again. [They] disagreed with this decision very much when they knew that my father wanted to borrow money from them for our education again, since what we owed them was not a small number. A decade ago, ten thousand RMB was not a small amount. Therefore, they didn’t want to lend money to us anymore. Plus, the tuitions and fees at that were really high, not like the nine-year compulsory education now.17

As other parents, Jasmine’s father went out to work as well when she was little. He went out to work as a carpenter as Jasmine recalled. He wasn’t at home for the most of the time as Jasmine and her siblings grew up.

If he worked in the local [close to the family], he would come back every week or every ten days. [If not,] he came back home once a month, or once every three or even four months. For most of the time, only my mom was at home.

Yet growing up with the huge regret in her heart for not continuing her studies in senior high school, not even once did Jasmine complain about her parents or the family that she was born into. As Jasmine described her ideal “home” for me, she recalled the home that has accompanied her growing up. “For those days when I was still in school, no matter what difficulty that I met, no matter what wrongs that I suffered, I went back and talked to my parents. And then, they took care of all those.”
It surprised me as she shared how her parents were able to resolve all the difficulties that she encountered in such a proud way knowing that her parents failed to send her and her sister to senior high school because they didn’t have enough money. The only reason that I could think about is the genuine parenting that Jasmine and her siblings have received from their parents. It was not about money or how wealthy they could be but the parental love and caring, the invaluable love and care. Although the fact of failing to continue the school made Jasmine heartbroken, her parents’ love and care made her strong enough to face and talk about this in front of me, a person who would get the degree that she never heard of.

In addition, it was Jasmine who told me directly that for a home to be a “complete” one, it must have seniors [her and her husbands’ parents]. “No matter it is his [her husband] parents or my parents, I feel that a home should have grandparents, wife, husband and kids, three generations together,” said Jasmine in such a delightful way with a smile resting on her lips. And it was also Jasmine who first told me that she didn’t care about the “peasant-worker” identity as she cared about the issues of empty nesters and stayed-home children.

I feel that…individuals who have families and go out to work, and leave their kids and seniors at home, for these, I don’t agree. . . . Leaving the kids and seniors at home and working alone outside, those who are left at home are either too old or too young. That’s really poor. . . . I don’t have that much to say about the peasant-workers. But the key point that I think for you, the peasant-worker, is to take care of your parents and kids. This is the most important thing. Although you are
working, you still need to fulfill your responsibilities [as daughter/son and mother/father]. It is not about how much money you give to them. That said, caring for a child or a senior family member is not a money issue. Even though you made money and gave the money to them, you didn’t consider their living situation, how hard it could be for the kids and the olds.

In order to make her words more convincing, Jasmine started to talk about her childhood experience as the evidence for what she believed: as long as the family members stay together, they still can have a happy life with little money.

For example, when I was little, still going to school, the economic situation [of my family] was really bad. But all of us stayed together and we were still happy every day. Seriously, every time when I thought about those days, I would die for living a couple of days more like that.

While Jasmine was recalling those sweet days, her eyes were shining and the whole person was radiating an infectious enthusiasm for life. Looking at her smiling eyes, I could see those beautiful days there—the children coming back from school, rushing into the kitchen to share their stories of the day with the mother, helping her prepare the dinner as well as waiting for the father to come back from work. I think Jasmine’s parents were successful. Although they failed to send her to a senior high school, a standardized institution to obtain more “education,” through their earnest living, they taught Jasmine not only in words but in deeds and made her understand that as a human being, she should treat her life seriously and make every effort to live rather than living in a perfunctory way. This, in Jasmine’s words, was that one should be responsible
for the role that he/she is playing in the world—no matter whether it is taking care of one’s children or parents. While some participants might be given equal chance to go to school, their parents’ financial situation might make the girls’ access to school hard as well.

Eremurus shared with me how equal girls and boys have been treated in her family in terms of going to school. As she said:

Like my mom’s generation, few girls could go to the school. That said, only boys could go to the school and study. . . . But for my generation, this changed a lot. I have an elder brother and a younger sister. I felt that no matter to whom, my mom treats us equally.

However, because of this equality between girl and boy in her family, her parents wanted all of them to have the chance to go to the same level schools and study, which was impossible to achieve if her parents only have stayed in the rural area and done the farm work. As Eremurus recalled:

When we were little, he [the father] went out for work because of our tuitions and fees. . . . At that time, he went to so many places to work, such as Zhejiang and Yunnan Provinces. Ugh, he has been all of those places. [He] worked in the construction field. You know that, just concrete and those stuffs. Those were all hard and tough works.

“Does that mean your father was seldom at home when you were little,” I caught the conversation and made it continue as she fell into her thought.
Right, when we were little, only our mom was at home. For my father, sometimes, well the telephone wasn’t through at that time. Anyway, in general no family had telephone. Maybe in one village, there was one family that has telephone. I remembered at that time, every time [the father] called us, we need to run for almost half an hour in order to talk to him via the phone. . . . He would make a phone call a day before and asked the people to send us a message when he will call again the next day so that we would know when we shall leave home to talk to him. Therefore, the next day, [all of us] would walk for more than half an hour and answer his phone. All of us would run to the phone place. We were so excited.

Perhaps growing up without the consistent physical presence of the father was a big regret for Eremurus, but the father used his own way to make up his absence in the child’s childhood. Since the phone was not a universal device at that time in the rural area, it was not convenient at all for individuals outside to keep contact with the rural folks. But this couldn’t stop the father’s attempt to call his family. Although the father wasn’t around as little Eremurus grew up, there was unrestrained joy on grown-up Eremurus’ face as she recalled the past and shared the experience with me.

Some of the participants, even when they had the chance to go to school, they always kept in mind how “pricy” the tuitions and fees were. Anthurium impressed me because of her friendliness. She told me that since she viewed me as a friend, she was willing to share her stories with me. Anthurium shared with me her experience of trying to quit the boarding school when she was little because of missing her mother. Young, as
she was 14 or 15 years old, the only thing that Anthurium remembered was to ask the president of the school to give back her tuition.

After I had been in school for two days, I went to beg the president of the school. I said to him, “Please, could you please give back my tuitions because I don’t want to stay at school at more?” He asked me the reason and I told him that I was missing my mom. . . . I remembered during that time, we paid our tuitions all at one time and it was about 4,000 something. Right, it was 2 yuans to 5,000. I remembered, at the year of 2007 or 2008. But that was a lot. Therefore, I told the dean of students that I didn’t want to stay any more. But the tuition was so pricy. I felt that I would let my mom down if I didn’t stay in school. So I begged the president to give back my tuition.

During the negotiation between the school and little Anthurium, she finally compromised to stay in the school but was given the permission to go back home for a couple of days. When being asked why she stayed in school, Anthurium said:

The dean of students told me that if I felt sorry for my mom because of this little money, then I would feel let my mom down more if I cannot get a job later after leaving the school. But anyhow, that was a lot of money.

At the end, Anthurium still didn’t tell me whether her school even told her that they would pay her tuition back or not. However, reading from her words, the ambiguous attitude that the school maintained to give back her money was not hard to tell. The tuition, which was “this little money” to the dean of students, was “a lot” to Anthurium. Even though staying in school was not what Anthurium really wanted at that time, she
still compromised, not due to the school’s persuasion but her mother’s insistence for her to go to school. As Anthurium recalled, she was pushed out of the house by her mom at the end; her mom yelled at her and asked her to go back to school. Since Anthurium didn’t want to let her mom down, she went back to school regardless of her personal unwillingness, as she didn’t want to say no to her parents “love” in terms of working hard and sending her to school.

The authenticity of parenting in the stories shared by my participants was not limited to the parents’ choice of childbearing and the struggles they endured in sending their children to receive more education. Most of them also mentioned how worried their parents were as they came out to work in the city, especially for the first time, and how excited the parents were every time when they went back for family gatherings.

**After Going Out to Work**

In fact, I didn’t think about this [her not good educational background] at the beginning. But coming out to work at first, it must be really hard to find a job. My parents, they were so worried about me going out alone to work. . . . Now both of them are working in this factory [where she works] as well. Honestly, even if they were not here, I wouldn’t do anything bad. But they just worried and felt that they should always stay by my side.

--Bluebell

Among all the participants, Bluebell came from the wealthiest family as a single child. Although her family still held the agricultural *hukou*, their living situation was not like other rural folks at all. Through our conversation, I got to know that Bluebell’s father
ran a small business in the earlier days before he and Bluebell’s mother started to work in the same company with Bluebell. Rather than staying in the field and doing the farming work, Bluebell’s family started to get over the poverty line with the take-off of the national economy in early 1990s. Her father even bought a car in order to do business in a more convenient way. Later on, they bought a residential apartment in a town that was close to their rural house. As Bluebell graduated from a junior secondary vocational school, she was about to go out to work following the arrangement made by the school. However, because her parents felt worried about her going out alone to a place where they knew no one, they decided to send her to the company where they were friends with the boss. This was how I met Bluebell, working in the company in which she actually addressed her boss as her uncle, dressing in a clean and well-fit suit and telling me that she has been taken good care of by all those “aunts and uncles.”

Although Bluebell’s parents might be able to offer her more because they were wealthy and they only had Bluebell, they went through the stage of worry as Bluebell worked alone in the company away from home and the stage of excitement as Bluebell went back for a family gathering as well. As Bluebell recalled:

It was March 11 that I started to work in Chongqing. But May 1, I took the drive with the boss, who came from the same village as we did, back home. In fact I only stayed at home for one day. The day before, I was still working in the morning and I took the drive with the boss and went back in the afternoon. They [the boss and his family] live pretty close to us. So I only spent the night and another morning at home. . . . They [her parents] prepared a lot of things for me to
take to Chongqing. They got up early next day and started to prepare. . . . We
have that kind of delicious cherry in the rural place. They packed a huge box with
the cherries, eggs, and all those stuffs that [they felt] you cannot buy them in the
city. They started to pack the trunk until it was full. I just felt that when I went
back, they were so happy. I arrived home really late in the night but in fact they
started to wait for me as they got up in the morning. As we drove back, it was
heavy traffic jam all the time. Ugh, but they didn’t go to bed. They still waited…

At that moment, Bluebell had to stop talking since convulsive sobs racked her. I handed
her napkins that I prepared beforehand and told her that she could have a moment for a
break if she wanted. Shaking her head without saying anything, both Bluebell and I fell
back into our own thoughts. I could feel how badly her parents wanted to stuff the trunk
as my mom packed the luggage for me every time before I left for the U.S. It was not the
material things that the parents stuff the trunk with, but the love and care, the soul of
parenting that they wanted their children to carry with them as they were
working/studying alone. It was the parents’ wish that those materials could not only
fulfill the trunk or luggage but the wanderers’ lonely heart. As Meng Jiao portrayed in his
famous poem “A Song for A Wandering Son,”

His loving mother holds the threads in her hand
Sewing clothes for her wandering son
As the time of his leaving approaches, she sews the seams closely, closely,
Afraid that his return will be late, late
Who says that the inch long sprout of grass
Bluebell was not the only one who shared with me the parents’ worries as she went to the city to work. For other participants, even though their parents were not as wealthy as Bluebell’s, the care and love that they have received from their parents were no less than Bluebell’s. Iris came from a family that couldn’t compare with Bluebell’s at all. Although Iris was the only child in her family as well, what her parents could have provided for her in terms of a qualified life and the material things were so limited because her father has been ill for a long time and it is her mother who has been the breadwinner for the whole family. “My mom is that kind, very traditional one. You know the people who didn’t receive any education. They could only do some temporary jobs,” Iris described her mom. However, as I learned from my participants, parents’ love and care were not constrained because of the shortage of materials.

At that time, I needed to go over there [to work]. Because of the long distance, I couldn’t go back home every day. Anyway, I had to leave my mom. At the beginning, the first week or the first month, I missed my mom so much. Sometimes I would cry because I missed my mom. My mom was as well. I have never left her, never. The first…time when I went back, he [the father] told me that my mom was crying at home. He said, “You that [went out to work], your mom was that, really that.”

I barely heard the third “that” coming from her mouth as her voice got lower and lower at the end. Neither could I figure out why Iris used so many “that’s” as she described her mother’s tears. Was she running out of words to demonstrate, afraid of saying it out loud
or it was her father who failed to find words to describe at first? I was not sure. Yet, as ambiguous as those two “that”s were, I felt exactly what she wanted to tell. When the language lost its ability to express and failed the role of conveying meanings, we were still communicating. I felt the care and love from her parents strongly at the moment when I was in the conversation with her. I felt it in such an intense way because I was also a wanderer, the treasure of my parents.

As introduced in the beginning, the stories shared with my participants primarily focused on two themes: receiving love and care, and experiencing hardships. Although the sweet memories that they had were quite similar in the sense that almost all of them were from the interactions between them and their parents at home, the hardships that they have suffered differ largely from gender to economy, from politics to the rural/urban dualism. Therefore, the second part of this chapter will focus on the stories pertaining to the hardships that they suffered from the four aspects: gender, economy, politics, and rural/urban dualism. Because of the complicated nature of those four issues, they cannot be divided in a clear-cut way from one another. But rather, they will be discussed in a more overlapping and mixed sense.

Experiencing Hardships

**Are Men Superior to Women?**

The most impressive thing is that I was beaten by my dad once. Why I remembered so clear? [He thought] I was playful. At that time, I was little, the time before my younger brother was born. Boys are still preferable in my family.
After they [the parents] worked in the field and came back, I didn’t do anything. I was playing over there. So he dragged me back and used a rod to hit me.

--Calendula

Although many participants told me that there was no “men are superior to women” belief in their families anymore, it still played a big role in some of their families. My contact with Calendula was filled with some bitter taste. She only had forty-five minutes as her lunch break for me. So I followed her to a street side stall, where she sat down and ordered a 6 yuan fried rice. She asked me if it was okay to have the interview done while she was having her lunch. While I was worried about the over-noisy situation that could make my transcribing work more difficult, I nodded and took a seat next to her. Eating her lunch with an absent mind, Calendula started to open herself to me.

At that time, I didn’t know. I only saw other kids playing this and that, but I had to stay home and do housework. I felt so wronged. Another time, I had a cold and started to cough. While I was coughing, I had some sputum. He [her father] scolded me because of that. Ugh, I told you, I remembered this very clear. Therefore, even now the relation between me and my father was—generally saying, others can communicate very well with their fathers—not me and my father. I guess that was because his scolding overshadowed my childhood.

As Calendula was eating, I asked, “Then how did you know your father’s scolding you was because you were a girl?”
I heard from our neighbors. They said that [if] having boys, [he would] be really happy. The feeling was different. At that time, my parents only had me. My younger brother wasn’t born yet. Until I was eight, my brother was delivered. Throughout the conversation with Calendula, she didn’t mention anything said directly from her father about whether he liked boys more than girls or not. Even though she mentioned at the end of our conversation that her father was worried when knowing that she decided to marry a Chongqingnese guy and move to Chongqing, I believed that this would never make up for what happened to her in her childhood. Father’s hit and scold, plus neighbors’ gossip, had already been imprinted in Calendula’s heart.

Besides Calendula, Hollyhock mentioned in her interview that she felt the difference as well. Hollyhock was one of only two participants sharing with me in the interviews that she was getting her driving license. That definitely impressed me as she tried hard to promote herself. When asked her opinion on the parents’ choice of having her younger sister, Hollyhock said that they probably wanted someone to accompany her since she was so lonely as the only child at home. But then, she seemed to realize something else, and added:

I think they have some preference to boys. My aunt has a boy and my dad liked him very much. He especially liked him and didn’t like us [she and her sister].

But later on, I think he didn’t have that thought any more. When did he drop that thought? I don’t remember, probably when I was in the junior high school.

But when I pushed the question even further and asked her if there was any specific thing that she could recall from those old days to show her father’s preference to boys,
Hollyhock said, “I don’t see anything special. Our aunt only visited us once a year.” After a few seconds’ reticence, Hollyhock looked at me and said, “Probably it was because [he, the father] hadn’t seen my cousin for a long time so that he showed his care more to him.” I didn’t pick up the threads but threw another question to Hollyhock. While she was answering another question, I fell back into my own thinking.

Perhaps, the parents didn’t have a preference for boys in fact. It was all our perceptions, the rooted belief that if a girl was scolded that was because her parents love boys more. We didn’t allow them a chance to explain but categorized them as individuals carrying on the “men are superior to women” belief. Perhaps the parents only just had a very down day that made them bad tempered as they went back home. Without knowing how to handle their bad mood, they scolded their children who happened to be girls. Seeing that, we immediately judged the parents as preferring boys without discussing it openly with the parents, which made us slaves to the thought “men are superior to women” again and practiced it ourselves as we were criticizing it.

In fact, in my conversation with Calendula, she indicated briefly that her younger brother maintained a bad relationship with her father as well because of her father’s backward mind that he didn’t accept her brother to be a hairdresser. They had several fierce arguments about this. Even though she realized this, Calendula still held to the belief that her father scolded her because she happened to be a girl. Maybe a habitualized thought was easier for Calendula to accept.

Crocus was the most energetic and happiest participant who I have ever met. She was skipping into the meeting room while humming softly to herself. Before I opened my
mouth, she stuck her hand out and said, “Hi, I am Crocus!” “Zhou Li, Nice to meet you! Please take a seat.” After introducing myself with a huge smile, I signaled Crocus to sit. I wouldn’t dream that a girl who was joyful like Crocus could be this sad as she started to recall her childhood. She was so regretful because she stopped going to school after vocational high school.

I came out to work in 1999, right after I graduated from the vocational high school. When I was young, our family was really poor. At that time, [people] in the rural places had little sense. [They would] say, “How can it be any useful for a girl to receive education?” In addition, my academic performance, ugh, didn’t make me to a standardized senior high school. Oh, vocational high school was like a junior secondary vocational school. As a matter of fact, I applied for the senior secondary vocational school. Only two years, if I could hold on for two more years, I would get a senior secondary vocational school degree. But because of something happened in my family, they were not able to afford the tuitions and fees any more.

Crocus stopped to going to school mainly because of the bad economic situation in her family. But what made my heart and, I believed, Crocus’ heart sink was facing the fact that rural folks had “little sense” of the importance for girls to get an education. In other words, no one felt sorry for her at that time after she stopped going to school except herself. Similar to Crocus, many participants mentioned to me that their families were in a bad economic situation when they were little. As they were growing up, they went through various difficulties because of the poverty and the desire to change it.
Transient Childhood

The most impressive thing when I was little is that I transferred from school to school very often. [I] transferred twice in my kindergarten, and three times in the elementary school. . . . It was mainly because of my parents’ changing jobs. Sometimes my grandma took care of me and other times my parents did.

--Geranium

While sharing her transferring school experience with me, I got to know that Geranium’s parents were in fact the first generation rural migrant workers. In order to live a better life, Geranium’s parents decided to go out to work when Geranium was still a little girl. Because of the temporary nature of their jobs, they changed from place to place. Therefore, they couldn’t take care of Geranium but left her to her paternal grandma. When asked about her growing up experience with parents, Geranium thought for quite a while and said, “It seems that they were with me for few years during my elementary school, then one year for junior high school, and one year for senior high school. . . . Well, at least longer than some other kids.” Even though Geranium didn’t complain about the limited time with her parents during her childhood, she did admit that if parents could spend more time with their children as they grow up, the parent-child relationship would be much better.

Nonetheless, Geranium was not alone in terms of the experience of growing up without her parents by her side. Honesty was frank with me and said that she didn’t have that much communication with her parents as she grew up. She recalled her elementary school and said:
My father didn’t stay home for very long. He always went to the city of Chongqing. . . . My grandma told me that after my father grew up, he has been working in Chongqing all the time. It was my mom who took care of me most of the times.

When asked about the most impressive thing in her childhood, Honesty told me that nothing was special but only too hard. Giving a smirk, Honesty continued:

If you asked my parents to take out some money and buy pens, well, we were so poor at that time. If you asked them to buy pens, [you] would feel embarrassed to do so. As you asked, [they would say] “no money.” When a new semester started, it was time to pay the tuitions and fees, but [they] didn’t have money. Always, [I] went to ask teacher to give couple of days extension. Sometime, it would be several months in order to pay [the tuitions and fees].

I continued to ask why she remembered it so clearly. Permitting herself a small mirthless smile, Honesty said, “Well, because my family was so poor.” Then, a long time silence followed after her answer. I didn’t dare to pick up the conversation since I had no idea how “poor” exactly could a person’s memory be when occupied with only poverty but nothing else. At that moment, my imaginative capacity, the one that I have been proud of all the time, failed in the conversation with Honesty. No matter how hard I tried, I was unable to feel what she was feeling and understand what was behind that mirthless smile.

Different from Geranium’s indifference and Honesty’s passive aggressive attitude, Chrysanthemum, who told me that she grew up with her grandparents, showed her understanding to her parents’ decision to go out to work.
I live with my grandparents. When I was little, they left me with my grandparents. Well, others might hate their parents if they were left to their grandparents and thinking that how horrible their parents were. But I think that they were doing this [go out to work] for our family, for all of us. I still love them.

Because of the deep love and appreciation that Chrysanthemum had for her parents, she started to work out in an early age since she wanted to, using her own words, “share some of the burdens for the parents.”

Ugh, I don’t know how to say. When I hear people saying “peasant-worker,” “peasant-worker,” all I think about is how hard of that kind, and I am one of them. I am one of those hard migrant workers. No other ways. [I was] thinking about the family. As I came out to work, I wanted to share the burdens for my mom and dad because I have so many sisters and brothers and the economy is really bad. . . . I know that some rich people, they look down upon female migrant workers. But I don’t care. . . . But sometimes I felt it [the word migrant worker] is not derogative. I, sometimes, felt proud of it. You see, those migrant female workers, they are going out, even though some of them sometimes may be little bit naughty, they come out because they are filial, they want to share the burden for the family.

As our conversation moved forward, I got to know that she had five siblings. Including her, her parents had six children. In a poor family with six children, Chrysanthemum learned to be considerate and responsible although she might be “naughty” as she
indicated in the interview. Even though going out to work hasn’t been easy for her at all, she still held on because of the love for her family.

When I was in the train to go out to work, I was sitting alone by the window and seeing others have accompanies by the side. I thought to myself that if only I could have some family member sitting next to me that would be really awesome. Seriously! I had been sitting for one day and one night. While I was sitting, I was thinking all the time how lonely I was. Few times I would go back to my seat [she bought the ticket for carriage with semi-cushioned seats] to take a nap but not too relax since the train was not safe.

Costmary eventually understood her parents’ hardworking after being beaten hard by her father. She confessed to me about her incomprehension of her father when she was little. While she was recalling her childhood, she was bursting into tears.

The most impressive thing is…we were poor at that time, my mom, one of her legs has problem so she went out to work while my father was staying home and do the field work. So there were us three, me and my two younger brothers, at home. I was the eldest one and my two brothers who had no idea what they were doing. I was holding the chickens and ducks that my father raised and then threw them out, and then picked them back to do it again. When my father went back, he…he hit me, and all of us. [We were] bleeding all over the body.

Costmary accepted the napkin that I passed it to her, wiped the tears and continued:

At that moment, I hated my father so much. So I didn’t talk to him for many days. At the end, when my school asked us to pay the fees for the make-up exam, about
20 RMB. My father, because of what happened, he didn’t give me. But you know what, although he didn’t give me in person, he asked someone else to give it to me. . . . Later on I thought to myself that nevertheless my father hit us, he cared about us in fact. . . . It was so hard for them [to raise us]. And I even threw the chickens that they raised out and picked back to do it again, and again. The slop was about the same height as two floors. . . . We were so poor and they just wanted to make more money so that they could offer us better things. But I was little. I didn’t understand and I had even hated my dad for a while.

When Costmary finished the sentence, she was crying, having a good cry in front of me rather than just wiping the tears. I patted her back since I didn’t know what to do except that. I thought I was well trained as an interviewer but when this breakdown moment came, I was so clueless. Running out of comforting words and phrases, I decided to let Costmary enjoy this good cry.

Later on, I was thinking. So I quitted school because I wanted to make money as early as possible. If I can make money, I can share, at least, a little of their burden. Therefore I went out to work at 17.

Jasmine, who gave up going to school because she didn’t want her father to owe more debts from the relatives, took the train to Chongqing as well.

[My] mind was empty. All [I] thought about was to make more money because of the debts that we owed for those relatives, the debts for us to go to school. Many of our relatives and friends looked down upon us. They told our father to stop sending us to school because he couldn’t afford that. Anyway, if my dad wanted
to borrow money from them, they refused to do so. Therefore, all I thought about at that time was making more money. Make more money so that I could pay them back! After paying them back, we can. Anyway, money is so important and that was all I thought.

I didn’t know what Jasmine wanted to say after the phrase “we can.” So after paying back all the debts, “we can what?” I asked myself again and again as I read the transcript of the interview with her. I believed it to be important since I view this “we can” as a possibility of her projecting towards a future. And the next second, it dawned on me that probably she hasn’t paid back all the debts yet so that she failed to picture the future for her, and her family.

But when I arrived in Chongqing, not only do [I] need to make money, but also save money. Money cannot be wasted at all. Meanwhile, saying about experiencing the difficulties, I have been in the difficulties all the time during those days. But the desire, the desire to go back to school was still there. Well, it is just because when I have stayed here for a longer time, the desire became not as strong as it was. But it is still there. When thinking about this, it still makes my heart sore.

Jasmine’s voice got so gloomy and low at the end of the sentence that it almost created the illusion for me that I was talking with a sad old man. Growing up in a middle-class happy family in the city, never had I dreamed that I would quit school one day because of a money issue. With that said, I didn’t remember, at least, once that there was a “desire” for me to go to school. I “have to” because that is what a student is supposed to do.
Nothing, especially money, has ever violated my identity as a “student.” As much as I wanted to empathize with Jasmine, I felt a strong sense of being “othered.”

As the only child in the family, Iris, as I indicated earlier, had a father who was ill for a long time and a mother, who barely received any education, needed to hold up the whole family. She told me that she started to work as early as she was in the junior high school because of the specific situation in her family.

In fact, I was out to work when I was still in the junior high school. We were, as you know, so poor. . . . And it was somehow special for our family that my dad has been ill for a long time and hardly had any salary. So the whole family was dependent on my mom’s temporary jobs. . . . In general, we could only feed ourselves at that time. Okay, so later on when I got into the junior high school, well, no, when I was still in elementary school, I went with my mom to pick the herbs on the hill to sell. . . . When I was in my second grade of the junior high school, I went with classmates whose families were similar to mine to the local ice cream factory to buy some ice creams and then sell to others. We didn’t have stuff like refrigerator at that time. So my classmates and I put the ice creams in a huge bucket and sell them from door to door. . . . After that, I got into the textile mill where my mom was working to help her do some things within my ability.

Iris was a petite girl who could only reach my chin. I looked at her shoulders and imagined the little Iris when she was only 12 or 13. How was it possible for the thin shoulders to carry those heavy burdens? “Peasants in China are poor” is no longer new but if we need to understand these new generation rural migrant female workers and what
contributed to the poverty of their families, the conduct of “one couple, one child” and the HRS cannot be avoided.

**Bandit-like Officials**

I don’t know. They only thing that I remember is that at that time, the conduct of the family planning was so strict. My parents were not at home [but went out to escape the local officials] and only me at home took care of my brother. Then, the local officials in our village came to our house and said that if we didn't have money, they would destroy everything in the house. So I locked the door up and watched it in order to stop them breaking in. But, , , they insisted in getting in, , , I bit one person’s arm until it started to bleed. I was totally pissed off.

--Costmary

As indicated earlier, Costmary had a mother whose leg had problems. Instead of staying home to do the farm work, Costmary’s mother went out when Costmary was little to Guangzhou and worked as cheap migrant labor. Little Costmary grew up with her father who stayed home to do the farm work in order to pay for the rent of the land to the government as well as raising the three children. As Costmary recalled, she learned almost all things from her dad but since he was a man, she could only learn how to take care of herself during the onset of menstruation from her grandma. Although Costmary didn’t talk about the exact dates of all those experiences that she shared with me, I could tell from her stories that her memory of fighting against the local officials was during the time when her parents went out to give birth to her youngest brother. In other words, it happened before she was hit hard by her father because of throwing the chickens and
ducks from the top of a hill. I was not sure if her fierce resistance to and the deep
resentment of the local officials in terms of biting one of them until he bled were out of
her understanding that her family was too poor to be destroyed or her instinct. But one
thing that I was certain was that the local officials must have performed like bandits, so
savage that they made Costmary feel that she had to resist.

Referring to bandit-like behaviors, Jasmine used the exact word “bandit” to
describe the local officials who aggressively practicing the “one couple, one child” and
expected others to do so as well. As Jasmine remembered:

Kids who were born in 80s like us, we didn’t have “only child.” When we were
little, one of the most impressive things was the local officials who were
practicing the family planning. [We were] so scared [of them]. That was my
deepest impression, so afraid that those people came. For example, like us, when
we were little, before our youngest brother was born, that impression was so
indelible. My mom [had] our three kids already. Speaking about the family
planning, we were over-birth already. But my mom still wanted to have my
youngest brother. Okay, [she] still wanted our youngest brother. When the local
officials came, they searched our house and confiscated our properties in order to
make us broke. They took all the things in the house just like robbery. [We were]
so scared. When the local officials came, we were scared. There was someone
who even said that my parents should be locked up in the jail, like those
criminals. Later on, when my youngest brother was delivered, [they came] again
and asked for a fine. Anyway, when those local officials came, if [we] didn’t have
money, they dragged the pigs if they saw the pigs or the cows if they saw the cows. Anything that they thought was useful, they would take away. Bandit! Bandit! Ugh, I have been so scared of them until now.

I was reflecting on her so firm address of the local officials as “bandit,” and her parents who were treated as “criminals” because of the over-birth. “Then under that kind of pressure, how did your mother give birth to your brother then?” I was curious.

I remembered those days when my mom was about to deliver, she usually slept on the hill because she was afraid of coming back home no matter it was day or night. Just think, when we were little, as parents, neither of them was at home. We were so scared. During night, the scariest thing was to hear a rattling at the door for it felt like those people were coming again. Oh, I think I will remember that kind of feeling for my whole life. When parents were not at home, there were two that we terrified most: one is robber and the other is the local officials practicing the family planning.

“I see,” nodding my head: I was amazed that she not only used “bandit” to describe the local Party officials but also positioned them as equal to robbers in her mind.

There was once that my mom was at home. About at three o’clock at night, those people came to our house and dragged my mom away and locked her up. My mom has been put in the jail for about a week. [It] was like being imprisoned, no, even worse than that. After that, my dad, who was not at home for most of the time, went back and resolved the issue. It was during those days while my mom was locked up in the jail and my dad was not at home, we needed to cook for
ourselves as little kids. I was only 7. From that time on, whenever I heard the words of officials practicing the family planning, I was quivering with fear.

What disaster that was for Jasmine’s family! As she described, her family was not even at the average standard of a typical rural family during at time. With her mother, the main labor at home, being forced to escape away from others in order to avoid of being caught by the local officials for days and eventually being locked up in the jail, and all the useful things, including the pig and cow that they raised, being taken, how on earth could they make a living? Was it necessary to be so ruthless if the government only wanted to control the population growth?

For a whole year, we had raised pigs or cows. We, ourselves, were even reluctant to eat because we raised them in order to pay for our tuitions and fees in school.

Even when it came to the Spring Festival, we didn’t want to eat them. That said, when your pigs grew big, the local officials came and dragged them away. [We were] scared even thought about them. In our mind, that was robbery. They didn’t listen to you at all.

The practice of “one couple, one child” not only made Jasmine sacrifice a normal but unduplicable childhood, but also to some extent, her chance of going to school. The price was unexpectedly high.

Obviously, Jasmine was not the only one who witnessed the bandit-like local officials’ behaviors and experienced the consequences brought by their deeds. As Eremurus recalled her not-so-clear memory about those days, she said:
I wasn’t so clear about those days now. But the only thing that I am sure was when the local officials came, my parents would take us to hide somewhere. When they came, they smashed up all the things we had at home, nothing left. For example, when those people came, we would hide in our relatives’ houses or in the hill so that they couldn’t find us. But because they couldn’t find us, the only thing that they did was smashing up everything in the house. Once they caught [the parents], it was compulsory that they had to have the sterilization done. And you needed to pay the fine as well [if you delivered an over-birth child]. There was no way that you could escape the fine because you need to register a hukou for your kid so that he/she could go to school later.

As the government set up the goal for the whole country to develop the economy, local officials’ destructive deeds to those rural folk contrasted sharply to what the government propagandized. What’s worse is that misfortunes never come singly. “One couple, one child” was not the only policy that exacerbated the poverty in the rural areas as my participants told but also the HRS. Although most of my participants admitted that HRS did change their families’ economic situation, to the extent that they could feed themselves, in terms of getting rid of the backwardness, HRS was not enough sometimes. It even worsened the situation, as some of them told me, because of the inappropriate and impractical land division method. As Jasmine recalled, they made a living at the mercy of the elements even after they rented the land from the government.

After you rented the land, you needed to pay for the rent in the form of turning in a certain amount of “public food” to the government. But it was truly dependent
on the weather. For example, if this year you had a good turn out, then depended on how many \textit{mu}\textsuperscript{20} lands that one had, there was how much food that one should turn in. But when the bad years came, disaster like flood, you still needed to turn in the “public food.” However, once you turned in the food, you barely had anything left. It was not enough for you to eat. The only good thing for this policy was that you worked for yourself in sense that if you worked harder, the more you got. Once you turned in the “public food,” the rest was yours.

“But you said there were bad years. How about those years when you didn’t even have enough to turn in?” I asked out of my huge curiosity.

You made your way out. [Spending money] to buy food. I remembered that I didn’t have land; neither did my younger sister and brother [because they were over-birthed ones]. Only my elder brother, my parents, and my grandparents had land. Even though our family did have land and we were working on it, the crop was not enough for the whole family to eat. At that time, the crop was bad, not as good as nowadays. All of the seeds were leftovers from the year before. We kept them and reused for a second year. The bad crop resulted in the lack of food. Usually when it got to June, sometimes March or April but the best was June, we ran out of food. When we were done with the food at home, it all depended on my father and the money that he made working outside so that we could use the money to buy food.

Jasmine’s words reminded me of the conversation that I had with Gypsophila Paniculata. When talking about the fined children, Gypsophila Paniculata was surprised
to know that I didn’t have an idea of how to distinguish fined children from un-fined ones. Being amazed as she was, Gypsophila Paniculata shouted:

Sometimes for us to know whether a kid was fined or not, we could tell from whether he/she has land. If they were fined, they wouldn’t get a piece of land. Therefore, you don’t have to over research on that. You just look at whether they have land or not. If they do, then they were not fined ones. If not, then they were.

What a hand-in-hand relationship is between the “one couple, one child” and the HRS. They functioned together to make a rural child’s identity salient no matter what they could possibly do, like little Perennial Coreopsis.

The conduct of the HRS was messed up in the local areas. As I finished all the twenty interviews, I still didn’t have a clear outline of how it was practiced in the localities. As Jasmine told me that they needed to buy food every year in order to feed themselves, Lily told me that they didn’t need to turn in that much food. “Just a small amount,” she said. More controversial, she told me that even for a fined child, one still could have a piece of land as long as the parents paid the fine.

But I, as a fined girl, still got land. As long as [the parents] paid the fine and registered on hukou, [the child] could get the land. Because the land was rented to individuals, everyone was working on his/her own land. They worked harder than before. . . . Once the land was rented, he [the government] didn’t care the crop that you planted in the field. It depended on you, whatever you wanted to plant. When we were little, we planted crops like sweet potato and some other vegetables. No matter what we could buy on the street, we would buy the
seedlings and went back to plant. When it was cropped, for our own family, it was enough.

“But as far as I knew, you still need to turn in the ‘public food,’ right?” I asked.

That food, that was not too much. Yes, you needed to turn in the “public food,” but just a small amount. How much food you needed to turn in was dependent on how many people you had in the family. It was 100 jin\textsuperscript{21} per person, maybe 50 jin, but whatever. It depended on how many people in your family who had the land.

If you had the land, then you needed to turn in. If not, then there was no need to. However, as Lily remembered, the government only asked the peasants to turn in wheat and millet as the “public food.” “Other crops,” said Lily, “the government didn’t care.” “Then how about people who didn’t have wheat or millet?” Crackling after my question, Lily said, “Money, use your money to buy it from others.”

Comparing with other participants who knew only a little about the HRS, Iris could be viewed as an expert. She spent 10 minutes lecturing me what the HRS was and how she understood it. At the end of our conversation, she made it clear to me by saying that there was no big difference from turning in the “public food” to the government to paying the rent to the landlords in earlier times.

Ah, we called that “land goes to every household.” This “land goes to every household” was based on the number of the individuals in one family, not land but rice field and land.\textsuperscript{22} So everyone got a little bit rice land and land. . . . We only had two mu rice land and two mu land because we only had four people, four or five, I forgot. . . . You need to turn in the “public food.” When you took the
“public rice” that you had over there, they would rate your “public food” to see whether it was good or not. For example, if the millet that you turned in was rated as high quality, then you might not need to make up the money. But you got there and they rated your millet as lower level or as failed, then you needed to pay a lot back to the government.

Seeing a surprised expression on my face, Iris continued:

Let me put it in a simple way. It was just like in those old days that we needed to the rent to the landlords. But [now] if your “public food” was not enough, then you needed to use money to make it up. Ugh, it really depended on the quality of your food. But the quality of your food largely depended on the land that you got. If you got a fairly fertile land, then lucky you, you didn’t need to pay money. They might give you money if your food’s quality was really good. But those times were rare. Usually you saw people spending money to make it up.

Not surprisingly, some of my participants told me that their parents didn’t do the farmwork anymore as soon as they realized that it was not worth the effort. Several of them told me that no matter what they did, they could get enough food from the land. Then why bother to stay in the rural area and do the farm work? Their parents went out to work and left the land that they had in the rural area to the seniors at home, the relatives, or even neighbors. As Honesty told me,

Later on, both of my parents went to the city of Chongqing to work and hired another person to do the farm work back home in order to have the ‘public food’
to turn in. But no matter how, it was not enough. My parents need to pay more money to make it up anyway.

Lamenting deeply over those girls’ experience, I questioned in my heart about the legitimacy of the HRS. My participants were telling me the bandit-like officials who they encountered in their childhood and the unreasonably heavy rent that their family needed to pay back to the government, no wonder they viewed “education” as a far-reaching luxury for them. It was in that moment that the rural/urban division became salient in our conversations and we, both my participants and I, were othered by each other’s presence.

**Urban Ph.D., Rural Migrant Workers**

This was my first time to know people like you. Really, the first time. My friends are like me, going to work. No one was like you, coming back [from the US]. It was my first time to know. I didn’t really know what to talk to you. Neither did I have any thought about you. But I just felt that you should be really happy.

--Clove

Clove impressed me because she was the only one among my 20 participants who didn’t take the consent form with her. Regardless of my insistence, she told me at the end that our lives were like two parallel lines so that there was no need to keep a “whatever” form. As I stared at her back and watched her leaving the room, I felt sad, not only for her but also for myself. She put me in such a position that I could easily objectify her without giving me a chance to explain. How was that different from Calendula’s belief that her father scolded her after coming back from farm work was because he liked boys? As Merleau-Ponty reminded us, “to be situated within a certain point of view necessarily
involves not seeing that point of view itself.” What else can I say about it? I appreciated the chance to co-exist with Clove in that moment so that I could embody the “othering” and “being othered” from the point of view that was invisible to her.

Marjoram expressed her admiration to me at the end of our conversation because I am still in school. In fact, as she recalled, her admiration of urbanites’ life had already started in her childhood.

When I was little, I felt that, because I was in the rural, kids in the cities were so comfortable. They did nothing. Born in the rural, it was really hard. [We] needed to walk in the hills to the school, almost an hour walking. Every morning, we would walk to school and then walk back at the end of the day. At that time, I felt that life was so hard. We were walking in the hills with no cars and any transportation. But other kids, they were riding cars. . . . As a rural kid, doing farm work was something that you have to. But like your city kid, you didn’t know how to do it.

That was one of the few times that I, as a “city kid,” was called out by my participants’ direct addressing. I wouldn’t say that I hate to be addressed as “city kid” since I was, am and will still be a city kid. But that addressing from Marjoram did make me uncomfortable as it proved to me how vulnerable the friendly relationship between my participant and I could be by simply putting an “I” and “you” in front of the “rural” and “urban” respectively.
My participants were not only experiencing the rural/urban difference when they were little but also and especially when they came to work in the city. As Perennial Coreopsis shared with me her first experience of coming to Chongqing, she said:

When I first arrived in Chongqing, because I came out from the rural, [comparing] with the city kids, there was still barrier. It felt like that the others [city kids] knew more. [I] just felt that the others are “higher” than me. I was somehow self-belittled and afraid of talking to others. Because our dialect was a little bit different from how city people were talking. . . . They could tell. They asked me if I could change or not. Well, no matter how I was in another environment. So I started to change in order to get familiar with them.

I was not sure if Perennial Coreopsis really meant “familiar” but to some extent, she was seeking the acceptance from others. As she talked in the conversation later, “During that time that I just went out, I felt that others’ words were more reasonable.” And obviously, “city kids” in Perennial Coreopsis’ words were clearly othered because they were, as Perennial Coreopsis said, “higher” than someone like her coming from the countryside.

The moment that truly stunned me, and I had nothing prepared beforehand, was the question that Honesty had for me at the end of our interview. I told every participant that I had a simple question at the end of the interview: do you have any questions for me? Most of them would hesitate for quite a while and then say they had nothing to ask because they didn’t know me or my work. So I got used to that kind of answer. But part of me, as I could feel all the time during the conversations, was waiting as well as hoping for something, something different. There was Honesty who was honest enough to ask
me the question in order to, as she described, feed her curiosity. Thinking for a second, Honesty started:

H: Do you come from the city? Where exactly?^{24}

Me: Yes, , , I am from Jiangbei District.

H: Wow, so your family must be fairly good because I saw you, you are still in school, because we . . .

There was a long silence after the “we.” I was waiting for Honesty to finish the sentence while I was regretting telling her that I am from Jiangbei District. Instead of finishing up her unfinished sentence, she continued, “If you were good at study, that’s good. If not, the parents wouldn’t care. At that time, I felt that my parents, ugh, [I] all day alone was cooking, feeding the pigs, and washing clothes.”

Reflecting on the infinite possibilities to fill out Honesty’s unfinished sentence, I failed to finish the sentence because of their enriched experiences as they grew up in fairly loving families with the embodied love from authenticity of parenting and went through the hardships that were mixed of all those issues from gender to economy, and politics to rural/urban dualism. As Karen Barad argued, “Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real.”^{25} Enjoying the moment when silence performed itself to me, I stopped struggling in terms of finding a word to finish the sentence. Comparing with the enriched experience that Honesty has ever had in her life, is it still
necessary or even possible to finish that sentence after “we”? Instead of draining my brain to finish that sentence, I was lost for words, but lost happily.

Summary

In this chapter, I answered the second research question, “How, if at all, are the policies reflected in the stories told by these new generation rural migrant female workers.” Conducting 20 in-depth interviews with these new generation rural migrant female workers during the summer 2014, I presented my analysis of the hundred pages of their interview transcripts. Sharing their growing-up experience with me as they have lived through the One-Child policy and the HRS, the rural migrant female workers’ stories were around two themes: receiving love and care from their parents, and experiencing hardships in this discursive constituted reality. While the love and care that they received was mainly embodied with the authenticity of parenting, the hardships that they have suffered as they grew up were mixed with issues from gender to economy, and politics to rural/urban dualism. As indicated in their stories, hardships that they have experienced and still have vivid memories of were so embedded in the discourses that the government was created in the OL and the HRS. However, only experiencing through the hardships, has the love and care from the parents been delineated as clear and strong. And only when a family was surrounded by love and care, would it be able to go through all those difficulties. In consequence, hardships and parents’ love and care went hand in hand in terms of constructing these new generation rural migrant female figures within this discursive world.
With the sharp contrast between the government’s narratives and the stories told by the participants, in the next chapter, I will juxtapose the two and discuss how they co-created the visibility of these new generation rural migrant workers’ identities.
Chapter 6: New Generation RMFWs: Learning to Authorize their Lives

In this dissertation, I focused attention on the narratives of what I defined as “these new generation rural migrant female workers.” In explaining their existence, Chapter One focused on a historical discussion of the Chinese household system, *hukou*, as it related to their displacement from the rural areas to work in the cities. As the social-historical contexts implied, introduced in the 1950s, China’s household registration system started to classify Chinese citizens into either agricultural or non-agricultural ones based on their place of residence, which carved out a space called the “floating population (*liu dong ren kou*)” for individuals who have moved, either temporarily or long-term, away from their registered place of residence without a corresponding transfer of official residence registration, or *hukou*.¹

Chapter One addressed the issue of significance in highlighting what I have termed “macro discourse”—the One-Child policy, the Household Responsibility System, and the discursive reality that they have been embedded in, along with the micro discourses that were represented in the discourse of the rural migrant female workers. I drew on Nietzsche’s understanding of discourse and language as well as Foucault’s theory of discourse in raising four research questions: 1) What and how are the image(s) of new generation rural migrant female workers constructed in the One-Child policy and the HRS? 2) How, if at all, are the policies reflected in the stories told by these new generation rural migrant female workers? 3) What, if possible, alternative understanding

¹ I used the term “authorize” here as I tried to emphasize the dual meaning that it carries on: 1) being the authoring self—the author of their own lives; 2) giving power or permission to themselves to narrate their own lives.
of the relationship between discourse and agency can be offered as rural migrant female workers talk about their way of acting/negotiating/reconstructing their identities? and 4) How might questions 2 and 3 provide a deeper conception of these new generation rural migrant female workers in this particular historical time?

As a foundation for analyzing the two documents (One-Child and HRS), I provided a historical overview of the policies and the reasons for their development in Chapter Two. These two political statements, as I have argued, have interrelated connections to both the household registration system and the subject of my research: new generation rural migrant female workers. In other words, the emphasis in that chapter was on the process of how the policies came into being. Especially, Mao Zedong’s and Deng Xiaoping’s different attitudes towards these two policies, the One-Child policy and the HRS, should be noted here again.

Mao, as much as he emphasized the efficacy of individual will while making policies, showed his ambivalent attitudes toward the Family Planning Policies and those regarding the rural economic reform. Scholars like Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin Winckler noted Mao’s ambiguous attitudes and claimed, “Under Mao Zedong, a large but ‘poor and blank’ population appeared sometimes an asset and sometimes a liability.”

Differing from Mao’s ambiguity, Deng Xiaoping’s attitude was strong and straightforward as he always believed that the one who falls behind gets beaten. The only way to get rid of the economic difficulty was to achieve the “Four Modernizations” program, thereby strengthening the fields of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology. Deng’s firm belief was that a large population would only add a
 burden to the nation’s development and slow progress. Deng’s belief, inevitably, was revealed in the One-Child policy and the HRS. Therefore, a well-developed discussion of the historical context served as a foundation for the analysis of the policies in Chapter Four.

After the discussion on the historical contexts regarding the origin of the “migrant workers” in China and the two relevant policies to these new generation rural migrants in Chapters One and Two, I explained the theories and methods employed in this dissertation in Chapter Three. Focusing on the identity (re)construction in both macro and micro narratives, I engaged in a rhetorical analysis of the two policies and the social-historical discourse that they were embedded in. I also explained the use of grounded theory\(^3\) as I went to the field to conduct 20 in-depth interviews with these new generation rural migrant female workers and dealt with the raw materials that I collected.

Nietzsche’s aesthetic language philosophy as well as Foucault’s theory of discourse equipped me lenses to carefully examine the texts of the two policies and the social-historical discourse that they were ensconced within. The abductive nature of grounded theory offered me insights as I was analyzing the raw materials collected from the field about what to focus on when examining the texts of the two policies and the interview data. Therefore, I was able to answer the first research question in Chapter Four and the second one in Chapter Five.

The first research question stated, “What and how are the image(s) of new generation rural migrant female workers constructed in the One-Child policy and the HRS?” Analyzing the two policies and their discursive contexts under the perspectives of
Nietzsche’s aesthetic language philosophy and Foucault’s theory of discourse, I answered the question in a much more detailed style in Chapter Four. I noted that these new generation rural migrant female workers, a group born after the launch of the OL and the HRS, were described in the OL to be “the origin of problems” for the family and for the country as they would definitely jeopardize the progress of the “Four Modernizations” and retard economic development. With the influence of the local Party officials who served as “the active propagandist and responsible educator,” the government expected its people to qualify their citizenship to be high suzhi (quality) citizens, the “reasonable and considerate” people who were able to understand the difficulties that the nation had faced and would be willing to follow the advocacy as giving birth to one child only, sacrificing the “over-birth” ones, “the origin of problems.”

Even though the HRS didn’t define these new generation rural migrant female workers itself, it helped to constitute this generation indirectly as it implied a changing situation in the rural areas: as the economy was getting better, more and more rural folks realized that they could afford to have more than one child regardless of what the government said. The collision of the rural folks’ individual willingness and the government’s advocacy was, in fact, generated by the controversial effects of the OL and the HRS. The collapse of the OL and the HRS regarding the issues of these new generation rural migrant female workers’ identity (re)construction indicated the impossibility for the government to escape from the effects of the rhetoricity of its discourses. In other words, the government as the creator of the discourses in which the “subject” of these new generation rural migrant female workers has been created can
never stay outside of its own rhetoricity. It is not that the government is here and the reality, created discursively, is over there but both of them are connected intimately since even the government, the creator of the subject, was unable to escape from the consequences that the discourses brought.

In order to answer the second research question, “How, if at all, are the policies reflected in the stories told by these new generation rural migrant female workers,” I conducted 20 in-depth interviews with these new generation rural migrant female workers during the summer 2014 and analyzed their interview transcripts in Chapter Five. Sharing their growing-up experience with me as they have lived through the One-Child policy and the HRS, the rural migrant female workers’ stories were around two themes: receiving love and care from their parents, and experiencing hardships in the discourses that they have lived in. While the love and care that they received was mainly embodied with the authenticity of parenting, the hardships that they have suffered as they grew up were mixed with issues from gender to economy, and politics to rural/urban dualism.

As indicated in their stories, hardships that they experienced and still have vivid memories of were deeply embedded in the discourses that the government created in the OL and the HRS (as will be explained below in answering Research Questions 3 and 4). However, only experiencing through the hardships, has the love and care from the parents been delineated clear and strong. And only when a family was surrounded by love and care, could it be able to go through all those difficulties. In consequence, hardships and
parents’ love and care went hand in hand in terms of constructing these new generation rural migrant female figures within this discursive world.

Juxtaposing Chapter Four and Five while keeping the historical background in mind, I am going to answer the third Research Question, “What, if possible, alternative understanding of the relationship between discourse and agency can be offered as rural migrant female workers talk about their way of acting/negotiating/reconstructing their identities?” in this chapter. While answering the third question, my answer to the last question on a deeper conception of these new generation rural migrant female workers in this particular historical space-time will be revealed simultaneously.

Chinese Policies and the Lived Identity as Rural Migrant Workers

More than a decade ago, Alcoff questioned the importance of social identity in terms of epistemic credibility. As Alcoff argued, perceptions, no matter whether they are at a basic level or are considered important epistemic judgments, vary across social identities. Certainly, just as Alcoff noted, I wouldn't deny the significance of the different social identities as a contributing factor to our knowledge claims. But what I wanted to focus my discussion on here is these new generation rural migrant female workers’ ongoing identity formation process brought up by the tensions among the conflicting identities created in the government’s and individuals’ stories as they disrupt the very discursive systems that construct these female workers.

Written in the OL, children who were born, as long as they were not the first one in their families, after the issue of the OL were condemned as “the origin of problems.” They were labeled as “the origin of problems” because through the government’s
scientific calculation, these “over-birth” children would inevitably jeopardize the progress of the “Four Modernizations” and retard economic development. Although the HRS allowed the rural folks more flexibilities in terms of their usage of the pieces of land that they were renting from the government, it, at the same time, enforced the prescription of the “over-birth” children’s identity as the “origin of problems” for their families because the unbearable economic punishment would be given to their families if they were born. That said, the tensions are presented as the socially imposed identity as “the origin of problems” encounters the possibility of individuals’ agency. If the social identity, “the origin of problems,” imposed through the discursive systems was required to be viewed as something sacrifice-able for the nation’s economic development, then these new generation rural migrant female workers, who are living and struggling through the existing discursive systems have learned to authorize their own lives as their own resistance.

A Sacrifice-able Life

As Chapter Four indicated, even before these rural migrant female workers were born, their identity was described to be sacrifice-able in terms of receiving a negative attitude as members of an “origin of problems” generation prescribed in the OL sent out by the Central government. Right after the “one couple, one child,” the government issued the HRS in the rural places in order to ensure economic development as the priority for the whole country. The punishment for households that had more than one child, or what my participants called the “over-birth,” written in the HRS enforced the prescription of the growing population’s identity as the “origin of problems” for their
families because of the unbearable economic punishment brought by their births. Regardless of the contradictory effects caused by the HRS and the OL in the locals, the resolute determination of the top leadership served as a not inconsiderable factor that contributes to the government’s narrative.

As the core of the second generation of the China’s top leadership, Deng Xiaoping’s primary goal during the time when he was in control was to develop the economy, to change the backward situation, and to strengthen the nation at any price; any price included sacrificing a good name of its growing citizens as they were destined to be negative drains on the economy. The top leader’s personal will authorize the generation’s identity, although the will was abstractly conveyed in the OL. In Donald Rice’s terms, Deng Xiaoping was an “authorizing figure” whose words have subsequently been used to authorize policies and practices but rarely been used to authorize the specific conduct and programs. Consequently, the abstractness of Deng’s words in the Open Letter and the guiding principle of the HRS left more than enough space for individual Party members to negotiate their own deeds as they conducted these two policies in the local areas. In other words, if the policies only prescribed the identities for the new generation rural migrant female workers, then local Party members’ behaviors made this intangible description more precisely visualized through their treatment of citizens.

As Yan Mo captured in his novel and my participants shared in their stories, local Party members’ deeds and practices while conducting the policies were ignoble. Their conduct reified the abstract “origin of problems” to be the individual “fined” kid. Some of my participants carried the special identity—fined girl—with them as they were
born as one labeled “over birth.” Not only would the comments from their neighbors and relatives make their “fined girl” identity visible, but also the reward and punishment systems that worked together along with the OL propelled the constitution of the “fined girl” identity to become salient within this social-historical framework. Irrespective of Gypsophila Paniculata’s awareness that fined kids didn’t get land or Lily’s insistence that as long as the parents paid the fine, kids as the “over birth” ones could still get the land, the sacrifice of the families’ economic situations became worse because of the economic punishment that made their identity as the “fined girl” visible. For some who were not included in the “fined,” but still experienced running away from the local Party members or staying at home to protect younger siblings and the house, their identity was as individuals being sacrificed. The nation’s priority was to develop the economy and control the population growth and the local Party members’ goal was to resolutely conduct the policies.

Certainly, not all of my participants had siblings. Four of them were identified as the only-child in their families. However, regardless of the fact that they were the only-child, they were in those rural families that were sacrificed by the nation as it always favored the development of the cities. Chinese scholars like Yunjie Yin summarized the changes that happened after 1949 based on the policies regarding the development in the cities and the rural areas. According to Yin, issuing urban-oriented policies have been a fundamental characteristic as the government deals with urban/rural relations, regardless of its more or less emphasis in different historical times. As Yin noted, from 1953 to 1978, the government was giving priority to the development of heavy industry, which
resulted in the slowness of the economic development and increasing poverty as a common experience in the rural areas.\(^9\)

Without a second thought, all of their answers to the question on the most impressive thing in their childhood were about their poverty, although some of them did admit there were economic changes when their parents went out to work or did some business. In other words, the HRS, the policy that the government believed to be effective in terms of changing the economic backwardness in the rural areas, didn’t work well as it was meant to. Consequently, a stable childhood for my participants was sacrificed in the comparison between the economic situation in the rural area and that in the urban. As the parent(s) went to work in the cities during these girls’ childhood, the girls traveled with their parent(s), were left with the grandparents, or flitted between their parents’ and their grandparents’ places.

Although in the OL, the government’s narrative, this new generation was described as sacrifice-able only to the extent that they should be given birth or not, it didn’t imply, especially children from the rural areas, that they could have a better life after the birth. Instead, the discourses during that historical time indicated the inevitability for the rural children to sacrifice their childhood as joyous and carefree. The overwhelming rhetoric of go-out-to-work filled out the rural migrant female workers’ childhoods, a usual definition of childhood was sacrificed. Rather, a childhood, which was full of motivation for being a rural migrant worker so that one could make more money, was carved out for these girls. Several participants of mine revealed some similar experience; it was as if by mutual understanding that when they were little, almost no one
in their villages knew what working as a migrant meant (*dagong*). Until one day, villagers started to see that people from other villages brought back money from the cities, they realized how much more money one could make being a migrant worker. “I didn’t want to study any more,” Sunflower said, “all I thought about all the time was how much money I could make if I would be in the city.” Crocus shared with me the “most, most” impressive thing in her childhood in a regretful tone.

Especially during my elementary and junior high schools, my grades were excellent. But that was the time for “Reform and Open Up.” The economy was getting better. Everybody was busy making money. . . . I just felt that my mom was so poor [because her mom didn’t receive any education, it was hard for her to get a long-term job], while others were making money so easily. And [life] got really good after they had money. For us who didn’t have money, living was exhausting. . . . [I was] thinking to step into society as soon as possible and to make money as soon as possible. . . . Anyway, it was during that time that I gave up my study.

In the government’s narrative, the group of these new generation rural migrant female workers was sacrifice-able. However, their parents’ words, deeds, and choices mentioned in the conversations that I had with those female workers conveyed the infinite love and care that was impossible to ignore. Although Calendula expressed her gendered knowledge that her father preferred boys instead of girls, she admitted the worry that her father had as she decided to move to Chongqing after she married. In this way, regardless of being portrayed as sacrifice-able figures in the government’s narrative,
these new generation rural migrant female workers grew up happily under the
cconsideration of their parents even though they were poor.

Growing up like that, these girls would never dare to question the decisions made
by the government, not to mention resisting. As Lily recalled her childhood of being a
“fined girl,” she said:

In fact we might not have been influenced [as being a “fined girl”], because that
was the nation’s policy. Who do you think you are that dares to [do] that. The fact
was that it was the nation’s policy. Who do you think you are to, resist, resist the
nation.

Leaving the policies alone without further commenting on them, these new generation
rural migrant workers tried to be the authors of their own lives as they focus more on
promoting themselves instead of being satisfied with what they have been assigned to,
protecting and maintaining the “complete jia,” and actively positioning themselves
between the rural area and city.

Authors of Their Own Lives—All is for a “Complete Jia”

As I immersed myself in the process of dissertation writing, I came to realize how
impossible it has been to try to find an exact substitute for the Chinese word “jia 家.”

When Chinese people, here my participants—these new generation rural migrant female
workers—use the word “jia,” it doesn’t only refer to the “house” but the physical place
where a whole family stays. Generally saying, the word “jia” for them is a combination
of “house,” “home,” and “family.” It is the whole meaning of their lives. “Jia” is the
externalization of one’s heart that has usually been influenced greatly by the outside
environment. For my participants, “jia” means 1) all the reasons that they wanted promotions in their jobs, 2) the careful protection of every family member’s heart, the well planned family life, and the comfortable and cozy place, and 3) where life is.

First, these new generation rural migrant female workers expressed their concerns for getting a better promotion of themselves in the conversations because they have believed that to improve the conditions of their “jia” is their responsibility. Realizing the sacrifice of their childhood opportunity as they decided to make money instead, some of my participants went back to different institutions to get more training while still working during the daytime. As Iris was getting her computer certificate, Eremurus was in the process of getting the certificate for a senior secondary vocational school. Besides them, Marjoram and Hollyhock told me that they were taking the training on driving so that they could get their licenses. Other than getting the certificates from different institutions, choices that these rural migrant female workers made exposed their concern for achieving better promotions. Marjoram even confessed to me in our conversation that it was her fault that she wasn’t economically strong enough to buy a large place so that the whole family can live together instead of scattering all over the place to make a living. Marjoram said to me, “It was me [my bad]; I didn’t have the ability, being economically strong to have my parents live with me.”

Despite her family members’ objection, Perennial Coreopsis gave up what she learned in the vocational school but picked the beauty industry, which she had zero experience in before. As Perennial Coreopsis explained, “I didn’t think about other things that much. All I thought was: I can learn more things now.” As Anthurium recalled her
first job after she left a junior vocational school: “I felt that what I was doing was nothing related to what I learned in the school. More important, [I was] working with some, some women in their 30s and 40s. It felt nothing motivated.” Soon after that, Anthurium changed her job to work as a saleswoman. Crocus changed her job several times since she couldn’t find a “very good” one or one that has “future development.” She eventually located herself in the factory where I interviewed her. As Crocus shared, she only wanted a job that she could see the future and also be near to her parents so that she could take care of them and her elder disabled sister. This was certainly not only Crocus’ will. In terms of authorizing their own lives, these new generation rural migrant female workers expressed their dependence on a “complete jia” and how much they would be willing to make effort into the maintenance and improvement of their “jia.”

Second, these new generation rural migrant female workers are those who have desired for a “complete jia,” the careful protection of everyone’s heart, the well planned family life, and the comfortable and cozy place. Geranium was pretty happy as she mentioned how supportive her parents had been. “Although going out to work is not easy,” Geranium said, “they [her parents] seemed to really support my choice when I told them that I wanted to work in the city. They thought that I could use this chance to do good.” Similarly, “jia” for Jasmine is a warm place where all the difficulties could be taken care of.

For example, I went to the boarding school when I was in our place. Not matter what kind of difficulties that I encountered while in the school, I could talk about
them to my parents when I went back. And then, all of them would be taken care of [by her parents].

Tulip told me her way of overcoming missing her parents as an only-child in the family.

I miss my parents, but, ugh, the only thing [I] could do was to call them. I went back once or sometimes twice a year. Because of the long distance, too often going back is not realistic. While I was missing them, I called them.

As Chrysanthemum expressed her missing the dish that her mom made, I asked her to elaborate more. Chrysanthemum said:

In fact, all the dishes that she [her mom] made was common ones, potato, cauliflower, and things like that. But I miss them so much. [I] cannot have them while working outside. The taste is different, impossible to have the taste of “jia.”

When I asked her what exactly she meant by saying the taste of “jia,” Chrysanthemum burst into laughing. “What exactly?” she continued to laugh, “I cannot give something like a taste of love. I mean nothing special. Not exactly what taste, but really delicious.” I felt the impossibility to put the taste of “jia” into words as Chrysanthemum was talking because of its commonness in our life. However, what made Chrysanthemum speechless was the very uncommonness of the commonness for the taste of “jia.”

More than that, as many of my participants mentioned the “complete jia,” parents and kids seemed to be indispensable. Leaving her kid to her parents and going out to work in Chongqing, Gypsophila Paniculata missed them very much.

I go back very often. Now my kid is living with my parents. . . . I felt that jia is especially warm and heartily. In fact, I do want to come out [to work]. I just
wanted to stay in jia with them. . . . In my heart, my parents’ jia is always my jia. Everyone has different definition of jia. Some people think the house is jia, as long as they have a place to live. But to me, jia can only be jia when I have my parents and my kid together.

As Jasmine described her “jia” in the city, she said, “My ‘jia’ here [in the city] doesn’t have senior people. He [her husband] doesn’t have parents.” While elaborating on the idea of “complete jia,” she said:

No matter it is his parents or mine, I felt that for a jia to be jia, it must have parents, son, daughter, and husband and wife. Only all of them together, it is a “complete jia.” This is to say that it has to have three generations. Three generations live together for the everyday life. Oh, so nice!

Clove, the participant who didn’t take the consent form after she was done with the interview, told me that her parents were always her priority. “Jia is so warm, and it is the most important thing,” Clove said.

No matter what happened, parents are always yours, right? No matter what happened to you, how badly you get ill, parents are the ones that you can always dependent on. Jia is like a harbor. No matter you have done, parents would never dump you. . . . Anyway, jia means warm to me. And parents, besides support, it is still support that they will give me.

Marjoram shared with me that for it to be a jia, it should have the whole family staying together.
[I felt that] a family should stay together, my parents, my elder brother, my sister-in-law, my little niece and me. As soon as I came out to work, I was thinking that if only my parents could go with me. Ugh, don’t be like what it is now while my brother is at one place, I am at another and parents are left home. [I] felt this is not the life that I wanted. I have always thought that having parents with me is better than anything else.

When asked if she has ever worried of fighting against her parents because they would stay together all the time, Marjoram looked at me as if hearing something astonishing. “It is so normal to have fight with your parents,” she said, “but your family members would not hate you because of the fight while others definitely will. . . . I felt that a whole family staying together is more important than any other things.”

For Costmary, “jia” is irreplaceable by anything else. She was amazed when she first arrived in Chongqing: the beautiful skyscrapers and the colorful lights. In her own words, she has never seen anything like this in her village. Buildings in her village were covered by mud. However, even if a long time after she got married in Chongqing, she still dreamed to go back.

Ugh, long time after I got married, I still wanted to go back. And now, I still go back very often. I have always wanted badly to go back. Every year, I went back several times, even if I had nothing to do, I wanted to go back. As long as I wanted to go back, I asked the permission [from the factory] and went back. Well, how should I say? Chongqing is nice and big. But I felt that my family is over there. It is still “over there” that I felt cozier and warmer.
Costmary was not alone in terms of the feeling about the “over there” as cozier and warmer. In fact, different from the portrayal in the earlier studies\textsuperscript{10} that migrant workers’ satisfaction of their lives was based on their involvement in the city or their reluctance to leave the city, which most of them have been done in the big cities on the east coast of China, my Chongqing participants demonstrated a stronger sense of positioning themselves between the countryside and the city instead of blindly holding on to the city. This is the third layer of meanings for the “jia” to be for my participants: “jia,” the place where their lives are.

Instead of building up their satisfaction of their lives based on how they socialized into cities, my participants had their own evaluation on the status as straddling between the rural and the urban. As they treasure a “complete jia” so much, what they usually shared with me was: work is here while life is over there (here “over there” refers to “jia.” For my participants, life becomes meaningful when they are in the “jia.”). This was strongly shown, first, in their “staying in their apartments in the cities” on weekends. Although one of the top reasons for them to stay in their apartments during the weekend, when they were working in the city, was the lower payment that they received as they noted the unaffordable spending that they were likely to make if they spent their weekends outside as an urbanite, more of them indicated that weekend was only their “rest time” between weeks of work instead of being the leisure time. Therefore, almost all of them mentioned their preference as staying inside to watch TV, do housework or sleep.

When asked how she spends her weekend, Sunflower said:
I will go out to some really close areas with my parents and kid to have fun during days like the National Day in October. But weekend, weekend I usually stay here, not going back [to jia]. We only had four “rest days” in every month. Sometimes I would go back [to jia] to see my kid. . . . Ugh, not going anywhere during this kind of “rest days.”

As Honesty talked about her weekend, she first explained what a lazy person she has been. In her own words, she would rather stay in her apartment and sleep instead of going out. “Well, but if it is someone’s birthday in the jia, we will go back and celebrate there,” Honesty said. It should be noted here in Honesty’s words that the jia was located in the countryside of Chongqing. As Gypsophila Paniculata made her feeling towards working in the city clear:

We are going out to work for the living, just for the living. . . . But life is not in the city. We work so hard in the city and try to buy our own apartment. But even when we get our own apartment, we still don’t belong to here [the city]. Look, every time when holidays like Spring Festival comes, few cars are running in the city. Why? We all want to go back, back to our jia.

Participants who viewed the days off as the “rest time” instead of the “leisure time” because they took “work” instead of “life” as reference to the days that they took off. In other words, what they have experience about in the city is “work” but not “life.” In other words, the effort that the Chinese government has made in its urbanization discourse was a failure as much as a success.
It was successful because these new generation rural migrant female workers, who were born in poverty and labeled as “the origin of problems,” have known clearly their responsibilities as to improve the poor conditions of their “jia,” and the only way to do so in the historical wave of urbanization was to follow the trend—going OUT to work. Regardless of the result, the urbanization discourse was a failure as it failed to eliminate the urban/rural dualism. Instead, the enactment of the repeated acts, going out to work, in the urbanization discourse made the “out” or “outside” even salient to these migrant workers. As much as they were outsiders to the city, the city was “outsided” to them regardless of the physical situation that they were working in the city.

Undoubtedly, the urbanization discourse eventually produced its subjects as these new generation rural migrant female workers have been subjected within the specific discursive regime and historical period. Nevertheless, those female migrant workers refused to place themselves in the position produced by the discourse where it makes most sense. It was not simple as the migrant workers found a job in the city, settled down, and since then have lived a happy life just like other urbanites do. It was much more complex than that. As Foucault noted, “All of us are living and thinking subjects... Everybody both acts and thinks.”

Going off the same line, some of my participants even shared their concern for the left-behind children and elderly. When asked how she thinks about terms like “peasant-worker,” Jasmine shook her head. “I don’t really care about how other address me than the issues like left-behind children and seniors,” she said. As our conversation continued, Jasmine elaborated:
Especially like people who have already had their families and went out to work with their children and elderlies being left behind, I disagree with that. Really, I disagree with that. . . . Leaving one’s little kids and elderlies behind in jia and going out to work him/herself. . . those who have been left behind were so poor. . . The key thing for peasant worker is to take care of one’s elderlies and kids. You can work, but some responsibilities that you still need to fulfill. It is not just that you send money to them. Even though you send money to them and it look like you “take care of” them, but you have never thought about how poor it could be for them as being left behind.

As Honesty talked about her feelings for her kid, she said:

After I gave birth to my kid, I felt that I should raise it up by myself; otherwise there will be no affection, really. For example, I am raising my kid by myself now. About study and everything else, as long as it is within my capability, I will help him. But I felt that my parents didn’t do this to me when I was a little kid. They didn’t care whether you performed well or not in school. They thought that giving money is the care.

I think this was also the reason for my participants going back to “jia” very often to visit their elder family or/and kids (if they didn’t raise the kids themselves). For some of my participants, even during their “rest time,” they would go back to visit their kids and parents even if their stay would only be a lunch’s time. They went out to work for a living, just a living, but life was not in the city.
More than that, I had participants tell me that they probably would go back to the rural areas after they retire. Geranium shared with me her missing life in the rural area.

I thought that, in fact, the development in the countryside is good as well. The air, the quality of the environment, even the thing that you breathe everyday is fresher. I am thinking that after I retire, I definitely will go back to the countryside.

The developed economy, the advanced social facilities, and the beautiful constructions in the city did not mean everything to these new generation rural migrant workers. As Narcissus pointed out, “Well, the outside [here she meant the city] is nicer. But it is impossible for me to stay outside.”

**Peasant as it in the “Peasant-Worker”**

As I understood my participants’ willingness to authorize their own lives, the most controversial aspect should be placed on their rejection of the totalizing metanarrative of what it means to be “peasant-worker.” As I noted in the First Chapter, the term “peasant-worker,” the word for word translation from the Chinese phrase “nong min gong,” was first brought up in 1984 by a professor from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences named Yulin Zhang. He initiated the usage of this phrase in one of his published articles to describe individuals who held an agricultural hukou coming out from the countryside and working in the big city. After that, this term has been widely adopted and used even in official documents in order to describe the rural-to-urban migrant workers. Regardless of its accuracy in capturing the situation for those individuals who
moved from rural to urban, “peasant-worker” framed their status as the fixed rural-urban duality with no space left for changes.

Nietzsche brought up the idea of “trope” in which he argued that all words and signs are tropes because of their tropic nature as partial, transferable and reversible as they present an imperfect knowledge.\textsuperscript{12} He went one step further as he pointed out that humans put their subjective impressions of things into linguistic signs, which designate the relationship that human beings are in to things. I see these new generation rural migrant female workers’ attempt to authorize their own lives as they negotiate and redefine the meaning of the “peasant” in the term “peasant-worker.”

Since the economic reform of 1978, China has undergone drastic changes in social structure and class hierarchy. The “peasant” captured in professor Yulin Zhang’s usage of “peasant-worker” indicated a social class instead of a profession. In other words, as many scholars argued, a two-tiered class system consisting of both peasants and workers started to serve as the basic unit of China’s social structure since 1978.\textsuperscript{13} However, from my conversations with them, these new generation rural migrant female workers gave another meaning to the word “peasant” as it no longer stood for either a profession or a social class. The word "peasant" in the term "peasant-worker" became an adjective to describe a special group of individuals who have the old-fashioned and unenlightened thoughts, sell their manual labor but are always cheap, and are handicapped by the lack of education with no awareness of using legal knowledge. And this, according to these new generation rural migrant female workers, is designated for individuals from their parental generation, the first generation rural migrant workers.
“They [the first generation of the peasant-workers] are so peasant,” as my participants would say when asked if they identified themselves with the term “peasant-worker” or not. As Iris said:

I didn’t feel that people were talking about me when they used the term “peasant-worker.” I didn’t have any feeling. . . . But for those who are elder, like my aunt-in-law, they are so peasant. . . . I felt that now I don’t have that much strong feeling toward the word “peasant.” But especially in the 80s and 90s, when people said “peasant,” it felt like a level lower than others.

In addition, it was Eremurus’ experience that constituted the fixed image of “peasant-worker” for her. While talking about the phenomenon of “going out to work,” Eremurus seemed to be pretty understanding. As she said, “So many people are going out to work,” Eremurus said, “I felt that as long as you work for others, you are ‘going out to work.’ It is not a big deal.” But when asked if she would ever consider herself as a “peasant-worker,” Eremurus immediately distinguished herself from “those peasant-workers” as she addressed them. Eremurus said, “I felt that, those who can be addressed as peasant-worker are all, for example, working in the construction field. In other words, they live by manual labor, the tough ones. For example, like my father, these people are [peasant-workers].”

It is important to point out that while my participants denigrated the “peasant” in the term “peasant-worker” since the “peasant” here refers to characteristics as old-fashioned, unenlightened and cheap labor (typically being used to describe my participants’ parental generation), they felt comfortable when they identified themselves
as peasants in a different sense, as individuals who possess an agricultural *hukou*. A
typical answer that I would receive from them after asking their opinions on “peasant-
worker” was: so what? Being a peasant is not anything shameful. Look at our Chinese
population, whoever was not peasant if you counted three generations of his/her family
back? However, the big possibility for almost every Chinese’s ancestor to be a peasant
didn’t seem to be enough for these new generation rural migrant female workers to
proudly identify themselves to be peasant. A convincing point has been revealed along
the way as my conversations went on with them. As Narcissus said:

No matter where I went, I didn’t feel ashamed as being a peasant. On the contrary,
I felt proud of it because now if [one] has an agricultural *hukou*, it is pretty that.
Urbanites want agricultural *hukou* because the policies start to assist peasants
now.

Other than that, participants would tell me that they didn’t think about any difference
between the peasant and the urbanites except for the *hukou*, the household registration.
Furthermore, as most of my participants identified in their interviews, they barely heard
anyone around them using the term “peasant-worker” nowadays in their lives. However,
the question remained: as urbanization progresses day after day, has the peasant/urbanites
dual issue changed or it just changed into a different form of issue, the form that captures
“peasant-workers” to be real “peasant [here it functions as an adjective]” because they
have no place to escape from the dualism? In other words, if the dualism between urban
and rural has disappeared as some participants perceived, then why does the “peasant” in
the phrase “peasant worker” become so salient? Using my participants’ words, they said, “We are not that peasant, but they are so peasant.”

These new generation rural female migrants’ attitude toward the “peasant” in the term of “peasant worker” reminded me of Gloria Anzaldúa’s critique of those Black women who couldn’t break out of the invisible white frame and stand on the ground of their own ethnic being in the article—En rapport, In Opposition: Cobrando cuentas a las nuestras. Anzaldúa argued:

One of the changes that I have seen since This Bridge Called My Back was published is that we no longer allow white women to efface us or suppress us. Now we do it to each other. . . We have indoctrinated into adopting the old imperialist ways of conquering and dominating, adopting a way of confrontation based on differences while standing on the ground of ethnic superiority. She also observed:

Like them we try to impose our version of ‘the ways things should be’; we try to impose one’s self on the Other by making her the recipient of one’s negative elements, usually the same elements that the Anglo projected on us. Like them, we project our self-hatred on her; we stereotype her; we make her generic.

Although Anzaldúa was focusing on race here, the strategy of projecting one’s negative elements to someone else and making him/her othered was exactly what I saw from these new generation rural migrant female workers as the difference was placed on social class. Just as those Chicana women, these new generation rural migrant female workers couldn’t break out of the invisible social class frame as they were within the discourses.
They project the derogatory image of “peasant” as old-fashioned, unenlightened and cheap labor onto those “peasant workers” in their parental generation just as they were projected by the urbanites. In this case, these new generation rural migrant female workers “outsided” peasants from their parental generation just as they were “outsided” by the urbanites. In other words, the conflict existing in the rural/urban dualism has changed its coat from peasant (in the rural areas)-worker (in the cities) issue to the “peasant (being used as a derogatory adjective)” in the “peasant-worker” issue.

Therefore, “peasant-worker,” the term that was invented in the 80s by a Chinese higher education elite, which used to describe the first generation rural migrant workers, has been forever left in the specific discursive regime and historical period as the nation’s urbanization has progressed. Acknowledging their knowledge about “peasant-worker” and capturing them as individuals who have the old-fashioned and unenlightened thoughts, who sell their manual labor but are always cheap, and who are handicapped by the lack of education with no awareness of using legal knowledge. None of my participants would view herself as one of this backward group. Regardless of their willingness to call themselves as “peasants,” those who held an agricultural hukou, they refused to see themselves as anyone from their parental generation, a “peasant-worker.” Regardless of their belief that they didn’t have life in the city but only in the “jia,” which most likely to be the rural areas, they refused to be labeled as “peasant-worker.” Even though these new generation rural migrant female workers admitted their lower educational level in our conversations, an urban female who is getting her Ph.D. education in the U.S.A., they belittled the first generation rural migrant workers, the
“real” “peasant-worker,” to be unenlightened, old-fashioned, and uneducated. Yet, as these new generation rural migrant female workers were rejecting the term “peasant-worker” and the corresponding negative image that the “peasant-worker” has carried, they forgot to mention that it was those “peasant-workers” who used their cheap labor to make money and sent their girls to school, to receive the education—the source of pride.

Implication for Future Studies

As I went to San Juan, Puerto Rico, in November to attend the annual conference of the National Women Studies Association, I met several Chinese and Sinologist scholars who found my study fascinating as well as intriguing. One of them brought my attention to the recently issued government’s advice pertinent to the reform of the hukou system in July 2014. On July 30, 2014, the government issued advice on advancing the reform of the household registration system. In order to advance the urbanization process so that a well-off society can be built up by the end of 2020, the Chinese government will further its reform on the hukou system built up in 1950s, as the government wants to eventually diminish the political differences between the rural folks and urbanites during the coming years.

As much as I wanted to put an end to this study, I failed. On the other hand, I was quite excited in terms of this on-going urbanization progress in China. My work, in fact, has the potential to serve as a precious snapshot for what happened in this historical time-space moment since individuals, especially future generations, will not have the embodied knowledge regarding the rural/urban division as those from these new generation rural migrant workers and their parental generation possess.
The emergence of the term “peasant-worker” in 80s was used to capture a special group of migrants who went out from the rural areas to the cities and worked in the cities because of the changing discourses within the special historical time as the HRS allowed the peasants more flexible ways to deal with the land that they rented from the government. The economic development in the cities called for a large number of cheap laborers, and the peasants’ desires to change their living conditions as well as creating a better future for their children let them to the cities. The new generation, the generation who was once narrated as “the origin of problems” by the government and was born/growing up during the “fight” between their parents and the local officials, found the term “peasant-worker” not acceptable for themselves at all even though they still portrayed themselves as going “out” to work in the cities. They admitted their outside-ness to the cities as the “jia” that they have been desired for has always been located in the rural areas but not being “peasant” (here the “peasant” is used as the derogatory adjective).

Foucault reminded us that discourse creates subjects in two ways: the discourse itself produces subjects as they are “subjected” within the discourse as well as the discourse produces a place for the subject from which the discourse’s particular knowledge and meaning makes sense. In this historical period, the grand urbanization discourse in the Chinese society produced its subject as individuals who went “out” to work. But the term “peasant-worker” failed to offer a space for these new generation rural migrant female workers as it did for their parental generation. Instead of locating themselves in the position from which the discourse of “peasant-worker” makes most
sense and being its “subjects” by “subjecting” themselves to its meaning, these new generation rural migrant female workers have acted in a way to reject the power of this term and rewrite its meaning. And their way to rewrite the meaning so that they could better posit themselves was through emphasizing on the “peasant-ness” in the “peasant-worker” and only through that, they could be able to outside the more negative meaning associated with “peasant-workers.”

Certainly, as the wheel of history keeps moving forward, I see so many new ideas coming out for future studies. First, I only mentioned toward the end of my last chapter about the development of the term “peasant-worker.” However, as fascinating as the nature of this term has been, a detailed and careful study can be done in terms of analyzing the history of the term “peasant-worker.” “Peasant-worker,” the term that not only has witnessed the change of China’s social structure since 1950 but also the economic takeoff since 1978, can be definitely viewed as a unique concentration for more than a half century of Chinese history.

Second, although I didn’t have the chance to interview the parents of these new generation rural migrant female workers, I can foresee how their stories, from the perspective of feminist bioethics—a distinctive academic concentration offering a sustained critique of mainstream bioethics as it calls attention to neglected voices that are seldom represented—especially the stories of fighting against the local Party members in order to give birth to the so-called “over birth” child, can be contributive to the new generation’s understanding of themselves. As the strong influence that feminism has had in various fields of study, feminist-friendly bioethicists started to realize the systematic
weakness in the explanatory framework that grounds analysis of research and clinical practices.\textsuperscript{19} One of the major issues that feminist bioethicists focus on is “autonomy.” Scholars like Susan Sherwin, Susan Dodds, and Carolyn Ells pointed out that the traditional view of autonomy directs no attention to the contextual details of personal experience.\textsuperscript{20} Susan Sherwin argues, “we need to move away from the familiar Western understanding of autonomy as self-defining, self-interested, and self-protecting, as if the self were simply some special kind of property to be preserved.”\textsuperscript{21}

China, as a country that has thousands years of history, has been influenced by Confucianism, Taoism, and imported Buddhism. Mencius, the most famous Confucian after Confucius, once said that there are three forms of unfilial conduct, of which the worst is to not bear male heirs to continue the family line. Simply attributing Chinese women’s childbearing decision to the Western understanding of “autonomy,” which has been so focused on the “self,” was too general since it does not take into account the power relations in which the childbearing decision has been embedded. Moreover, the mother’s embodied experience of escaping the local officials in order to give birth, provides a distinctive understanding of how “autonomy” can contribute to our conception of these new generation rural migrant female workers.

Third, the analysis of the OL’s fundamental ideology can add to our knowledge of the nation’s structure as the isomorphism of a typical Chinese family. In the recent decades, the term “national studies fever” recaptures many scholars’ eyes as it has been made into the contemporary consumption culture.\textsuperscript{22} As Sebastien Billioud indicates, “China is currently undergoing an exceptional moment of rediscovery and reinvention of
a traditional culture that was repressed for a long time.”

Questioning whether the national studies really has got a “fever” or not, Wenzhong Qian reminds us of the ups and downs that the national studies has been through and how especially Confucianism was treated 40 to 30 years ago. While emphasizing culture as a life style, Dan Yu expresses her concern for the national studies getting too “hot.” Yu, who believes that a thing turns into its opposite if pushed too far, holds the perspective that the national studies should better be kept in an appropriate “temperature.”

No matter what kind of attitudes that the scholars had towards the phenomenon of the “national studies fever,” one thing they all admitted is that national studies has become “hot,” coming back to Chinese people’s everyday life as they talk about it, advocate for it, and push their kids to learn it. But in fact, through the study that I have done on the Open Letter and HRS in connection with the experiences of these new generation rural migrant female workers, I would like to add to it and argue that the fundamental ideology that refers to Confucianism, has never left the Chinese people alone, even during the earlier post-Mao era.
Notes

Chapter One


9. “‘Dagongmei’-Female Migrant Labourers.”

10. In Chinese, “rural migrant workers” is pronounced as Nong Min Gong; “rural migrant female workers” is pronounced as Nong Min Nv Gong; and the “new generation” is pronounced as Xin Sheng Dai.


15. Reform and Open Up policy brought up by Deng Xiaoping, a paramount leader in the Chinese history, consisted of a series of policies. Under the micro-management institution reforms, rural areas were experiencing the household responsibility system while cities went through the enterprise reform. Besides, the planned resource-allocation experienced material management system, the foreign-trade management system, and the financial management reforms. Other than those, the reforms happened in the macro-policy environment as well. See more information from Justin Yifu Lin, Ts’ai Fang, and Zhou Li, *The China Miracle: Development Strategy and Economic Reform* (The Chinese University Press, 1996), 125-167.


37. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, eds., *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, 2nd ed. (Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001), 1168.


42. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, 42.

43. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, 43.

44. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, 43.


Chapter Two


8. The “Family Planning Policies” refers to Mao Zedong’s emphasis on the dual themes of birth control and birth planning because of his over-optimistic about China’s
population and the capacity to maintain an adequate food grain supply. Detailed history will be discussion in the “One-Child Policy.”


15. Years between mid-1970s to the end of 1978, which was the end of the Cultural Revolution and the earlier years of Mao Zedong’s death, are always viewed as the darkest period in Chinese history, because during that time, there were several political groups fighting for their own interests. The most obvious groups were the Gang of Four, Deng Xiaoping and his supporters. In the early 1975, Zhou Enlai’s health deteriorated to the point that he could no long assume his responsibilities. Mao suggested that Zhou retire in order to take care of himself and asked Zhou to leave the State Council to Deng. Around the beginning of June 1975, Mao and Zhou agreed between themselves that from then on Deng Xiaoping would chair the meetings of the party’s highest decision-making body. By 1975, Deng was running much of the country. Speaking repeatedly that we need to put things back in order, Deng professionalized the military, fixed the railroad system, revived industry and mended fences internationally. During that year, no matter how hard the Gang of Four tried to defame Deng in front of Mao, Mao came down on Deng’s side and supported his work. However, although Mao criticized the Gang of Four, he didn't purge them because Mao knew that the Gang of Four was his ideological praetorian guard who would defend the ideals of the Cultural Revolution to the end. In September 1975, Mao’s nephew Mao Yuanxin came to Zhongnanhai and reported to Mao of Deng’s discredits of the Cultural Revolution. Fed enough of what happened outside under Deng’s leadership, Mao grew increasingly skeptical of his fealty. At one leadership meeting, Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing, even attacked Deng as a “slave to the West.” On 2 February 1976, the Central Committee issued a Top-Priority Directive, officially transferring Deng to work on "external affairs" and thus removing Deng from the party's power apparatus. On 3 March, Mao issued a directive to reaffirm the legitimacy of the Cultural Revolution and specifically pointed to Deng as an internal, rather than external, problem.
Deng reemerged as the de facto leader of China following Mao’s death on September 9, 1976, after the Gang of Four was purged in October 1976 and outmaneuvered Hua.


20. Greenhalgh and Winckler, Governing China’s Population, 63.


The First Five-Year Plan refers to the period from 1953 to 1957. After restoring a viable economic base, the leadership under Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and other revolutionary veterans decided to adopt the Soviet economic model in order to build up intensive program of industrial growth and socialization. Under the help of the Soviet planners, the Chinese government formulated the plan. The main object for the plan was a high rate of economic growth, with primary emphasis on industrial development at the expense of agriculture and particular concentration on heavy industry and capital-


32. Greenhalgh and Winckler, Governing China’s Population, 73.

33. Greenhalgh and Winckler, Governing China’s Population, 74.

34. “The Critique of Ma Yinchu.”


38. Greenhalgh, Just One Child, 50.


42. Greenhalgh, Just One Child, 36.


47. Greenhalgh, *Just One Child*, 32.


51. Qian Xusen, who received his education in US, was the father of China’s space program and top military science advisor and was one of the most influential natural scientist. Chen Muhua, the vice-premier in China, was put in charge of a new and enlarged Birth Planning Leading Small Group in June 1978.


54. “The Open Letter from the Central Government.”


Various steps were taken in the process of Collectivization. The three major forms of cooperatives were: 1) “mutual-aid team,” in which four or five neighboring households pooled their labor, farm tools, and draft animals for peak seasons on a temporary or permanent basis. In this way, resource ownership was not altered and crop decisions remained the responsibility of the individual household. 2) “Elementary/primary cooperative,” in which 20-30 neighboring households combined their assets in a unified scheme. The net income of a cooperative was shared in two ways—dividend payments for land, draft animals, and farm tools and remuneration for work performed. The land, draft animals and farm tools were still owned by individual member households. 3) Collective farm or “advanced cooperative,” in which all means of production were collectivized. Remuneration in a collective was based solely on labor contribution and took the form of work points. The income of a household depended on the number of work points earned by the family members and the average value of a work point. The process of collectivization of agriculture was essentially completed with the establishment of the People’s Communes in 1958.


The difference between the primary collectivization and the advanced collectivization was that for the former one, the farmers still retained their ownership of land while land would be pooled and farmed cooperatively and for the later, the private land ownership would be abolished. See more information from Elena Garnevska, Guozhong Liu, and Nicola Mary Shadbolt, “Factors for Successful Development of Farmer Cooperatives in Northwest China,” *International Food and Agribusiness Management Review* 14, no. 2 (2011): 71.


Mao Zedong, “On the Correct Handling of the Contradictions Among the People.”

Mao Zedong, “On the Correct Handling of the Contradictions Among the People.”

Feng, “A Study on the Outline History,” 228.


Chapter Three


22. “Xiaoping Tong: The Differences between Chongqing as the Experimental District and Special Economic District (童小平：重庆城乡同城改革试验区不等同于特区),”
23. There are 20 administrative districts and 19 counties in Chongqing.


25. As Yi-han Xiong noted in his article, the term “new generation” refers to migrant workers born between 1980 and the early 1990s. See more information from Xiong, “The New Generation of Migrant Workers,” 3.


27. Elwood and Martin, “‘Placing’ Interviews,” 652.


**Chapter Four**


6. Mencius (372–289 BCE), a Confucian sage regarded as second only to Confucius himself, accepted Confucius’ discussions of government on benevolence (*ren*) and developed it into the theories of the benevolent government” (*ren zheng*, 仁政).


27. The history of the Chinese Communist Party was a live show of fighting against both Left-leaning and Right-leaning Errors. Right-leaning Errors started with Chen Duxiu, the co-founder of the Chinese Communist Party with Li Dazhao in 1921, during the
cooperation period between Kuomintang and Communist Party. The characteristic of the Right-leaning Errors was that the leader of the Communist Party gave up its leadership while in the cooperation and let the Kuomintang to take the lead. Differing from the Right-leaning Errors, the Left-leaning Errors refers to Wang Ming, during 1931 to 1935, which didn’t consider the specific historical situations but take actions blindly. It is also addressed as Left-leaning Adventurism.


29. Ye, Deng Xiaoping Gai Bian Zhongguo, 236-239.


32. Here I referred the value, “rule a country of virtue,” to Confucians rather than Confucius was because the relations between virtue, king, and heaven were brought up before Confucius. But I still attributed the development of this value to Confucians for this topic wasn’t specifically discussed until Mencius’ time.


34. Muhua Chen, “Shixian Sige Xiandaihua, Bixu Youjihuadi Kongzhi Renkou Zengzhang (In order to achieve the ‘Four Modernizations,’ must control the population growth in a planned way),” People’s Daily, August 11, 1978, sec. 2.


37. Jian Song, Xueyuan Tian, Guangyuan Li, and Jingyuan Yu, “Guanyu Woguo Renkou Fazhan Mubiao Wenti (Issue about the goal of our population development),” People’s Daily, March 7, 1980, sec. 5.


40. Behler, “Nietzsche’s Study of Greek Rhetoric,” 11.


42. Behler, “Nietzsche’s Study of Greek Rhetoric,” 12.


58. This is widely noted by many scholars. I cited a few here.


60. Whitson and Poulakos, “Nietzsche and the Aesthetics of Rhetoric,” 140.


64. Liang, “‘Yitaihua’ Zhengce Xingcheng de Shidai Beijing Yanjiu.”

65. Liang, “‘Yitaihua’ Zhengce Xingcheng de Shidai Beijing Yanjiu.”

66. Liang, “‘Yitaihua’ Zhengce Xingcheng de Shidai Beijing Yanjiu.”
Chapter Five


4. “Go out to work” is a phrase that my participants used very often as they talked about the migrant working experience from the rural area to the city. The phrase has an interesting indication as it refers to areas that are not rural areas as “outside” and the rural areas as “inside.”


10. I named my 20 participants after different flowers’ names after a long-time struggle. I used to ask my participants question like how they would like to see themselves being presented in terms of the name. Most of them told me that they have never thought about that or simply don’t care. After meeting with one participant who told me that no matter how elegant, great or beautiful the name is, it is no more than a symbol to others to address and for one to know who oneself is, I gave up the struggle of giving pseudo names to my participants. Instead, I name them with twenty different flowers that I think go along with their personalities based on my own experience with them. As Tagore said, “Let life be beautiful like summer flowers.” What else is more beautiful than flowers? Failing to answer the question, I decided to name them after flowers.

12. RMB stands for Renminbi, the office currency in China. The exchange rate between RMB and US now is about 6 to 1.

13. The Chinese character for “good,” which consists of a “girl 女” and a “boy 子.”


16. After the six-year elementary school in China, students can continue their studies to three-year junior high school and three-year senior high school. And after that, they need to take the college entrance exam in order to go to college/university. Generally, students will enter the junior high school at 12 and graduate at 14 or 15 without any interruption and go to senior high school at 15 and graduate at 18. That said, Jasmine stopped going to school when she was 15.

17. In China, primary and secondary education takes 12 years to complete, which consists of 6-year elementary, 3-year junior high school, and 3-year senior high school. The nine-year schooling in elementary and junior high schools pertains to compulsory education. See more information from “9-year Compulsory Education,” *China.org.cn*, accessed November 2, 2014, http://www.china.org.cn/english/education/184879.htm


19. Meng Jiao (孟郊) was a Chinese poet of the Tang Dynasty. “A Song for A Wandering Son” was one of his famous poems collected in the popular anthology *Three Hundred Tang Poems*. The poem is talking about a mother who is sewing warm clothes for her son before he leaves home. She sews the seams tightly and closely so that the clothes can keep him warm. As she sews the clothes, she is afraid that her son may not return or return late. At the end of the poem, Meng Jiao used a question to illustrate the hardness for the son to repay his mother’s love just like a sprout of grass to repay the sun for the three years’ worth of light and warmth. 


20. *Mu* is a Chinese area unit promulgated in 1915. One *mu* land equals to 614.4 m².

21. *Jin* is a traditional East Asian unit of weight. One *jin* equals to 1.1 pounds.

22. The difference between rice field and land was that the rice field is only used for planting rice but the land can be used in different ways like planting maize and millet.

24. It should be noted that the city of Chongqing is divided by two major rivers. In that sense, Chongqing is a city with multi centers instead of one. Based on different centers, Chongqing was managed by the unit of district. Among all of them, two districts are viewed as the ones for the rich: Yuzhong District (the old economic center) and the Jiangbei District (the new economic center).


**Chapter Six**


9. Yunjie Yin, “The Changes as the State deals with the urban/rural relations,” 110.


   Ke-Qing Han, Chien-Chung Huang, and Wen-Jui Han, “Social Mobility of Migrant Peasant Workers in China,” *Sociology Mind 社会学思维*, 1.1, No. 4 (2011): 206-211.


22. Website like *Culture China* has a section named Cultural Observation specifically dealing with issues related to the “national studies fever” or the revitalization of the national studies started in the 1990s. Here, “national studies” refers directly to the study of the ancient classics like Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism, and etc.


26. Yu, “National Studies, don’t get too hot.”
Appendix A: IRB Approval

The following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below. This review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as defined in the federal regulations as Category(ies): 

Project Title: Exploring the Identity of Chinese New Generation Female Rural Migrant Workers

Primary Investigator: Zhou Li
Co-investigator(s):

Faculty Advisor: Raymie McKerrow

Department: Communication Studies

Rebecca Cale, AAB, CIP
Office of Research Compliance

Approval Date
1/7/14

Expiration Date
1/6/15

This approval is valid until expiration date listed above. If you wish to continue beyond expiration date, you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation.

Adverse events must be reported to the IRB promptly, within 5 working days of the occurrence.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
The following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below. This review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as defined in the federal regulations as Category(ies):

Project Title: The Role of Narrative in Identity Formation Among Chinese New Generation Rural Migrant Women

Primary Investigator: Zhou Li
Co-Investigator(s):

Faculty Advisor: Raymie McKerrow

Department: Communication Studies

Rebecca Cale, AAB, CIP
Office of Research Compliance

Approval Date 5-4-15
Expiration Date 6-5-14

This approval is valid until expiration date listed above. If you wish to continue beyond expiration date, you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation.

Adverse events must be reported to the IRB promptly, within 5 working days of the occurrence.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
Appendix B: 20 Characters

As I noted in the notes of Chapter 5, I named my 20 participants with different flowers’ names that I think go along with their personalities based on my own experience with them. Since I love Rabindranath Tagore’s poem Summer Flower, “Let life be beautiful like summer flowers,” I asked myself: what else is more beautiful than flowers? Failing to answer the question, I decided to name my participants after flowers. Because different flowers have their own meanings, I chose one kind of flower for each of participants as I believed can describe them most.

1. Bluebell (meaning of bluebell: constancy) was born in 1994, only child in her family.
2. Gypsophila Paniculata (meaning of gypsophila paniculata: everlasting love) was born in 1981, who has two elder brothers.
3. Perennial Coreopsis (meaning of perennial coreopsis: nobleness) was born in 1990, who has an elder sister.
4. Anthurium (meaning of anthurium: hospitality) was born in 1990, who has two elder sisters.
5. Geranium (meaning of geranium: true friendship) was born in 80s, who has one younger brother.
6. Calendula (meaning of calendula: grief) was born in 80s who has one younger brother.
7. Chrysanthemum (meaning of chrysanthemum: justice) was born in 90s, who has more than three siblings.
8. Crocus (meaning of crocus: youthful gladness) was born in 1980 who has an elder sister mentally disabled.
9. Iris (meaning of iris: message) was born in 80s, only child in her family.
10. Jasmine (meaning of jasmine: amiability) was born in 1984 who has an elder brother, one younger sister and one younger brother.
11. Lily (meaning of lily: majesty) was born in 80s, who has an elder sister and a younger brother.
12. Clove (meaning of clove: bright) was born in 90s, only child in her family.
13. Eremurus (meaning of Eremurus: endurance) was born in 80s, who has one elder brother and a younger sister.
14. Tulip (meaning of tulip: elegance and grace) was born in 1982, only child in her family.
15. Honesty (meaning of honesty: honest) was born in 1984 who has a younger brother.
16. Costmary (meaning of costmary: peacefulness) was born in 1989, who has two younger brothers.
17. Sunflower (meaning of sunflower: warmth and happiness) was born in 1987, who has an elder sister.
18. Marjoram (meaning of marjoram: blushes) was born in 1993, who has an elder brother.
19. Hollyhock (meaning of hollyhock: ambition) was born in 1993, who has a younger sister.
20. Narcissus (meaning of narcissus: new beginnings) was born in 1986, who has an elder brother and a younger sister.

Sources for the flowers’ meanings


