

LAYERED MOTHERHOOD FOR CHINESE MOTHER BLOGGERS: A FEMINIST  
FOUCAULDIAN ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRACT

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This is an exploratory attempt at understanding motherhood as layered, conditioned, and multivalent against the background of the one-child policy in China. Through close readings of blogs maintained and posted by Chinese mother bloggers at [www.sina.com.cn](http://www.sina.com.cn), I foreground the complexities of their subjectivities. What is significant about blogs for the purpose of my study is that they are increasingly being used by networks of middle-class urban Chinese parents, and specifically by women. Drawing mainly from Michel Foucault and different schools of feminist thinkers, subjectivities are understood as fluid, constituted, and becoming. Therefore, this dissertation highlights the interconnectivity between Chinese nation, the discourse of population in China, Chinese women and their children, and the nexus of power and knowledge in the age of biopower. It also centers on the normative, constitutive, and regulatory power of gender and sexuality on Chinese mother bloggers as exemplified by their glorification of motherhood and everyday practices in nurturing and disciplining their young. However, in the midst of conforming and reproducing dominant discourses on gender and sexuality, Chinese mother bloggers are also engaged in the technology of the self through the diligent act of blogging, thus fostering new modes of existence and relationships and exerting their agency in context.

To my mother, an illiterate woman – who dares to dream for her daughter.

To my husband – who understands, appreciates, and supports his wife.

To my son – who embodies the wonder of life and sustains the hope of the future.

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## Layered Motherhood for Chinese Mother Bloggers: A Feminist Foucauldian Analysis

### Introduction

The one-child policy enforced in mainland China since 1979 has been pivotal in the nationalist discourse of modernity in China and the liberal discourse of human rights in the West. Within the frameworks of modernity and nationalism, every citizen in China has the moral responsibility of controlling their reproduction so that sustainable development will be achievable. The one-child policy was supposed to curtail the unprecedented population growth so that overpopulation would not drain the economic gains or drag down economic development, which had become the focal point of attention in the Chinese government agenda since the opening door policy in the late 1970s. What is important to bear in mind is the fact that economic development and the one-child policy happened almost simultaneously in the late 1970s. China by then was ready to integrate itself into the global economy and politics, putting an end to its purposeful opposition to the capitalist camps headed by the United States and Great Britain since 1949 when the People's Republic of China was founded. Chinese women in this drive for modernity and development were called upon, in the words of Michel Foucault (1979), to “discipline” their bodies.

While in China the nationalist discourse hails the controlling and disciplining of individual bodies for the ambitious dream of China becoming a giant in the global community, the liberal discourse of human rights in the West has busied itself with condemning the inhumane and draconian policy of controlling people's reproductive rights and violating basic human rights. For instance, the Bush administration decided to withdraw 34 million dollars in U.S. Congress-allocated funding that was meant to support



the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) assistance for the rights and health of women since 2002. The decision was based on the allegation that the UNPFA's program was complicit with coerced abortion and involuntary sterilization in China (U.S.

Defunding of UNFPA accessed on Feb. 13, 2007 at

[http://www.americansforunfpa.org/site/c.enKMIRNpEkG/b.933339/k.627E/US\\_Defunding\\_of\\_UNFPA.htm](http://www.americansforunfpa.org/site/c.enKMIRNpEkG/b.933339/k.627E/US_Defunding_of_UNFPA.htm)). Media coverage of China's one-child policy in the U.S. has mainly

represented the dark side of the policy. Stories like female infanticide, girl abandonment, sterilization, and illegal immigrants seeking asylum because of the policy became perennial recipes to feed people's wild imagination that China was like a slaughterhouse and Chinese people the powerless victims of a draconian policy. Academic circles have also been paying close attention to the policy. Books like *Slaughter of the innocents* (Aird, 1990) and *A mother's ordeal: One woman's fight against China's one-child policy* (Mosher, 1993) championed the individual freedom and human rights ideal of the West and blamed the policy for taking innocent lives and victimizing Chinese people.

A careful examination of the nationalist discourse in China and the liberal discourse in the West reveals that neither of these two discourses centers on the agency of the Chinese women who have to bear the burden of the policy. Chinese women have remained fundamentally marginal to a debate that has been about how they should "discipline" their bodies.

It is my contention that although the one-child policy has enabled the West to position China as inferior to the West in terms of human rights on the one hand, and on the other hand, has been a significant site for Chinese nationalism to assert its political and economic agendas at the expense of Chinese people's reproductive rights, the

Chinese women who are integral to these discourses have been neither subjects nor even the primary objects of concern in the policy formation and the human rights condemnation. They have most of the time been either voiceless victims or liberated women.

In this study I would like to foreground the voices of Chinese women through an examination of web logs or blogs published at a women's virtual community in China at <http://www.sina.com.cn>. In so doing, I intend to explore the complexity of a particular stratum of Chinese women's subjectivities in the context of the one-child policy. This particular stratum of Chinese women is middle-class, well-educated, and most likely suburban. As noted by Jenkins and Thorburn (2003): "The current diversification of communication channels...is politically important because it expands the range of voices that can be heard in a national debate, ensuring that no one voice can speak with unquestioned authority" (p. 2). In addition, as evidenced by the empirical work of Michael Keren (2006), blogging facilitates emancipation and empowerment under certain conditions. Keren contends,

What can be more liberating than millions of women who formerly lacked a public voice, asserting new identities, blurring the private/public divide that kept women's issues away from the public sphere, and educating each other, and the world at large, of updated norms and values. (p. 37)

However, Chinese women's voices in the virtual community that I examine are filled with contradictions, uncertainties, and ambiguities. But their valiant and persistent efforts in asserting their agencies/voices are worth investigating, in order to understand how their agency is manifested in this discursive realm online.

Agency is of primary concern to postcolonial feminist scholarship that problematizes location and voice (Spivak, 1988). Examining colonial debates on widow immolation, Spivak demonstrates that there is no space from where the subaltern subject can speak. If the subaltern subject refers to “the third-world subject” (p. 271), then the subaltern woman is the third-world woman who was caught between forces of imperialism and patriarchy. She was denied the access to the centers of hegemonic power. However, to expose the predicament of the subaltern subject is not to reinforce her subjugated subjectivity. Nevertheless, it is exactly “this interstitial space between agency and the lack thereof, between being constructed within structures of domination and finding spaces of exerting agency”, to borrow Shome and Hedge’s (2002) words, that needs theorizing (p. 266).

Before setting off on the journey of theorizing the “interstitial space between agency and the lack thereof,” I have to examine the speaking role I personally take as well as the location from which I speak (Alcoff, 1992; Gajjala, 2004, pp. 5-7). An emphasis on the significance of social position and lived experience has always been a central theme of feminist epistemology. Linda Martin Alcoff (1992) cautions us that speaking from a privileged location is always discursively dangerous. No matter how well intentioned, the practice of the privileged speaking on behalf of the less privileged other, has often resulted in reinforcing rather than challenging structures of oppression. However, this does not mean that as intellectuals we should refrain from speaking. The very act of refusing to speak can be a means of turning away from responsibility, as Diane Elam (1995) argues. For our work to yield any significance, we have to take up the challenge of speaking for others. Speaking for others in a responsible manner entails

acknowledging the privilege afforded to me as a Chinese national and a woman by my position overseas in an academic setting. Rey Chow (1993) notes that some Chinese intellectuals are more interested in their career advancement than in oppressed women in China. This is a cautionary note that I have to bear in mind when I attempt to work on the subjectivity of Chinese women. For these reasons, I refuse to be an informant of Chinese women to an audience in the West for fear of becoming the representative of my entire culture. But at the same time, I take seriously my ability to speak not for Chinese women but with them so that the complexity of their subjectivities in relation to the one-child policy can be appreciated.

Simultaneously, I do realize that I speak from a socially and culturally privileged location because of my education in the United States, which is not available to my urban Chinese women counterparts, who are situated in a different setting geographically, materially, and culturally. My research focuses on urban Chinese women and how their subjectivities are both constrained and enabled in the context of the one-child policy. My research interest and focus are clearly determined by my biography, experiences, and knowledge. I was born in the late 1960s when China was in a swirl of political struggles marked by the outburst of the Cultural Revolution. I came of age when China was engaged in economic reforms and integrating into the global system and when the suspended national higher education system was resumed to admit students based on their academic performance rather than on their political affiliations. When I was married and ready to give birth to my son, my only child, in 2000, the one-child policy had already been in place for twenty-one years and it had transformed the fertility norms from four or five children in my mother's generation to one child in my friends' and my generation.

My fertility pattern was determined by the almost universal one-child policy in the cities in China. It is not truthful if I were to deny my sporadic strong aspiration for another child not only for my own desire, but also for the companionship of my son who sometimes feels lonely. However, it is not accurate to say that I find the one-child policy so oppressive and repressive that I want to break its evil spell and enjoy my reproductive rights without any constraints.

Like millions of urban Chinese women who have learned to live with the policy and who are ready to take the fullest advantage of all that contemporary circumstances in China can offer to us, I treasure the empowering experiences of becoming a mother as well as the opportunities to develop my own potential as a woman. I am no longer contented with the roles my mother has played all her life: a virtuous wife and selfless mother. It is only through low fertility and/or perhaps with lots of child-care/nannies that it is possible for women of my generation to seek some balance between motherhood and self-advancement.

For the past two years my research has been focused on reproduction and Chinese women. I have come to the understanding that for Chinese women and even women in the West in the age of scientific intervention in fertility, their bodies do not usually belong to them (Spar, 2006). As Arabella Lyon (2005) points out, “the Chinese official understands differently [from a liberty of body conceptualized by John Stuart Mill], conceiving procreation as affecting a national population in profound ways and the individual body as inseparable from the collective good” (p. 174). Feminists have also argued for the mediated nature of women’s reproductive and sexual rights in a web of power relations and resources distribution. “Bodily integrity” and/or “control over one’s

body” are core notions to women’s rights. However, these notions cannot be separated from the social, historical, political, and economic contexts that various women have to live in (Correa & Petchesky, 2003, pp. 88-89). Social, historical, political, and economic contexts all work together to shape the subjectivities of Chinese women.

Bringing into the research field my own biography and experience as a Chinese woman who is disciplined by the one-child policy makes it possible for me to engage in reflexivity. As Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Deborah Piatelli (2007) argue, “Reflexivity, at one level, is a self-critical action whereby the researcher finds that the world is mediated by the self – what can be known can only be known through oneself, one’s lived experience, and one’s biography” (p. 496). By reflexively drawing from my experiences, I am able to establish common experiential ground with my fellow Chinese women bloggers and, at the same time, to sensitize myself to the differences in their experiences of mothering. The purpose of engaging in reflexivity is to place my fellow Chinese women bloggers’ experiences of mothering into social context, to move their knowledge to the center of social inquiry (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984), and to better inform my interpretation of their experiences. However, the engagement with reflexivity does not mean that the power differentials between my subjects and me, an academic who has the possibility of publishing my work, will automatically disappear. The power differentials can at best be minimized if I am attuned to the differences between us and bring my subjects into the process of co-constructing knowledge (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007, pp. 499-503).

Relying on postcolonial feminist thinking and Foucault’s understanding of power, biopower in particular, I intend to illustrate that the key to a more sophisticated

understanding of Chinese women's existence as subjects is to understand them neither as fully intentional, active, omnipotent subjects nor as mere victims of state control, but as negotiating, calculating, situated, and fluctuating everyday agents.

The research questions that I am going to engage in this project are as follows:

1. How are Chinese mother bloggers' subjectivities constituted in the discourse of one-child policy?
2. What is essential to the phenomenon of blogging as defined by Chinese women who use the blogosphere in their parenting?
3. How do biopower, gender, and sexuality act as conditions in one or more areas to influence action/interaction in the blogosphere?
4. How are cultures (re)produced and/or contested as these Chinese mother bloggers imagine and enable the creation of the next generation, most directly through the nurture of children as manifested in their blogs?

Chapter One is mainly an elaboration on my entry point in the research as compared with the kind of research that has already been conducted in relation to Chinese women and the one-child policy. What I want to articulate is that although the one-child policy has inspired a lot of research in anthropology, demography, and sociology, research addressing Chinese women in the discourse of the one-child policy is so small a voice that it is hardly audible compared to the loud accusations of human rights violations. In addition to clarifying my entry point, I state clearly that feminist epistemology, methodology, and methods shape how I approach the research that intends to legitimate Chinese women's experiences as resources for knowledge. In the last part of chapter one, I mainly explain why blogs written by Chinese women are a valuable source

for me to understand their reality in relation to the one-child policy and why a feminist Foucauldian approach fits the task of giving voice to Chinese women and the specific method or procedure that I have used in gathering data as evidence.

Building on the gender and nation work of Yuval-Davis (1997) and the biopower theory of Foucault (1978), Chapter Two examines several historical moments in modern Chinese history to explore the discursive links between nation, population, Chinese women and the constitutive power of modern nation. As both biological and cultural reproducers (Yuval-Davis, 1997), the prescribed gender roles for Chinese women within the constraint of motherhood have been repeated but differentiated each time the Chinese nation has been faced with crisis. When China was challenged with imperialism at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Chinese women were given back their physical health and their intellect. In the 1970s, when China realized the importance of economic development, social welfare, and political stability, the one-child policy was issued on the premise of Malthusian social theory. Chinese women's bodies are disciplined because of the discursive links between nation, population, and Chinese women. However, the poor, victimized object is not the only identity Chinese women have. They have initiated an active self-formation to normalize the one-child policy and to disrupt the prescribed gender roles. Chapter Two mainly addresses power at macro level and how it impacts Chinese women in reproduction and their child-rearing practices. I first expound the discursive links connecting Chinese nation, population and Chinese women in several communicative moments in modern Chinese history relying on the theoretical lens of feminist theorizing on nation and women. I then use the disciplinary power of the norm



of quality (Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005, pp. 27-33) to understand the blogs I collected written by Chinese mother bloggers.

Chapter Three and Chapter Four shift gears to focus on the micro politics of Internet use, blogs in particular, by Chinese mother bloggers in their everyday life. Through an examination of selected blogs under the parenting virtual community at [www.sina.com.cn](http://www.sina.com.cn) relying on a feminist Foucauldian approach, I address the essential properties of the phenomenon of blogging as defined by Chinese mother bloggers who use the blogosphere in their parenting, when they blog, and how they are engaged in the (re)production and contestation of Chinese culture in terms of parenting and children's values in their blogs. Instead of speaking for them, I am seeking Chinese mother bloggers' creation of meanings in the blogosphere by looking at their views, values, beliefs, and ideologies embedded in their blogs. While Chapter Three focuses on how motherhood is repeated and reenacted in the blogosphere to define Chinese women, Chapter Four engages in an endeavor to unpack how the discourse of sexuality works through individual bodies and how the anxiety over young girls' sexuality urges the mothers to discipline the bodies of their daughters.

I would like to emphasize, in Chapter Five, the importance of understanding subjectivity as "multivalent and complexly constructed" (McLaren, 2002, p. 60). Instead of understanding the subject as a determined, passive body incapable of agency, I would like to look at their self-constitution through the act of blogging. Using feminist appropriation of Foucault's (1988) theory on the technologies of the self, I investigate "how agency and control are activated collectively and in context" as theorized by Morwenna Griffiths (1995, p. 79). Chinese mother bloggers' blogging manifests the

gendered subjectivity of Chinese mother bloggers in that motherhood is still defined and understood as a given in the blogosphere. Their blogging also suggests their embodied subjectivity because it is firmly grounded in their lived experiences as women with children. Simultaneously, it reflects their ethical subjectivity because they are engaged in self-transformation, reflection on their practices, and the creation of a new culture of the nurturing of the next generation. The embodied subjectivity and ethical subjectivities of Chinese mother bloggers witness their agency in the practices of rearing children.

Chapter Six, the concluding chapter, recaptures the complexities of Chinese mother bloggers' subjectivities in the context of the one-child policy. Meanwhile, it is a good place to address the limitations of my present study and to envision the possibilities for a more empowering and emancipatory feminist research that speaks for/about/with others (Elam, 1995).

Greenhalgh (2001) in "*Fresh winds in Beijing*" has already begun the important work of recovering Chinese feminist voices to let them speak on the impact of the state policy on Chinese women's bodies and lives. Centering their voices will make me and other academics to see a more dynamic connection between the macro and micro. It is important to rely on post-colonial feminist thinking to examine the production of other subject-positions for Chinese women beyond a strong state and victimhood.

## Chapter One: Chinese Women, Blogging, and Feminist Genealogy

*What Has Been Written about the One-child Policy*

Ever since its implementation, the contentious one-child policy, has captured the attention of academic research both in China and abroad. Broadly speaking, the available literature on the one-child policy can be categorized into four general areas: those concerned with social consequences caused by the one-child policy, those studying children in relation to the policy, those interested in the policy and its implementation and government control, and the research that focuses on Chinese women and the policy.

As far as the first category is concerned, scholars have been paying close attention to the consequences of aging and gender imbalance and their implications for the future. For instance, Zhang and Goza (2006) take as their focal point the demographic shifts caused by the one-child policy and propose some solutions to the aging problem that China is now facing as a result of the combined effects of low fertility, reduced mortality, and longer life expectancies. In a similar vein, also concerned with the aging issue in China, Zhan, Liu, Guan, and Bai (2005) examine institutional care for the elderly and attitudinal changes toward institutional care in one of the major cities in China. Attention has also been paid to the relations between the changing age structure in the labor force and retirement in China (Adamchak, 2001). To put it in simple terms, sociologists and demographers alike are concerned with the aging population and how it has affected or will affect the society at large.

Gender imbalances have been explored from different perspectives. For example, Coale and Banister (1994) demonstrate the shortage of females from 1930s to 1990s using data from the censuses and fertility surveys in China. They argue that the recent

decrease in the proportion of young females in China is directly related to the one-child policy, which leads many people to choose abortion in the hope of securing a male offspring. Chan, Yip, Ng, Ho, Chan, and Au's (2002) research addressing the cultural dimensions of gender selection concurs that assisted reproductive technologies have been used in China to fulfill many people's dream of having a son to continue the family name and to have old age security under the strict population control program. Likewise, Wu, Viisainen, and Hemminki's (2006) study finds that of the three possible determinants to the high sex ratio among newborn babies in rural China, under-reporting of female live birth, neglect of female newborns, and selective abortions, the abortion of female fetuses is the major contributor to the high sex ratio among newborns. These studies have addressed the social implications of gender selection and called for the improved status of women and the importance of raising the educational level of the population.

The second category mainly features children and the one-child policy. One phenomenon created by the one-child policy is a generation of "little emperors." Their health, education, and psychological wellbeing become the center of attention not only for their parents but also for researchers and media (Chandler, Levinstein, Zhang, & Zhang, 2004; Crowell & Hsieh, 1995; Jing, 2000; & Yan, 2006). For example, Mooney's (2005) article reports on the problems faced by college students in China. They are the product of the one-child policy and in their childhood and adolescence have been the center of their families. However, campus life proves difficult for them when they have to face the strong competition in college and bear with the poor living conditions on campus. In contrast, Wang, Du, Liu, Liu, and Wang's (2002) study using the Zuckerman-Kuhlman personality questionnaire to assess personality traits and the Plutchik-van Praag

Depression Inventory to measure depression indicates that the one-child policy affects personality traits and depression in students with siblings. When compared with students without siblings, the students with siblings, who are generally from the countryside, seem to demonstrate more anxiety and depression. Though I do not necessarily agree with the explanations provided by the researchers, I do find that how the children growing up in the era of the one-child policy fare has been a rich resource for academic endeavor.

Another line of research looks at the consumption power of the ‘little emperors,’ their TV viewing habits, and how their parents exercise parental control have also entered the research field of the academic world (Ji & McNeal, 2001; Zhao, 1996). Some researchers have been interested in investigating how the one-child policy has impacted traditional aspects of Chinese family life such as filial responsibilities and what these children are like and the kind of values they have developed with regard to their families and society (Deutsch, 2006; Fong, 2004; Zhan, 2004). For example, Deutsch’s interview results with eighty-four graduating university seniors show that the first cohort born under the one-child policy, when compared with those who have siblings, are more likely to get prepared for the filial obligations they are expected to fulfill. At the same time, they seem to feel more responsible for the wellbeing of their parents because of their being the only hope of their parents. The study also finds that patrilineal norms have been destabilized by the one-child policy.

Perhaps a more comprehensive study along this line is the book, *Only hope: Coming of age under China’s one-child policy* (Fong, 2004). Fong’s extensive survey data and comprehensive participant observations in the city of Dalian between 1997 and 2002 yield the finding that the promise of modernity characterized by fast economic

development, low fertility, and relentless competition has been part of the collective consciousness of contemporary China. Her study also addresses the disparity between young people's aspiration for consumption, leisure, job and pay and the underdeveloped social security system in China. Filial piety has been challenged by the under replacement level demographic situation in many cities in China. More importantly, the book shows that all the girls interviewed were raised to be strong and independent; they enjoy unprecedented parental investment, support, and care. Her research supports the research questions I am pursuing that are aimed at exploring the cultivation of new cultural practices in child-rearing by Chinese mother bloggers. The scholars cited above have made significant contributions to our understanding of the impact of the one-child policy on children in relation to their health, education, and social responsibilities. Their work responds to the central issue of the product of the one-child policy and the degree of competence with which this generation of "little emperors" can run China effectively/ethically in the future.

Under the big umbrella of policy and its implementation is assembled a large body of literature. It is necessary to make further discrete differentiation in their emphases. First, I would like to focus on those articles and books that mainly discuss the circumstances and dynamics of the policy. Then I will give a more detailed account to those that investigate the implementation of the policy.

As far as policy is concerned, the evolution of the policy, its results and significance in the context of China's socioeconomic development has been in the spotlight. For example, Tien (1991) tries to tell the full story of China's one-child policy, following the trajectory of the major disputes of population all the way from the founding

of new China in 1949 to the late 1980s. He traces the overall circumstances that help to shape China's population planning programs, details the objectives of the one-child policy, and assesses the social and economic salience of the policy. The circumstances leading to the implementation of the one-child policy are also explored in McLoughlin's study (2005). However, his research is more focused on the history of the policy and the incentives for compliance and penalties for noncompliance and the outcomes of the policy. In regard to the rationalization and formation of the policy, the best research so far, according to my knowledge and judgment, is done by Susan Greenhalgh (2003; 2005). She shows convincingly that the core ideas underlying the one-child policy are framed by the reform-minded Chinese leaders' faith in Western science. They rationalized, based on the human constructs forged by missile scientists, that the population crisis could only be solved by a one-child policy. The scientific rhetoric at operation in the formulation of the policy depoliticizes the policy and hence covers up the elite policy-making practices in China. All research devoted to the formulation, evolution, and objectives of the one-child policy tends to point to the fact that the demographic concern of the policy has political and economic implications.

In terms of policy implementation and government control, there is a plethora of research. Such research primarily centers on the costs of the policy and iron-handedness of the government. One typical example along this line of research is John S. Aird's book (1990), *Slaughter of the innocents*. He accuses the one-child policy of being coercive family planning and the Chinese government of being a repressive regime. Central authorities' policies, instructions, exhortations, and models transmitted to the provincial and lower levels are the analytical focus of the project. It finds the one-child policy

paramount to human rights violations and the international family planning community that praises the Chinese program complicit with the Chinese government's coercion. Another example that is crying out for attention and that carries a lot of emotional animosity is Mosher's (1993) first person account of how Chi An, a Chinese woman who experienced all the upheavals in 1960s and 1970s, was both a victimizer and a victim of the one-child policy, which finally led to her political asylum in the U.S. The individual tragedy of Chi An and her counterparts in China are usually a source of national pride in China's effort in controlling the biggest population a country has ever known. Family planning policies and their successful implementation are usually associated with the unique and extensive structure of government control in China (Banister, 1987; Wolf, 1986). The household registration type is also found to be a contributing factor to the success story of China's family planning program (Cooney & Li, 1994). However, it is important to bear in mind the fact that household registration type is a highly effective mechanism designed by the Chinese government to control rural-to-urban migration. Understandably, in the face of a strong central government as in the case of China, most observers and researchers have viewed Chinese people exclusively as victims of the one-child policy and the Chinese government as repressive and oppressive.

In the sea of research that condemns the Chinese government for its social engineering and exposes its draconian methods in sustaining its family planning efforts, it is a relief, to some extent, to see scholars start paying attention to Chinese women in relation to the one-child policy because after all it is Chinese women who have been made to bear the burden of the policy physically, emotionally, and psychologically. However, this line of research has been scant. There are only a few examples that I can



recount. One of the early research articles in this area addresses the impact of the one-child policy on women and the patriarchal family in China (Chow & Chen, 1994). The empirical study argues that the ultimate goal of the one-child policy is “economic development rather than gender equality” (p. 92). Women were still bound in the old family structure and traditional gender relationships.

Scholarship also shows concern for the health issues pertaining to the policy. For example, Short and Zhang (2004) study the use of maternal health services in rural China and find that there was an increase in the period between 1988 and 1997 in women having assisted birth and prenatal visits. Similarly, Doherty, Norton, and Veney (2001) look at prenatal and obstetric care utilization in the context of the economic and social cost implication of the policy. Their research reveals the disheartening fact that some women choose not to use obstetric care for fear of the financial penalties associated with unapproved pregnancies.

More important, infertility treatments of childless women in China are also addressed. As Handwerker’s anthropological work in Beijing in the 1990s reveals that although some childless women in China use a range of medical and technological options to disrupt the gender norms of motherhood expected from them, the dominant social expectations that all women should be fertile are deeply entrenched in Chinese society. Handwerker laments, “Even in the China of the 1990s, there appears no normative identity for women who are not mothers. The idea of sex as pleasurable for women is something the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] defines as decadent or immoral” (p. 198). The medical intervention for childless women in China is one form of discipline that Chinese women have to endure to participate in the social life as

intelligible beings. Handwerker points out, “In China, the use of female bodies as symbols of modernity and progress in nation-state building has resulted in numerous contradictions” (p. 178). The curtailing of overly reproductive women on the one hand, and the medical intervention for non-reproducing women on the other, is just one example. Whatever the case, Chinese women’s bodies cannot escape the “discipline.”

To date, there is only one article that addresses the use of discussion forums on the Internet by middle-class urban Chinese mothers in their practices of parenting (Gan, 2006). However, this particular article only focuses on the so-called new identity of net-mom adopted by middle-class urban Chinese women. Although the research touches on “happy motherhood,” “significance of mothering,” and “affectionate parent-child relationship” (pp. 160-161), the analyses are too superficial to help us understand how and why motherhood is such an important experience for middle-class urban Chinese mothers who are also Internet users. At the same time, in terms of the Internet and globalization, the research exclusively dwells on how the Internet makes it possible for people living in different parts of China to share their parenting experiences. Those who have “professional knowledge” and those “who have overseas experiences” enjoy more popularity in regard to the credibility and popularity of their postings (pp. 162-163). The author concludes that middle-class urban Chinese mothers, though physically located in China, are using the discussion forums on the Internet to “identify themselves as modern and scientific-minded parents” (p. 164).

More critical examination of the role Chinese women play in negotiating with the policy is comparatively sparse. Greenhalph (1994; 2001) and Fong (2002) might be the only few scholars who have blazed this trail. Greenhalph’s (1994) feminist analytics

combined with demographic and political-economic inquiries have definitely revealed that Chinese women do not simply assume a victim position in the formidable one-child policy. They are agents negotiating with and resisting a policy that interferes with their private and public selves on the village level. Paradoxically, their resistance reinforces the patriarchal emphasis on the values of sons. As far as urban daughters and women are concerned, as I mentioned earlier, Fong's (2002; 2004) research shows that urban Chinese women, because of low fertility and their ability to get paid work, demonstrate their filial piety by providing their parents with financial support. At the same time, urban Chinese women are able to create a conducive environment for the growth of their daughters. It is encouraging to see research exploring the negotiating power of Chinese women in regard to the one-child policy.

However, as I have indicated from the literature review (and it is by no means a comprehensive and exhaustive one), research addressing Chinese women in the discourse of the one-child policy is too small a voice and one that is hardly audible compared to the loud accusations of human rights violations. At the same time, it is important to point out that most of the literature comes from anthropology, demography, and sociology. Communications studies scholars have paid little attention to the interconnection between nation, population, and Chinese women in the case of the one-child policy in China. This is where I see myself being able to engage in and contribute to the dialogue from the perspectives of agency, social construction, and power which are important issues in the communication field.

Feminist thinkers have begun theorizing agency in relation to reproduction (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1995). When the concept of agency is applied to the one-child policy

in China, it is important to investigate the micro-politics of how Chinese women negotiate their subjectivities in everyday life “cluster[ing] around notions of emergent cultural forms, counter discourses, alternative and oppositional practices, or resistance” (p. 11). I intend to use reproduction as a point of entry to “see how cultures are produced (contested) as people imagine and enable the creation of the next generation, most directly through the nurturance of children” (pp. 1-2). In the case of the one-child policy in China, it is both an adversity and an ambition. While the want for more offspring is still strong in many people, having a one-child family has become a desired and widespread norm and, more important, a symbol of modernity for both the state and ordinary people (Anagnost, 1995). The discursive formation of population as a hegemonic power space for the state simultaneously affords ordinary Chinese people and Chinese women the possibilities of subversion, contestation, and agency.

Related to the concept of agency is the notion of power. It is important to expand the understanding of power as exclusively external and repressive to one of constituting subjectivities so that I can explore the conditions under which Chinese mother bloggers are made subjects. To expose the limitation of the liberal discourse of human rights in the West, I am going to incorporate Foucault’s perspective of power in my analysis of nation, population, and urban Chinese women. Foucault’s investigation into the functioning of power/knowledge and biopower in managing human life draws attention to the discursive formations of different discourses that shape our very existence as intelligible human beings. While the disciplinary power of the modern state is productive of subjects, it does not eradicate the subjects’ capabilities for agency through technologies of the self.

Relying on feminist scholarship in relation to the effects of reproduction and on how reproduction is implicated in power and borrowing from Foucault's productive perspective on biopower, I hope to offer a nuanced understanding of the subject positions that urban Chinese women possess in relation to the one-child policy. To do this, it is first of all necessary to spell out the frameworks that shape my research.

*Method, Methodology, and Epistemology*

Feminist epistemology, methodologies, and methods are connected with one another (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 4). All three components are essential in knowledge building. An epistemology "is a theory of knowledge. It answers questions about who can be a 'knower' (can women?); what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge (only tests against men's experiences and observations?); what kinds of things can be known (can 'subjective truth' count as knowledge?), and so forth" (Harding, 1987, p. 3). The epistemology that guides my work is one that acknowledges that women can be agents of knowledge and women's unique and situated experiences, perspectives, and feelings are the sources of legitimate knowledge (pp. 3-8).

Feminist epistemology allows multiple locational and contextual knowledges to emerge into the realm of truth because it accounts for the partial, situated, and subjective nature of knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1993). By contextualizing and situating knowledge within an awareness of what is at stake in the knowledge-building process, feminist epistemology opens up the possibilities of co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and his/her research participants with a focus on the unequal power structures that allow particular discourses to emerge. Instead of working to improve the accuracy, objectivity, and universality of mainstream research by adding

women, feminist epistemology strives to achieve what Donna Haraway (1988) termed as “situated knowledges” (p. 581) through paying attention to the specificity and uniqueness of women’s lives and experiences. Simultaneously, feminist epistemology challenges the idea of a “value free” science that endorses the detachment of the researcher from the researched. To feminists, knowledge producers are always already influenced by the “epistemic communities” that shape and define who they are in terms of their beliefs and value systems which are intrinsically connected with the process of knowledge building (Potter, 2006, p. 13). From the inception of a research program to the collection of data and the final report, the subjectivity of the researcher leaves imprints and makes subjective judgments (Harding, 1993). Thus, to claim detached and independent objectivity and a value-free science is out of the question in the process of knowledge building for feminist epistemology. As a follower of feminist epistemology, I would like to ask questions that make women’s lives a priority, “provide for women explanations of social phenomena that they want and need,” and engage in self-reflexivity examining my own beliefs and behaviors as a researcher (Harding, 1987, pp. 5-9).

At the same time, as a nonwestern feminist, I do realize the fine lines that I have to work with when I attempt to address the issues that Chinese women are confronted with in the context of the one-child policy. On the one hand, the one-child policy confers on the bodies of Chinese women miseries and oppressions embedded in Chinese culture that impact both procreation and heterosexuality. On the other hand, I do agree with Uma Narayan (2003) when she cautions nonwestern feminists on how to employ feminist epistemology in their research. She astutely points out, “some major preoccupations of western feminism – its critique of marriage, the family, compulsory heterosexuality –

presently engage the attention of mainly small groups of middle-class feminists” (p. 310). Marriage, family, and heterosexuality are still very much taken for granted in the context of Chinese culture. In addition, as Narayan suggests, I must think and function “within the context of a powerful tradition that, although it systematically oppresses women, also contain within itself a discourse that confers a high value on women’s place in the general scheme of things” (p. 310). It is important for me to hold a fine balance between exposing the oppressive nature of the policy and exploring the agency of Chinese mother bloggers as embedded in a web of relations and conditions.

Feminists have fashioned new epistemologies by validating the legitimacy of women’s lived experiences, emotions, and feelings as the sources of knowledge. To play out the new paradigm of feminist epistemology in building knowledge prioritizing women’s lived experience, it is important to address the issues of methodology and method. According to Sandra Harding (1987), “A methodology is a theory of how research is done or should proceed” (p. 3). A method is “a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence” (p. 2). To put it succinctly, the methodology that influences my research is the feminist genealogy that originates from Foucault’s genealogy. To understand what features in the feminist genealogy, it is first of all important to know how Foucault conducts genealogical research. The genealogical methodology that Foucault deploys is best exemplified in his *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality Volume One*.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1979) develops an analysis of the methods and techniques used to subject the body. “These methods,” Foucault argues, “which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant

subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called ‘discipline’” (p. 137). Discipline operates on the body, having an influence on “movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body” (p. 137). More importantly, discipline produces docile bodies. “A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (p. 136). What Foucault calls the microphysics of power operates on the body through the imposition of a rigid schedule, through compulsory activity, and through continuous surveillance. Power also operates on the soul by creating particular types of subjectivity: some people are labeled as criminals, or delinquents, or deviants. Foucault’s discussion of discipline and surveillance illustrates the permeation of power to the smallest details in individuals’ lives. These new forms of power and control, or what Foucault calls discipline, have a double effect: they increase efficiency not only in the institutional contexts but also on the individual level, while at the same time they provide a mechanism for the intensification of power relations.

If in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault focuses on the ways that power operates through discipline, in *History of Sexuality Volume One*, he demonstrates how power works through discourses. In *The History of Sexuality Volume One*, Foucault analyzes the relationship between subjectivity and power. He maintains that the subject is produced through power rather than being outside of power relations. He sets out to “define the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality” (p. 11). According to Foucault, we are encouraged and provoked to speak about ourselves in relation to sex. Thus, we are constituted as sexual beings through the proliferation of discourses which “can be both an instrument and an effect of power” (p. 100). At the



same time, Foucault in both of his books develops a new notion of power which is not only repressive, but also productive and constitutive. He characterizes power as relational; it is the “multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they constitute their own organization” (p. 92). Foucault’s new concept of power demonstrates the way that power operates on individual bodies. What distinguishes Foucault’s genealogies is that instead of adhering to a progressive historical account, he traces the historical influences that lead to present-day practices. As Margaret A. McLaren (2002), a feminist Foucauldian thinker, argues, “Foucault’s detailed, if idiosyncratic, accounts of the histories of the penal systems, madness, and sexuality highlight the contingency behind what are now seen as the inevitable outcomes of historical forces” (p. 31). The importance of unpacking the historical contingency is to reveal the possibilities for resistance. Foucault’s genealogies are useful tools that excavate subjugated knowledge in the grand narratives of history.

However, to follow a rigid Foucauldian analysis in centering the subjectivity of Chinese women in the one-child policy may not be a very wise decision because as quite a few feminists have shown Foucault is gender blind (Bartky 1998; Bordo, 1993). Sandra Lee Bartky comments on Foucault’s oversight of gender difference this way, “Women, like men, are subject to many of the same disciplinary practices Foucault describes. But he is blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine” (p. 27). She is one of the feminists who extend Foucault’s discussion of disciplinary practices to examine female identity and subjectivity. Her analysis illuminates the ways in which the cultural norms of a patriarchal society transform women into feminine bodies through the disciplines and practices of cosmetics, fashion,

and the female bodily norms. In a similar vein, Susan Bordo also highlights the importance of gender in the cultural pliability of the female body in her research showing that a disproportionate number of women suffer from anorexia nervosa. These two feminist works employ the Foucauldian framework of discipline and practices to explore female subjectivity by focusing on how patriarchal power works through women's bodies. In addition, both works reveal the contingency of the cultural construction of gender so that feminine bodies are not hopelessly passive and deterministic. Those contingencies are exactly the cracks in the sedimented gender norms that provide new possibilities for gender transformations.

To be sensitive to the dimension of gender in the subjectivity of women does not exclude the usefulness of Foucault's genealogy of the subject to a feminist genealogy, although his focus is on the male. One of the important reasons is that on the issue of the body, Foucault and feminism share common ground. To Foucault, it is on the body of individuals that power operates. Likewise, McLaren (2002) maintains, "Feminists view the body as an important site of political struggle" (p. 91). The issues of violence against women, rape, sexuality, gender norms, beauty ideals, and for my own project, reproduction and motherhood in particular, have body as the focal point. More importantly, "both reject mind/body dualism, both view the body as a site of political struggle, and both view the body as central to subjectivity and agency" (p. 82). Furthermore, Foucault as well as feminists conceptualize subjects as constituted in an enmeshed system of power and social contexts. McLaren's insightful reading of the genealogical works of Foucault explains,

Disciplines produce subjects, discourses produce subjects, subjects are the effect

of power. In turn, disciplines, discourses, and power are each themselves complex; power is relational, discourses are polyvalent, and disciplines are multifarious. Subjects thus produced are likewise complex, both she who is speaking and she who is spoken of, both of dominated and resisters, both constrained and enabled by various disciplines, practices, and institutions. (p. 59)

To her, the feminist genealogy of the female subject is made possible because of Foucault's genealogy of the male subject. The feminist genealogy, like Foucault's genealogy of the male subject, will pay particular attention to the conditions under which women are made as subjects (p. 80). Concurrently, the feminist genealogy is attentive to the complexity of the subjectivity of the female subject. She is both the oppressed and the resister and both the constrained and the enabled.

The feminist genealogy of the female subject, or a feminist Foucauldian approach is applied by Jana Sawicki (1991) in her work titled "Disciplining mothers: Feminism and the new reproductive technologies." According to her, a Foucauldian feminist approach is characterized by a bottom-up analysis that pays primary attention to mundane practices, struggles, and moments of resistance that have brought forth the transformation of these practices over the years (p. 81). When a feminist Foucauldian approach is adopted in the context of the one-child policy in China, it means that I will trace the historical genealogy of the one-child policy embedded in the national identity of China using both feminist theory on gender and nation (Yuval-Davis, 1997) and the biopower theory of Foucault (1978). I will mainly examine several historical moments in modern Chinese history to explore the discursive links between nation, population, Chinese women and the constitutive power of the modern nation. At the same time, it is more

significant to give voices to Chinese women, who initiate and transform the practices of child bearing and raising, so that my analysis will not be another top-down one that only repeats the harsh criticism against the one-child policy as inhumane that is already prevalent in the liberal discourse of human rights in the West. Instead, my analysis will focus on the productive and positive dimensions of biopower to illustrate the subjectivity and agency of Chinese women. To give a fuller picture of how biopower works through both the mind and body of Chinese women, I will also attend to the deployment of sexuality and the naturalized gender.

The deployment of sexuality focuses on the body and constitutes our subjectivity. Sexuality becomes central to who we are. Margret A. McLaren (2002) perceptively points out that the discourse of sexuality exercises influence “both at the level of individual body and the body politic” (p. 91). By this, she means that at the level of body politic, the discourse of sexuality is utilized through population control programs so that population will be in tune with economic and political development. This is exactly the premise of the one-child policy in China. The discourse of sexuality is integral to biopower, which manages life. The one-child policy is exemplary of how biopower works on the macro level. Simultaneously, at the micro individual level, the discourse of sexuality normalizes and politicizes individual bodies so that individual bodies become the embodiments of social-cultural norms. The body politic and the politics of the body reinforce each other, working together to ensure the docility and utility of both the population as a whole and the individual bodies at the micro level.

Foucault’s (1978) work also shows that it is precisely the discursive explosion around sexuality in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that gave rise to a new sexual lexicon and made it

possible to name a diverse range of sexualities. Instead of focusing on the mere sexual acts, sexualities are intrinsic to proprieties of persons. For instance, he writes that sex is something that “one had to speak of;” “inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, [and] made to function according to an optimum” (p. 24). Sex becomes the very core of “this economic and political problem of population” (p. 25). Hence, a certain type of sexuality becomes the norm and others the deviants in need of medical intervention and social correction (pp. 104-105). As Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (1996) point out, “it [Foucault’s work on sexuality] allows us to see female sexuality as socially constructed and reconstructed in complex and often contradictory ways rather than as simply being repressed” (p. 9). However, to avoid following into the false dichotomy between essentialism and constructionism, “The challenge which faces us here, and which feminists are now taking up, is to develop a theory of the body as itself socially constructed while being experienced as a material, physical presence” (p. 11). It is the contention of feminists that the material appropriation of women’s bodies and the cultural significance accorded to sexuality are interconnected (p. 26). For this reason, it is important to address both the material conditions and cultural meanings of female sexuality. The deployment of sexuality is especially interesting in the context of the one-child policy in China given Chinese obsession with female chastity and heterosexual family arrangement. Sexuality is one of the primary mechanisms that disciplines and controls the body, especially the female body. However, even in the context of Chinese culture that upholds the institution of heterosexual families, I hope that the relationship between cultural mores and individual subjectivity is less mechanistic and more open.

Intersected with sexuality is gender as another mechanism that is also in operation in the one-child policy in terms of Chinese women's subjectivity. Judith Butler describes gender as "a doing" (1990). One performs one's gender. To Butler (1993), performativity is "not a singular act, for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms" (12). This reiterative, regulatory, and normative repetition of norms characterizes performativity. If we use the theory of performativity to understand gender, then gender is constituted through the repetition of acts, verbal and nonverbal, that continue to emphasize the gender norms. Gender can be described performatively as Butler (1990) does in her essay, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution." She writes that gender "is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (p. 270, emphasis in original). It is the repeated nature of gender constitution that grants it so much force. Each performance of gender, be it in the mundane practice of how women should dress themselves or be it their social identities as daughters, wives, and mothers, is a citation of identity that carries with it the power of history. Through Butler's work, it is possible to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the constitutive power of gender on female bodies. Butler's (2004) work has also laid out the resistant possibilities for undoing gender if we accept the premise that gender is essentially "a doing."

Having laid out the feminist epistemology and the feminist Foucault approach that direct my research, it is now time to say a few words about the methods for gathering evidence. I spent approximately six months between February and August in the year

2007 to collect blogs under the thread My Babies: Wonderful Moments in Growth at [www.sina.com.cn](http://www.sina.com.cn), one of the most popular websites in China. I read the posts almost daily especially in the months of May, June, and July and copied and pasted the data into different categories to assist analysis. Primarily, I rely on observation of the online blogs to see how Chinese women's subjectivity is created in the context of procreation, heterosexuality, and biopower. At the same time, I pay attention to moments of resistance that are crucial to the transformation of child-raising in China through the mundane practices of feeding, educating, discussing, and journaling about child-raising by middle-class urban Chinese women.

*My site of investigation*

According to the China Internet Network Information Center, China is the second largest Internet-user market in the world, just behind the U.S (Zhu & Wang, 2005, p. 49). Zhu and Wang write, "As of December 2004, 94 million people [in China] had gone online" (p. 49). Although their work addresses the issue of digital divide along the dimensions of education, age, and geographic location, they observe, "Internet adoption rates are similar for men and women" (p. 50). "The 19<sup>th</sup> Survey Report," published on February 15, 2007 at the official website of the China Internet Network Information Center, updated the number of internet users in China from 111 million in 2005 to 137 million in 2006. Of the 137 million current internet users in China, 58.3% were males and 41.7% females. One cross-cultural study has shown that women students need more training in using the internet to benefit their education (Li, Kirkup, & Hodgson, 2001). Nonetheless, research and other sources have definitely reconfirmed the impressive

internet use by middle class urban/suburban Chinese women and the leadership role Chinese women play in developing websites (Li, 2000; Xue, 2000).

My primary site of investigation is at <http://www.sina.com.cn>. According to the introduction page on the website of SINA in English, “With 230 million registered users worldwide and record of 500 million daily page views, SINA is the most recognized internet brand name in China and among Chinese communities globally.” Its popularity is confirmed by the traffic ranking page at [http://www.alexa.com/site/ds/top\\_sites?cc=CN&ts\\_mode=country&lang=none](http://www.alexa.com/site/ds/top_sites?cc=CN&ts_mode=country&lang=none), an international web search platform. It ranked [www.sina.com.cn](http://www.sina.com.cn) the third most frequently visited website in China. It is preceded in ranking by [www.Baidu.com](http://www.Baidu.com) and [www.QQ.com](http://www.QQ.com) and followed by [www.sohu.com](http://www.sohu.com). My personal observation shows that <http://www.sina.com.cn> has the most extensive personal blogs in terms of nurturance of the next generation among the top four websites in China ranked by Alexa.

Blogs, as one of the newest digital spaces to express lived experiences and/or self-chronicling, have been described and defined in many ways. In terms of format, they are frequently updated Web sites containing dated entries governed by a reverse chronological structure (Blood, 2002; Gurak, Antonijevic, Johnson, Ratliff, & Reyman, 2004). Use of blogs ranges from professional to the very personal. Blood (2002) describes blogs in this way:

Some provide succinct descriptions of judiciously selected links. Some contain wide swaths of commentary dotted sparingly with links to the news of the day. Others consist of an endless stream of blurts about the writer’s day; links, if they exist, are to other, similar, personal sites. Some are political. Some are



intellectual. Some are hilarious. Some are topic-driven. Some are off-the-wall.

Most are noncommercial and all are impassioned about their subjects. They are weblogs. What they have in common is a format: a webpage with new entries placed at the top, undated frequently – sometimes several times a day...weblogs are hard to describe but easy to recognize. (p. 1)

Chinese women's blogs on parenting at the website I investigated fall into the category of topic-driven online journals because it is the common love of children, the passion for sharing the wonderful moments in the growing process of their children, and their personal reflections on parenting that bond the bloggers together. The centrality of the nurture of the younger generation distinguishes this type of blog from other blog genres such as filter blogs and notebook blogs, or even personal blogs (Blood, 2002). Because bloggers tend to link to other bloggers' sites, blogs have the potential to create virtual community (Blanchard, 2004).

As for the reasons behind the blogging phenomenon, "to persuade, and to leave a record of having been there" are speculated as what is driving the bloggers to perform actively in the blogosphere (Hewitt, 2005, p. 105). However, to Blood (2002), "there are only three motivations for keeping one [blog]: information sharing, reputation building, and personal expression" (p. 27). She continues that for anyone maintaining a blog for some time, they will find themselves doing all three. I do agree with Blood that the bloggers I observe tend to do all three. One of the mothers says in her blog that blogging is her endless love. She regards her blogs as her journals and a good listening platform for her soul. However, she is only willing to share her blogs with those who have a lot in common with her. Her blogging makes it possible for her to get to know other mothers.

She writes, “Although blogging happens in a virtual world and it is intangible, our hearts are close.” She compares her virtual friendship with other mothers with her face-to-face personal relationships and finds that the virtual friendship is as ensuring and uplifting because she can share with her virtual friends on many things. In addition, in blogs she wants to record her best memories and listen to herself in order to relax, appreciate life, and seek happiness. There are also quite a few bloggers in my research who keep count of the number of visits so that they know for sure how popular their blogs are.

In terms of what is new about the blogosphere, Hewitt points out, “there are no barriers to entry to a world offering a nearly limitless audience” (p. 105). Audience is certainly one of the attractions that encourages bloggers to keep their entries updated regularly because there are people who care about what they write. Besides the power of audience anticipation, Blood (2002) elaborates on the defining features of weblogs as filtering information, providing context, promoting media literacy, providing alternative points of view, encouraging evaluation, and inviting participation (pp. 10-18).

When the Internet becomes part of everyday use by feminists who challenge the metaphorical definition of the Internet as a frontier and surfing with the analogy of weaving and networking, it has the potential of creating new vocabularies for women and technology, thus fostering a form of resistance in oppositional metaphors (Wakeford, 2000, p. 357). However, gender inequity among the most-read political blogs on the web is a reality (Harp & Tremayne, 2006). Harp and Tremayne’s discourse analysis of bloggers’ explanations for gender disparity reveals that the dominant beliefs that women do not blog about politics, women’s blogs lack quality, and top bloggers do not link to women’s sites prevail in the blogosphere. Similarly, the discursive construction of

weblogs privileges filter blogs maintained by male writers, downplaying the quality and value of blogs created by women and teenagers (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, & Wright, 2004). The researchers argue “that by privileging filter blogs and thereby implicitly evaluating the activities of adult males as more interesting, important and/or newsworthy than those of other blog authors, public discourses about weblogs marginalize the activities of women and teen bloggers, thereby indirectly reproducing societal sexism and ageism, and misrepresenting the fundamental nature of the weblog phenomenon.” For these reasons, more research is needed on blogs produced by women and teens. Recent research on Chinese women’s literature also suggests that popular novels and blog sites by urban Chinese women can sexually subvert traditions (Schaffer & Song, 2007). However, how the blogosphere for everyday use such as parenting by ordinary women who are not necessarily identified with feminism and feminist cause remains an uncharted terrain.

What is significant about blogs for the purpose of my study is that they are increasingly being used by networks of middle class urban Chinese parents, most of whom are women. They gather together in the virtual communities for their shared love of their children and their desire to reflect on and record their parenting and the wonderful moments in the growth of their children. They are using blogs, though not necessarily intentionally, as an emergent cultural form to engender “counter discourses, alternative and oppositional practices, or resistance” (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1995, p. 11). In creating social networks, Chinese women have forged new lines of communications that are influencing, or have the capacity to influence, broader social conventions and practices (Hevern, 2004; Hewitt, 2005).

The site at which I collected my data is the blogosphere under the topic of parenting at [www.sina.com.cn](http://www.sina.com.cn). Under the umbrella term parenting, there are several areas of interest that web users of this website can access: Health, Expert, Nutrition, Education, Blogs, Babies, Kindergarteners, Community, Topic Forum, and Immunization. The blog area is further delineated into Parents: Pregnancy Journals, My Babies: Wonderful Moments in Growth, Parents: Educating Elementary School Kids, Living Abroad: Reflections on Life, Blurts, and Top Blogs. Because my focus is on how urban Chinese women engage in the production and contestation of Chinese culture through the nurturance of the younger generation as suggested by Ginsburg & Rapp (1995, pp. 1-2), I find the blogs under My Babies: Wonderful Moments in Growth fascinating, although I do realize that the teleology within this title is highly normative and erases the possible negative experiences of child-rearing. There are two primary reasons for my interest in this particular forum. First, most of the blogs I have read are devoted to children ranging in age from several months old to kindergarteners of five or six. I believe that mothers who have small children are in a better position to change culture in general because of changes in technology, social practices, and culture. Second, my focus on how Chinese women engage in the production and contestation of Chinese culture through the nurture of the younger generation as suggested by Ginsburg & Rapp (1995, pp. 1-2) embraces not only the topic of education, which is the major concern for parents who have school-age children, but also love and how to raise their children to be well-rounded persons in terms of personality, integrity, self-respect.

I agree with Harp and Tremayne (2006) when they state, “Arguably, women blogging about the cost of childcare and healthcare are addressing social/political issues.

This rearticulation of ‘politics’ falls outside of a normalized definition of politics” (p. 259). However, it echoes “the personal is political,” a banner of second wave feminism. What I also want to point out is the importance of valuing women’s communicative activities. For too long, women’s journals concerning emotion, pregnancy, child rearing, and weight loss have been dismissed as trivial, personal, and insignificant. It is time for scholarly attention to these neglected areas.

### *Postcolonial Feminism and Reproduction*

The politics of reproduction has been pushed to the center of feminist thought and practice (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1991). The control of reproduction and the protection of sexual rights have been central to the agenda of mainstream feminism. “For white feminists, the right to control one’s own body, for it not to be regarded as a man’s property, was essential to the conceptualization of female sovereign subjectivity and citizenship” (Lewis & Mills, 2003, p. 9). However, this perspective has neglected the interlocking relationships between women’s bodies and their race, ethnicity, and class (Colen, 1995). Also erased in the mainstream feminist understanding of reproduction is the close relationship between gender and nation in many third world contexts. These erasures have been addressed by postcolonial feminism.

In terms of women’s sexuality and sexual rights, postcolonial feminist thinkers call attention to the differences women of color and white middle-class women in the West experience. What Shellee Colen (1995) terms stratified reproduction is very illuminating in helping us to see how reproduction is structured across racial, social, and cultural boundaries. By stratified reproduction, she means, “physical and social reproductive tasks are accomplished differentially according to inequalities that are based

on hierarchies of class, race, ethnicity, gender, place in a global economy, and migration status and that are structured by social, economic, and political forces” (p. 78).

Reproduction as experienced by women of color is no longer simply an issue of gender, but an issue of class, race, ethnicity, globalization, and migration.

A closer look at the discourse of reproduction in the U.S. reveals the power relations identified in the stratified reproduction that empowers some categories of people to nurture and reproduce while disempowering others (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1995, p. 3). Historically, black women in the U.S. were exploited under slavery when they were used as both breeders to reproduce labor for the slave owners and wet-nurses for their white owners (White, 1985). During the 1970s when the mainstream feminists were struggling for the rights to abortion, African-American women did not show a lot of enthusiasm. Angela Davis (1981) reminds us that the abortion rights campaign failed to incorporate the historical, social, and economic realities women of color had to live with on a daily basis. She poignantly states,

They [women of color] were in favor of abortion rights, which did not mean that they were proponents of abortion. When Black and Latina women resort to abortions in such large numbers, the stories they tell are not so much about their desire to be free of their pregnancy, but rather about the miserable social conditions which dissuade them from bringing new lives into the world. (p. 204)

Today, African-American women have been encouraged to be sterilized or to use long-term contraceptive because the government sees them as posing a problem for the welfare system (Bryson, 1999, pp. 150-151). The historical testimony and the present situation of

African-American women in their reproduction show the structural differences between white women and women of color along the lines of race, ethnicity, and class.

In addition, postcolonial feminism addresses “how the inequalities of post-colonialism create particular and gendered dilemmas” for people whose lives have been directly impacted by traditional cultural practices, such as female circumcision/female genital mutilation (FC/FGM), veiling, sati, and by hegemonic state discourse such as the one-child policy in China (Lewis & Mills, 2003, p. 12). Take FC/FGM as an example. As a contested site, its meanings are often fluid and constructed. Lionnet’s (2003) recent work reveals the complexity of the issue against the background of post-colonialism in the global context. She examines how immigrant subjectivities are created and acted upon by the state legal system in the discourse of FC/FGM played out in postcolonial France. She contends that if the reformist intent only focuses on reforming ‘native’ savageries in the form of FC/FGM, it runs the risk of acting on Black/African/third-world women’s bodies by obscuring the other violence of colonial and postcolonial power. It is important for research addressing FC/FGM to historicize and contextualize FC/FGM and to offer a more nuanced reading of the mechanisms that are at operation.

Related to the concern for how the inequalities of post-colonialism creates gendered dilemmas is sensitivity to the power of colonial discourse. The exploration of colonial legacy is one of the major contributions of post-colonial feminist thinking. One example that illustrates this scholarship is Mani’s work. Mani (1998) undertakes the project of excavating “the submerged truths, ironies, contradictions, and paradoxes” underlying the heated debates forged by the colonialists and nationalists concerning widow-burning in colonial India (p. 196). Through her comprehensive archival and

textual analysis of official, native, and missionary writings on sati, she reveals how tradition and modernity are inscribed on the bodies of upper class Indian women, thus accomplishing a powerful feminist critique of colonial discourse and critical cultural studies.

FC/FGM and sati are not the only issue of concern in the area of sexuality and sexual rights against the background of colonialism and post-colonialism. Postcolonial feminists have also begun to analyze the sexual subject positions of women in the third world countries. They are positioned by conflicting discourses of sexuality, nationalism, modernity and religion as manifested in the case of Malaysia (Ong, 2003), which will lend insight to the one-child policy in China. Ong focuses on the way in which these discourses are negotiated differently by women from different class positions. She also cautions against the danger of framing women's responses to Islamic revivalism and modernization in terms of "mere resistance or passivity" (p. 406). She contends that the management and self-management of women's bodies are concomitant with the larger picture of how third world countries struggle to cope with the "crisis of cultural identity, development, class formation, and the changing kinds of imagined community that are envisioned" (p. 406). Recovering women's agency in the face of population control in developing countries is a meaningful and significant endeavor.

Furthermore, post-colonial feminists theorize on the interconnectedness between women's bodies and nation. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1997) in the introduction to their book *Feminist genealogies, colonial legacies, democratic futures* point out, "Women's bodies are disciplined in different ways: within discourses of profit maximization, as global workers and sexual laborers; within religious



fundamentalisms, as repositories of sin and transgression; within specifically nationalist discourses, as guardians of culture and respectability or criminalized as prostitutes and lesbians; and within state discourses of the originary nuclear family, as wives and mothers” (xxiii). Women’s bodies are the sites for multiple symbolic and material meanings in terms of religions, nationalisms, and normative families. It is women’s bodies that have to be regulated to be in fine tune with the religious doctrines, the national aspiration, and the familial duties of their localities.

The idea of women as mothers and biological reproducers of a nation and its population is extensively elaborated in Nira Yuval-Davis’s (1997) work *Gender and nation*. She argues,

The central importance of women’s reproductive roles in ethnic and national discourses becomes apparent when one considers that, given the central role that the myth (or reality) of ‘common origin’ plays in the construction of most ethnic and national collectivities, one usually joins the collectivity by being born into it. (p. 26)

As ‘bearers of the collective,’ to borrow Yuval-Davis’s words, women’s reproductive roles are already implicated in the construction of nations.

The intersection of nation and women is illuminatingly prominent in the contemporary one-child discourse in China. However, if scholarly attention is focused too much on the heavy-handedness of ‘third world states’ and the misfortunes of Chinese women when faced with the strong government, there is the danger of representing Chinese women as a monolithic group of victims of backward cultures and states, suffering and enduring misogynous and oppressive ideologies, different forms of male

violence and repressive family structures (Mohanty, 1988). As such, they are deprived of their agency.

As a nonwestern feminist, I find postcolonial feminist theory very insightful in addressing reproduction along the axes of gender and race, and sexuality and class, in resisting the othering practices of the colonial discourse against a postcolonial and global background, and in exploring the agency of oppressed people in their daily lives. Postcolonial feminist thinking also helps situate my understanding of the one-child policy in relation to sati, veiling, and female circumcision and sensitizes me to the fluidity and constructed nature of these contested sites.

While I totally admit that in the one-child discourse in China, Chinese women's bodies are disciplined as biological and cultural reproducers, I would like to present Chinese women as strategic thinkers, at once vulnerable and powerful, limited yet not incapacitated.

## Chapter Two: Chinese Nation, Population, Women, and Quality Child

I did not have my son until I was 32. In the third month of breastfeeding him, I began to have regular periods. After some discussion with my husband, we decided that I should have a once-for-all contraceptive, intrauterine device, in place so that we did not have to worry about me getting pregnant again since we already had our one child. I am one of the lucky women whose contraceptive functions perfectly. But I know that contraceptives do not work for every woman. One of my friends in college had to go through three abortions because, in her case, the intrauterine device failed her repeatedly. I also know that some of my friends experience extended menstruation as a result of different kinds of contraceptives.

When I was in China working as a faculty member in a university, it seldom occurred to me that I and other Chinese women are implicated in the nationwide one-child policy. My understanding at that time was that if the policy is a state policy for the well-being of my country and future generations, as a good citizen I should abide by it. I did not see it to be oppressive or disciplinary because accepting my gendered roles as a good citizen, good wife, and a good mother seemed so natural.

Not until I read Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and feminist theories after I came to pursue my Ph.D. in the U.S. did I realize that the one-child policy in China is gendered. The more I explore the one-child policy through the lens of feminist thinking, gender theories, and how power creates docile subjects, the more I see the need to historicize it and to excavate its genealogies. I, and millions of other Chinese women, have been normalized into wives and mothers in the continuity of our collectivity and the standing of our nation in the world.

In this chapter, I will, first of all, examine the discursive links connecting Chinese nation, population and Chinese women in several communicative moments in modern Chinese history relying on the theoretical lens of feminist theorizing on nation and women. I will then use the disciplinary power of the norm of quality to understand the blogs I collected written by Chinese mother bloggers. To Greenhalgh (2005), “The nexus of women/nation/population, then, is not only discursive but also material or corporeal” (p. 851). The material or corporeal dimension of the interconnection between Chinese nation, Chinese population, and Chinese women as manifested in the everyday practice of raising children is my major concern.

*Chinese Women as Biological and Cultural Reproducers: Bound Women*

*Anti-foot Binding*

Chinese women were once physically bound because of the age-old tradition of binding their feet small at an early age so that they could be pleasurable to the male gaze and, more importantly, could stay indoors and attend to the private space they were designated. In addition to the physical bondage of foot-binding, Chinese women were also intellectually bound because of the Confucian precept that ignorance is a great virtue for women. With their bound feet and intellect, Chinese women, like women in other nations, sustained the continuities of their nations because of their roles as not only biological reproducers but also cultural reproducers. Yuval-Davis (1997) succinctly argues, “gendered bodies and sexuality play pivotal roles as territories, markers and reproducers of the narratives of nations and other collectivities” (p. 39). She also elaborates on the interconnection between women and nations because of their roles as biological and cultural reproducers (p. 26). As “bearers of the collective” (p. 26), to

borrow Yuval-Davis's words, women's reproductive roles are already implicated in the construction of nations. More importantly, gender relations and sexuality have played a central role in the construction of identity and difference for men and women. The cultural reproducers' roles of women render them "as the cultural symbols of the collectivity, of its boundaries, as carriers of the collectivity's 'honour' and as its intergenerational reproducers of culture" (p. 67).

Chinese history is filled with the stories of virtuous women raising their sons properly at home so that their sons could contribute to their country in tremendous ways when they grew up (Barlow, 1994, pp. 263-264). Chinese women have long been exercising their influence on the future of their country through their roles as biological and cultural reproducers in their families in spite of their bound feet and intellect.

However, in the late nineteenth century when China faced the double shackles of imperialism and feudalism (Jayawardena, 1986, pp. 167-169), Chinese women were called upon to be a revolutionary force as cultural reproducers to transform the backwardness of the country. It is important to bear in mind that China's modern history is inseparable from the West. In spite of its "territorial integrity" and "linguistic integrity," China, as a developing country, Chow (1993) argues, has always had the West as its ideal in its nation building. Its dream has been "to become as strong as the West, to become the West's 'equal'" (p. 8).

Since the mid-nineteenth century, this dream of becoming strong and being able to stand up against the imperialistic exploitations of the West has defined the trajectory of nation-building in China. Two communicative moments worth exploring at the end of the

nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century are the anti-foot binding discourse and the establishment of schools for women.

According to Jayawardena (1986), foot-binding is identified as one of the evil and degrading social practices that had been in place to maintain Chinese women's low status in society by the bourgeoisie and intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth and the turn of the twentieth centuries. Kang Yuwei, the reform leader who organized the first 'Unbound-Feet Society' in 1882 in Canton, argued that "crippled women with bound feet would produce weak children and be unsatisfactory mothers" (p. 178).

Similarly, as Lee (1998) explicates, present in the antfootbinding discourse in China are the Manchu conquerors, Japanese colonizers, Western imperialist powers with their missionaries, and Han elitist males' opinions. Antifootbinding, a women's issue, excluded the voices of Chinese women. It was never addressed as a gendered issue by any of the speakers in the discourse. Instead, it became a site for the conquerors and colonizers to dominate their Han subjects in China, both men and women, and for the Han elitist males to exert their chauvinistic-nationalistic identity. The rhetorical contextualization in relation to race, class, gender and nationality reveals the operation of power on two levels: the colonizer versus the colonized and the patriarchal Han elitists versus their female subordinates. In addition, it helps expose the colonizers' as well as the Han elitists' condescending attitudes towards the victim, in this case, Chinese women. Colonizers posed themselves as saviors while the Han male elitists became progressive patriots. By making the unquestioned explicit, the readers realize the vileness of oppression even in emancipation. Lee thinks that it is important to emphasize dichotomy like savior/victim, civilized/barbaric, and benevolent/oppressive to deconstruct the

political intentions of different hegemonies. Her postcolonial feminist approach addresses gender, patriarchy, and international imperialism, unraveling all forces at play in the antifeetbinding discourse in China. Unbound feet became symbols of modernity. Furthermore, the physical wellbeing of Chinese women was deemed important because of their biological and cultural reproducer roles.

### *Women's Education*

The turn of the twentieth century witnessed not only Chinese women gradually having more normal feet but also going to schools. According to Sangwha Lee (1999), the Chinese government in 1907 began to introduce women's education into the public education system through legislation both at the elementary and college levels. Although in Chinese history, there are numerous records demonstrating the intellectual achievements of females in arts and literature, they were usually educated in private because of their elite positions as members of the upper class. Public education for girls was indeed something unimaginable and unprecedented. However, a close scrutiny of the philosophy behind public education for women or girls in China reveals that it is just one more performance of the patriarchal system to constitute Chinese women in a gendered manner. Croll's (1978) observation suggests that women's education is intrinsically intertwined with the patriarchal needs of Chinese nation-building at the turn of the century. She writes,

A good girl makes a good wife; a good wife makes a good mother; a good mother makes a good son. If the mothers have not been trained from childhood where are we to find the strong men of our nation? If then we say as China has said for so long: Let the men be educated, let the women remain in ignorance, half the nation

cannot be as useful as it should. It is as if one half of a man's body were paralyzed; these members not only being helpless but proving a weight, a hindrance to those not affected. (p. 55)

Education for women was at stake when the national identity of China was in danger. In addition, the purpose of making them intelligent was for them to, again, be able to raise a promising future generation.

In both the anti-foot binding discourse and education for Chinese women, we see the Chinese nation building dream of being as strong as the West at work in the rhetoric of the male elitists. To fulfill that dream, the reformers deemed it imperative that Chinese women become strong and healthy mothers and be educated so that they could fulfill their roles as both biological and cultural reproducers to breed physically strong sons and raise them properly. Unfortunately, the objectives of the reformers have little to do with the real equality between men and women. The subordination of women within the family and in society, and, more importantly, the firm grip of patriarchy over women, remained intact.

Chinese male intellectuals, like many of the colonized men, interpreted their feelings of disempowerment resulting from the processes of imperialism and subjugation “as processes of emasculation and/or feminization. The (re)construction of men's – and often even more importantly women's – roles in the processes of resistance and liberation has been central in most such struggles” (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 67). In order for China to have a progressive image, and more significantly, for China to stand up against the encroachment of foreign powers and to break away with the constraining Confucian traditions, Chinese women's roles had to be reconstructed. However, the reconstruction is



still within the normalized gender relations between men and women. As Shuqin Cui (2003) demonstrates,

In the guise of nationalism, woman serves as a figure of the oppressed, bearing external invasions and domestic problems, a trope of resistance in the struggle for national independence, and a symbol of a component in the building of new nation-state. What is left unexamined is whether woman occupies a subject position in the narrative and narration of nationalism. (pp. 174-175)

Chinese women in relation to nation and population in this particular historical moment that witnessed Chinese territory and sovereignty in danger and Chinese culture in crisis were reinforced with the important task of transforming Chinese society and Chinese culture and of ensuring the nation's collectivity as both the biological and cultural reproducers.

This identity of strong mothers both physically and intellectually reiterates the normative gender hierarchy that has already been in place for centuries in Chinese culture. As Butler (1999) points out, "Indeed, when the subject is said to be constituted, that means simply that the subject is a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses that govern the intelligible invocation of identity" (p. 185). Chinese women, consequentially, became important and recognizable because of their identity as mothers who could breed and raise strong sons in the future so that the physical constitution and intellectual performance of Chinese people could match their counterparts in the West. This shift from the identity of an objectified weaker and ignorant sex with bound feet for the gaze and pleasure of men to strong mothers with natural feet and good education was called forth because of the nation-building priority of China at the turn of the twentieth

century. We see clearly here that gender is not the result of a single act. It is reiterated to be more fixed. As Butler argues, “The rules that govern intelligible identity, i.e., that enable and restrict the intelligible assertion of an ‘I,’ rules that are partially structured along matrices of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, operate through *repetition*” (p. 185, emphasis in original). The identity of “mother” for Chinese women was repeated in this crucial moment of Chinese history because China was beaten by the Western powers and it was the promise of a strong younger generation that China placed her hopes in.

### *Chinese Nation, Population, and Women*

Like many developing countries, China has experienced the paradox of aspiring for modernity and working hard to maintain its cultural identity. Women's roles as both the cultural reproducers and biological reproducers of the population that constitutes the nation, inevitably, are implicated in this modernity dream of China. In the global and historical contexts, Chinese women, during their reproductive years, become public spectacles through government population policy. At the same time, the nation becomes an open theatre for the world to witness its progress towards modernity through its regulation of women's reproduction and their bodies. For China to be economically as competitive as its counterparts in the West, family has to be regulated, women's bodies controlled, gender norms reconstructed.

At the turn of the twentieth century, when Chinese women's bound feet and ignorance got in the way of nation building, they were given back their physical fitness and they were also given the opportunity to go to school so that they could raise and teach their children properly. In the 1960s, when China was deeply entrenched in its

confrontation with the West in Cold Wars, ‘half the sky’ was bestowed upon Chinese women so that they could contribute to the socialist construction of the nation on men’s terms while maintaining their traditional roles of being mothers and wives (Lee, 1999; Croll, 1978). In terms of reproduction and raising their children, they were to give birth to a “red” (revolutionary) generation so that the younger generation that grew up in the rhetoric of revolution could save the world from the abyss of capitalism. With the progress of time, China found it imperative to catch up with the West. Consequently, instead of the absolute authority of ideological struggles and revolution, economy began to dictate the course of national building. Chinese women were now required to become mothers with only one child so that the huge population would not slow the economic development of the country. It is this Malthusian discourse that legitimizes the one-child policy in contemporary China.

Thomas Malthus, like other classic economists, such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo, was preoccupied with the relationship between population and social welfare (Lee & Wang, 1999, p. 33). His concern that population growth imposes constraints on material progress and social wellbeing has cast its magical spell on many developing countries. The fear that “the unchecked continuous growth (‘explosion’) of the population might bring a national (or international) disaster” is the very spell that dictates the population policies in many third world countries, China being an extreme case (Hartman, 1987, quoted in Yuval-Davis, 1997, pp. 32-33).

China, one of the most ancient countries in the world, according to Lee and Wang (1999), experienced two periods of population growth in modern history. “First, between 1750 and 1950 the population increased by some 150 percent from 225 million to 555

million, an annual rate just short of 5 per *thousand*. Then between 1950 and 1999 the population more than doubled from 555 million to 1.27 billion, an annual rate of almost 1.7 per *hundred*” (p. 51, emphasis in the original). The second surge of population growth happened precipitously within only half a century after the first surge. 1950 is a dividing line for several reasons. Perhaps the most important is that People’s Republic of China was announced to be a socialist country on 1 October, 1949. It is also significant to note that new China practiced socialism within the rhetoric of revolution which was in direct opposition to capitalism.

The rhetoric of revolution, at the beginning of new China, for a short period of time, deemed it important to have a large population so that China would have some advantage over its capitalist enemies in terms of manpower. In my textbooks in elementary school, I often read the statement that “China is a country with a vast territory, rich natural resources, and a big population.” A vast territory, rich natural resources, and a big population seem to be sources of national pride in the face of vicious capitalist containment. It is widely known that Chairman Mao even condemned one demographer, Ma Yinchu, for his daring warnings against the possible consequences of unchecked population growth. One article in the archive of *Population and Development Review* entitled “A critique of Neo-Malthusian theory” written by Ta-k’un Wu (1960) criticized Ma Yinchu as “a 100 percent Neo-Malthusian” who dares to support the “reactionary” theory of population (p. 702). Ma became the enemy of Chinese people because “he denied that a populous county like China could catch up to or surpass Britain, not to mention achieve fast entry into communist society” (p. 703). The article argues,

The practice of revolution and construction in China has vividly proved that the principal factor impeding the economic development of underdeveloped countries is not so-called overpopulation, but the imperialist countries that utilize the Neo-Malthusian population theory to deceive people and the reactionary ruling classes who collaborate with the imperialists. (pp. 706-07)

The logic of the article augments the revolutionary and productive power of a big population for a county like China and finds the imperialists the root cause of the miseries suffered by people in underdeveloped countries.

The necessity of having a large population was not only disseminated in the system of knowledge but also repeatedly emphasized by the Chinese government as personified by Mao Zedong. Mao, the first chairman in China, proclaimed in 1949, that “of all things in the world, people are the most precious...and that before long there will arise a new China with a big population and a great wealth of products, where life will be abundant and culture will flourish. All pessimistic views are utterly groundless” (Tien, 1991, p. 20). Although there were intermittent population policies in the 1950s and 1960s, “the PRC [People’s Republic of China] officially endorsed Marx’s and Stalin’s optimism that socialism could make better use of people than could capitalism” (Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005, p. 39). Chinese women’s bodies and fertility, although not directly and rigidly regulated by the party policy, were controlled by the rhetoric of revolution. The total marital fertility rates in 1950, 1955, 1960, 1965, 1970, and 1975 were 5.8, 6.2, 4.1, 6.3, 6.2, and 4.4 respectively (Lee & Wang, 1999, p. 48).

However, starting from 1973, the top officials began to realize the urgency of population growth. “Over the span of a single generation, PRC authorities have shifted

from Mao's optimistic view of people as a 'national storehouse of workers' to a relatively more pessimistic view of people as consumers of resources" or mouths to feed (McLoughlin, 2005, p. 307). The call for later marriage, longer child spacing and fewer offspring was issued, resulting in the total marital fertility rate drop from 4.4 in 1975 to 3.2 in 1980 (Lee & Wang, 1999, p. 48). However, the pressing economic development priority at the late 1970s and the stark poverty in China seemed to call for a more radical solution.

Contending that the one-child policy was based on "the foundation of little more than nineteenth-century [Malthusian] social theory," Lee and Wang deemed the policy to be draconian in nature (p. 51). Top Chinese leaders in the 1970s, in their haste to catch up with the world after a long period of isolation and ideological antagonism with the West from 1949, embraced the original Malthusian proposition, believing that China's poverty was largely the product of Chinese overpopulation.

Whole-hearted acceptance of Malthusian social theory by the top level officials, coupled with the new enthusiastic faith in the authority of science being able to bring modernization to China, resulted in the joint work of politics and science. The scientist who is responsible for the radical one-child solution is Song Jian, a leading missile scientist, who in the post-Mao period, responded to "the call to apply modern science and technology to the challenge of rapid economic modernization" (Greenhalgh, 2005, pp. 254). The Song group, after complicated calculation, presented two arguments. "First, China's impending population explosion was depicted as a threat to national security and even survival, for by degrading the nation's ecosystem, population growth would eventually destroy the resources necessary to sustain human life." The second argument

was tied to a ‘quasi-military’ frame that cast China’s population to the global stability of the world and China’s standing in the global community. As a result, “compared with the social scientific construction of population as a problem of imbalance in domestic development resources, these new almost militaristic framings of the population problem both raised the stakes involved in gaining control over population growth and intensified the sense of urgency surrounding that project” (p. 265). The population problem, once framed as a threat to national survival and the global ambition of China, was enshrined to the status of “strategic issue” (Greenhalph, 2005, p. 265) deserving to be solved by the “basic state policy” (Greenhalph, 2001, p. 854) of one-child per couple.

Like many developing countries, China adheres to the prophecy of Malthusianism as a major strategy to try and solve its economic and social problems. The potential threat of unchecked population growth on the stability of economic and political systems looms large on the population policy in China. One-child policy, as a direct result of the impact of Malthusianism, is highly gendered. The consequences of gendered Malthusian policies are summarized by Yuval-Davis (1997). She states,

Where there is strong pressure to limit the number of children, and where male children are more highly valued for social and economic reasons, practices of abortions and infanticide are mainly directed towards baby girls. There are rumors about villages in China and India in which certain age groups, born after Malthusian policies were enacted, are 100 per cent male. Female babies are also often the ones which are more easily available for international adoption. (p. 34)

Although it is difficult to confirm the validity of those rumors, Yuval-Davis does capture the gendered implications of Malthusian policies in third world countries. What she does

not have space to fully develop is the gendered consequences on Chinese women who, like women in other developing countries, “are often the ‘captive’ target population for such policies” (p. 33).

When the policy was deliberated, and later implemented, its full social and political consequences were not carefully considered or anticipated. Neglected was also the voice of women on whose back the policy was written. Perhaps one of the most scathing analyses exposing how the Chinese official and party-produced narratives have firm grips on and power over Chinese women’s bodies, subjectivities, and lives is done by Greenhalgh (2001). According to her, “In the revolutionary decades of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, the policies and programs of the state were justified by a narrative of women’s health and liberation” (p. 853). The narrative of the reform era in terms of population is very much dictated by Malthusianism coupled with the fact that “the population narrative of a nation in demographic crisis saved by the party’s one-child policy fitted into a longstanding narrative of the nation in which the party repeatedly rescued the country from major threats – feudalism, poverty, corruption – again and again earning the right to rule” (p. 853). Greenhalgh continues, “With issues of economic modernization, global integration, and Chinese nationalism all hanging in the balance, women’s concerns were deemed secondary, and policies to promote the women’s liberation agenda were largely abandoned” (p. 854). Women’s bodies are disciplined to achieve urgent demographic targets and to help realize the contemporary nationalism characterized by the drive for modernity.

Some of the consequences for the disciplined female bodies are manifested in the revival of girl abandonment and violence against women’s bodies (Johansson & Nygren,



1991; Chan, Yip, Ng, Ho, Chang, & Au, 2002; Short, Ma, & Yu, 2000; Greenhalgh, 1994). Lee and Wang's (1999) research shows that "close to one-third of urban women and one-fifth of rural women had had at least one induced abortion. China had become a society with one of the highest rates of contraceptive use in the world" (p. 52). Similarly and in more general terms, Scharping (2003) points out, "Apart from violating general human rights, Chinese birth planning is also provoking public ire because many critics discern violations of women's special rights. Among them are the right of inviolability of the body, the right to self-determine fertility, and the option to choose from a range of different contraceptives" (p. 8). Chinese women's special rights are difficult to respect because of the political and social context of one-child policy. Moreover, their rights are dependent on the social categories of their being biological reproducers and the Chinese collectivity to which they belong.

Chinese collectivity has for centuries emphasized the absolute power of state over its subjects. In addition, Chinese women find their identity being defined by "normative womanhood in terms of motherhood" (Handwerker, 1998, p. 196). Their roles as biological and cultural reproducers of the Chinese collectivity are repeated again and again in Chinese history. In the discourse of one-child policy, Chinese women's bodies are violated and controlled in the sense that they are only allowed one child. After the birth of the allowed quota they have to permit medical professionals to control their fertility through different contraceptives. During pregnancy, because of the concern for quality babies, Chinese women render their bodies to the scientific intervention of medical professionals and hi-tech equipment. In the case of out-of-quota pregnancies, it is hard to imagine alternatives beyond abortion, whether voluntary or involuntary. The

press in the West is not short of horrible stories of Chinese women falling victim to ferocious abortions and sterilizations.

However, if I only rely on feminist theorizing of nation and women's bodies and the repressive approach to the governance of population in China, I will neglect the constitutive nature of modern power, biopower in particular. Biopower refers to power over life that evolved in two forms: "the disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population" (Foucault, 1978 , p. 139). As a result of biopower, which entails the calculated management of life (p. 140), there emerged a whole host of disciplines, such as demography, biology, medicine, psychiatry, psychology, ethics, pedagogy, and simultaneously, the political and economic observation of the problems of birthrate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration. "Hence there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of 'biopower'" (p. 140).

As a new form of modern power, biopower is aimed at the administration of the vital characteristics of human populations and exercised in the name of optimizing individual and collective life, health, and welfare. Biopower entails the increased ordering of life at all levels. It is the characteristic form of power in the modern era, when life becomes a central object of power.

To understand modern power as purely repressive is to dichotomize power relations. It is important to realize, as Foucault maintains, that the subject is produced through power rather than being outside of power relations. Foucault (1978) develops a new notion of power which is not only repressive, but also productive and constitutive. He characterizes power as relational so that individual bodies become tied up with the

docility-utility nexus so that they participate in the shaping of and conforming to prevailing forms of selfhood and subjectivity through self-surveillance and self-correction to norms.

Greenhalgh and Winckler (2005)'s work utilizes both "regime capacity" and "biopower" to understand the multi-layered subject of the governance of population in the most populous country in the world (pp. 5-6). They contend that the state policy of family planning in China has shifted from the norm of quantity to the norm of quality. Increasingly the state relies on the regulatory methods of economic reform and the disciplinary techniques of medical, educational, and other professions to constitute subjects. Instead of focusing on the physical discipline of women's bodies, the norm of quality established in the 1990s and early 2000s, works through the mind of Chinese people. Greenhalgh's approach to biopower "is informed by broadly Foucauldian approaches to forms of power that exist in and beyond the state" (p. 27). Her main concern is on discourses. By discourses, she refers to "historically specific bodies of knowledge that structure how things can be said" (p. 27). She concurs with Foucault by showing in the case of China how discourses produce subjectivities and rejuvenate and refresh power itself.

The constitutive authority of biopower demonstrates that the disciplining of women's bodies is not only initiated from without but increasingly from within. It is not difficult to understand the willingness of Chinese women to discipline their bodies if one bears in mind the general social climate in China. As China is more and more preoccupied with modernity and integration with the world, Greenhalgh and Winckler (2005) observe, "China's people have become increasingly preoccupied with producing

world-class persons: good scientific mothers, exemplary single children, and globally competitive workers” (p. 2). Chinese people, Chinese women in particular, have internalized “the modern, science-based norm” (p. 32). The disciplined bodies become docile bodies to facilitate the modernization dream of the country because of the joint work of state intervention in the form of the one-child policy, modern science, and self-discipline (Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005, pp. 27-33).

### *Good Mothers and Quality Child*

The norm of quality is the mechanism that works through the practices of raising children on a daily basis for Chinese mother bloggers. Good mothers today are no longer women who can give birth to healthy babies. They should be those who can feed, clothe, and educate their children in such a manner that their children will grow up as all-rounded adults who can compete in an increasingly competitive global economy. Likewise, quality child is not only someone who is physically fit but also intellectually competent. To be globally competent and competitive, children right from their kindergarten years are given the best education their parents can possibly provide. Good mothers also make sure that their children learn English as early as possible because it is popularly understood that English is the international language that will give whoever can master it an edge in the global context (Fong, 2004, p. 23; pp. 33-68). At the same time, children are integrated into the national dream of becoming as strong if not stronger than the West from a young age.

Education has always occupied an important position in Chinese culture. It was the only means through which one’s social mobility was achieved in ancient China. Cheng Kai-Ming, Jin Xinhua, and Gu Xiaobo (1999) explicate the strong tradition of

education in China and find a strong correlation between the values placed on education and the age-old civil examination system held at the imperial courts for selecting officials for the government. Although the civil examination system has long been done away with, the traditional values of education that were nurtured by it still prevail in contemporary society. Cheng et al. summarize the values of education as scholarship, recognizable success realized in examinations, and the means for entering officialdom (pp. 119-120). Even today, education or learning for tangible success is still what drives the investment interest of parents.

Of course, it is not fruitful to understand the purpose of education in China as related to only status and social mobility. Education for personal growth and enlightenment is also very ingrained in the values attached to education. However, when increasingly the state relies on the regulatory methods of the economic reform and the disciplinary techniques of the medical, educational, and other professions, it is not hard to see how education can be the ground on which Chinese women, and to be more specific, in my research, Chinese mother bloggers, actively participate in fine-tuning their children to the national expectation of fostering a generation of globally competitive workers.

In this climate of learning to raise quality children, parents are no longer satisfied with the education that their children receive from their standard schooling such as kindergarten, elementary school, or secondary school. They invest heavily in the extracurricular education that their children can receive. In the blogs that I collected, the mother of “A Child’s Heart” offered a list of all kinds of extracurricular education that her daughter received. On the list are English, mental addition and subtraction, using an abacus, drawing, dancing, chess, and violin. “A Child’s Heart” started learning English

from a private tutor when she was three years and eight months old. Her private English lesson is conducted three evenings during weekdays and two mornings on weekends and each of her private English lessons is about an hour and a half.

When “A Child’s Heart” was four years and one month old, she was signed up for extra weekend training on how to do addition and subtraction mentally as well as how to use an abacus offered by her kindergarten. Two months later, she insisted on learning how to draw. Then her mother, a teacher herself, began to continue her math lessons at home three times a week. Each time, her mother would ask her to do ten math problems to enhance her skill. According to the blog, drawing was what A Child’s Heart loves the most. However, she only took art lessons for a couple months because her mother did not like the fact that she was only taught to imitate the drawing of her teacher. To compromise between “A Child’s Heart’s” unwillingness to learn mental addition and subtraction and her mother’s insistence that she should not learn drawing, “A Child’s Heart” began to take dance lessons when she was four years and seven months old. However, the child got fed with the physical exhaustion of practicing dance every Saturday that she soon gave it up.

Her chess lesson began when she was five years old. Every Saturday afternoon for about two and a half hours, she took group lessons on how to play chess with three other kids. However, she seldom practiced her chess at home. According to her mother, it was because she did not want to lose a game. Violin lessons was were added to her extracurricular education when she was five years and one month old. She took a one-hour lesson every Saturday evening. Playing violin is also what “A Child’s Heart” loves. She practices playing violin almost everyday. On the mother’s list of ideal skills for her

child to learn, learning to play ping-pong is the only item that has not yet been put into practice. In terms of cost, the mother of “A Child’s Heart” has to spend at least two hundred fifty Chinese Yuan if I only count English, chess, and violin lessons every month. My personal conservative estimate is that roughly about eight to ten percent of the mother’s income is spent on the child’s extracurricular activities. This percentage does not include her spending on her daughter’s kindergarten or day-care.

This long and detailed list of the kinds of extracurricular education that A Child’s Heart receives gives at least a glimpse of how a child’s daily life is governed by a rigid schedule imbued with her mother’s expectations. At the end of the list, the mother of A Child’s Heart wrote that she only wanted to use the extracurricular education to improve her daughter’s intellect (for example, chess and doing addition and subtraction mentally and using an abacus), to be physically fit (playing ping-pong for instance), to cultivate her tastes (such as drawing, dancing, and playing violin), and to help her get a head start on those subjects that she has to learn when she starts her formal education (for instance English).

The mother emphasized that she would not force her daughter to learn or continue to learn something that her daughter was not interested in because her purpose in providing so much extracurricular education was not related to learning for specific future goals. For example, she said that she would never expect her daughter to become a translator, an artist, a chess master, or an Olympic champion. She would be very satisfied if her daughter would become someone who is useful to the country, to the people, and to her family. However, if we count how many extracurricular lessons that “A Child’s Heart” has to take simultaneously, it is not difficult to see how what Foucault calls the

microphysics of power operates on her little body through the imposition of a rigid schedule, through compulsory activity, and through the continuous surveillance of her mother, who really wants her daughter to enjoy her life fully as a quality child. The child's daily routine is inextricably intertwined with the fate of her country, the well-being of her people, and the happiness of her family.

Among the blogs I collected "A Child's Heart" is not the only child whose daily activity is governed by a rigid schedule. Chinese mother bloggers are eager to show off the success of their children at a young age in terms of their talent in different fields such as drawing, dancing, roller skating, reading, story-telling, piano playing, and many more. Together they define, practice, and invigorate what raising a quality child means. It no longer means that a child can get an A in all his/her subjects at school; it also entails the versatile development of many faculties. Today a quality child is expected to do well in his/her studies (book knowledge), to be good at sports, to be able to sing or dance or play a musical instrument, and to be a responsible citizen who can carry on the dream of China becoming as strong if not stronger than the West. In making sure that their children become useful people to the country, to the people, and to the family in the future, Chinese mother bloggers actively participate in the process of disciplining their children and themselves. Their self-discipline is manifested in their willingness to invest not only money but also time and other resources in their children so that they fulfill their constructed roles as "the cultural symbols of the collectivity, of its boundaries, as carriers of the collectivity's 'honour' and as its intergenerational reproducers of culture" (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 67). As reproducers of culture and as the primary agents in the



socialization and education of their children during the childhood years of their children, Chinese mother bloggers strive hard to live by the codes of good mothers.

As mentioned earlier, the codes and regulations of a good mother today also deem it important for the mother to make sure that her child is not only good at his/her school subjects such as math and Chinese but also all-rounded in other aspects such as music or arts. Most important of all, good mothers make sure that their children master English properly so that their children can be competitive in a global context. Fong's (2004) ethnographic research in a metropolitan city in the northeastern part of China reveals that the city people in her study on the whole have internalized the cultural model of modernization, which well captures the aspiration of Chinese people "hoping to rise to the top of the capitalist world system" not only in terms of economic development but also in terms of lifestyles (p. 3). Fong contends, "Chinese leaders presented mandatory low fertility, rising inequalities, and the loss of jobs, pensions, and medical insurance as sacrifices that Chinese people had to make for the construction of a modern economy that would eventually bring First World affluence" (p. 19). Although there are complaints about the kinds of sacrifices that people have to make, according to Fong, "No one, however, questioned the desirability of First World affluence itself" (p. 19). First World is used as the prototype for the modernization dream of Chinese nation. People in Fong's study defined modernization

as progress toward the adoption of a modern economy that is likely to improve a society's position in the capitalist world system. Such progress could be measured objectively by statistical indicators of health, education, living standards, and per capita Gross Domestic Product, and subjectively by the degree a society's cultural

resemblance to the core region countries widely acknowledged as ‘developed’ and ‘modern.’ (p. 21)

To be able to participate in the modernization drive, children have to learn and master English because of its status of being an international language and its strong association with the affluent First World. Many students in Fong’s study indicated that they had been tutored or took private afterschool classes in a foreign language. However, what I need to clarify here is that a foreign language does not refer to just any language other than Chinese. Among the most popular foreign languages studied in China are English, German, French, and Japanese and English is top on the list.

When I collected my data, I paid particular attention to the everyday practice of child-rearing. One of the blogs I read during June 2007 on how to teach children to use “please” in their daily interactions with adults took me to an “unexpected” world of helping children to learn English at a young age. This particular family has a twin, one boy and one girl. The boy was named Jack and the girl Lily. In the virtual space of this family’s blogs, there is a special category titled “Blogs in English” recording how English is instilled in the daily routines of the children. The father in the family has purchased many English books, many of which are on CD, and the twins have been listening to them for almost four years when they themselves are at most five years old. When they were three, their parents started sending them to “You and Me” English School. What is important to my study is not what kind of language school it is but how learning English has become an everyday practice for both the children and the parents. According to one of the blogs under the category of “Blogs in English,” the mother wrote, “I set an English corner in the living room, there are a series “you and me” English

textbooks, many bilingual story books and original English movies, most of them are cartoons. Around the corner, Jack and Lily can contact English anytime, watching movies, listening songs, reading books, playing games etc., very natural, English has become one of their languages, they didn't feel any pressure to learn English."

The children may not feel any pressure to learn English because their parents have already tried their best to naturalize the language into their daily life. However, the parents feel the pressure to learn English with their children and to make sure that the homework of reciting one story every day from "You and Me" English School is done properly by the twins. One of the blogs said, "Dad and mom felt much pressure, we must arrange the time, learning and playing, both of them must be considered felicitously. The whole family worked hard together, at last, Jack and Lily could recite all the lessons, they were praised almost every lesson by Sammy." Learning English is no longer a must only for the children; it has become a family activity that is practiced everyday. The blogs in English were started in Oct. 2006, and they were maintained till the summer of 2007. The blog in the summer of 2007 recorded the daily activities of Jack and Lily under the care of their grandmother. Their grandmother is a retired math teacher. Her care of the children during the summer break entailed not only her preparing three meals a day, but also giving math and Chinese lessons. Every night the twins went to bed listening to English stories.

Jack and Lily's parents are not the only parents among the Chinese mother bloggers who place high priority on English learning. The Chinese mother bloggers I observed not only pitch in on their children's efforts to learn English, but they themselves are also diligent learners of English who want to keep up with the pace of modernization.

One of the Chinese mother bloggers demonstrates her strong interest in English in her virtual world. Although her case is not representative of all the Chinese mother bloggers I observed, it sheds light on how strong a hold the learning of the English language has taken in the daily life of ordinary Chinese women. Flying Seagull is a software engineer and her husband was pursuing his doctoral degree in the Netherlands during my online observation. She carved out a bilingual blog space for her family on [www.sina.com.cn](http://www.sina.com.cn). She writes in Chinese most of the time. But quite a few blogs of her virtual world were written in English. In her virtual world, she classifies her blogs into moods, poems and songs, lovely Angel (blogs devoted to her daughter), parenting knowledge, overseas study and life in NL (a space for her communication with her husband), computer & Internet, classmates & colorful party, amusement, and bilingual world circle. This very classification is illustrative of her desire to improve her language skills and of how important English is to her. In one of her invitational blogs, she introduced her profession and she also said that “English is important to my daughter and me. I wish that you could join us in this ‘Flyingseagull mother and daughter bilingual IT communication circle’ to discuss technical and business issues in IT. I also wish that we can use English to broaden our world of communication and make new friends.”

At the same time, she is proud of her identity of being the mother of a two-year-old daughter. She hoped to have more opportunities to exchange parenting experiences with other mothers. She said that “no matter how busy and tired I am, I will try my best to be a qualified mother for my child, a good wife in my husband’s eye, and a good daughter-in-law in my mother-in-law’s eye. I will learn from different daddies and mommies.” In late April of 2007, she wrote in her blog in English, “I woke up so early

in the dark because of my baby girl's moving frequently beside me. My hubby went to Shanghai to fetch visa yesterday. He will continue his Phd study in Netherlands. I know the days will start soon again in which I'll meet my dear hubby, my baby girl will meet her dear papa and my mother-in-law will meet her dear son only by video or phone.” There was a lot of emotion in this blog that anticipated the days lying ahead when her husband would return to Netherlands to continue his study. However, at the end of the blog, she wrote “I should and will try my best to support my hurby, accompany and teach my baby girl more, and have a happy life with my baby girl and mother-in-law in the following times. Sure, work hard too. I said to myself in this dark night. I think I will and I don't wanna my hurby worry too much about us. I'll try my best to live a happy life always. Also I hope my hurby will study and live there happily with our support.”

From her blog space, we see a woman who has a career a cutting edge profession, who is trying her best to balance the different responsibilities called forth by her various identities, and who diligently works on her English proficiency. The virtual world in the blogosphere is not only the space to record the wonderful moments in her daughter, “Angel's” growth, but also the space for family communion and personal dreams, which are tied into the modernization dream of the country. Under the category of overseas study and life in the Netherlands, there are blogs devoted to the communication between the husband and wife, father and daughter, and the episodes of a doctoral student in a foreign country contributed by her husband. In May 2007, when the husband of Flying Seagull went back to his university abroad, he wrote, “If I want to walk further along my life course, pursuing my dreams, I have to stay here to ‘fight’ for the future of my family because my homeland is still lagging far behind in my research field now.” The personal

destiny of ordinary Chinese mother bloggers and their families are interconnected with the modernization drive of their country. As Yuval-Davis (1997) argues, nation and gender inform each other and are intrinsically interconnected with each other (p. 21). The intersection of nation and gender defines specific codes and regulations for both men and women (p. 67). In the case of China, to be more specific, in the historical context of China striving to be more like the First World, men are expected to be experts of knowledge or sharp businessmen while women are expected to shoulder their responsibilities as both biological and cultural reproducers on top of their career demand.

In the social context of the internalization of the cultural model of modernization and in the political climate of biopower, Chinese mother bloggers dream the dreams of a nation that is not only economically strong but also culturally more like those enjoyed by the affluent countries in the First World. When the dream of a strong nation is reflected in the daily life of ordinary Chinese people, it encompasses much more than only the desire to learn English. It also manifests itself in the social activities that Chinese mother bloggers encourage their children to be involved in.

2008 is a very special year in Chinese history because it is the year that the Olympics will be held in Beijing. This is the first time that such an important international sports event will be held on the soil of China. When the bid for the 2008 Olympics was won, it provoked an outburst of great celebrations all over the country because it was such a boost to our national image as a modern country, which is developing at a tremendous pace. It was also an affirmation of the great accomplishments of Chinese people. Paul Close, David Askew, and Xu Xin's book (2007), *The Beijing Olympiad*, argues "that there is an *extraordinary convergence*, or *elective affinity*,

between modern Olympism and the ideals and tendencies of modern market capitalism” (pp. 1-2, emphasis in the original). This general framework helps illuminate the relationships between the Olympic Games and “various other modern social phenomena, including the growing appeal of liberal democracy and individualism, the spread of the Western cultural account, the progress of globalization, and the rise of China as a major political-economy player on the world stage” (p. 2). Because of the multi-faceted importance of the Olympic Games to the national identity, from the moment that China won the bid to the present, all aspects of national priority and many details of ordinary Chinese people’s lives have been connected to the effort of hosting a successful Olympic Games in China.

During my online data collection, I came across the blogosphere of “Super Reunion Rabbit.” Rabbit in Chinese culture symbolizes peace and harmony. Reunion, according to my speculation, stands for the wish that mainland China and Taiwan will be reunited as one country in the future. Sheng (2001)’s research examines the entangled relations between China and Taiwan with the U. S. as the mediator in between. According to Sheng, “During the Mao Zedong era, China’s policy towards Taiwan was largely based on Mao’s determination to liberate Taiwan through force” (p. 15). However, this policy of force was replaced with “a new policy of ‘peaceful reunification’” when China embarked on the journey of economic reform during Deng Xiaoping’s administration. Although the reunion or the reunification of Taiwan and China remains unrealized at the moment, for many mainland Chinese, the territorial claim over Taiwan as an integral part of China is an undeniable fact. The metaphor of the one

country or family is ingrained in the imagination of mainland Chinese in terms of the relations between China and Taiwan.

Against this background, I assume that the name of the child is imbued with the national dream of both modernization and reunification. She was born in 2004. She and her mother on May 19, 2007 held a sale of “the balloons of love” for handicapped people to show their support for the Olympic Games in 2008. Each of the balloons was priced at 1 Yuan. On each balloon was inscribed “I love the Olympic,” “Beijing 2008,” and the five-ring symbol of the Olympics. “Super Reunion Rabbit” and her mother donated the proceedings of 2008 dollars to a charity in their city on Children’s Day (June 1) to show their love and kindness to people less fortunate than them as well as their support to the important national event of the 2008 Olympics. Also on that day, she participated in a themed activity organized by the Children’s Palace in her city. The theme of the activity was “Our Olympics, Our Day.” At the event, “Super Reunion Rabbit,” her mother, and her grandmother had a chance to learn more about the Olympic Games by looking at the badges designed for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, such as “The Seal of China, Dynamic Beijing,” “Lucky Cloud Torch,” and “the Record of Olympic Champions” and also by participating in various activities there. Among the activities available were shooting, wall climbing, signing names on the wall of the 2008 Olympics, an exhibition of Olympic stamps, “I am a little Yao Ming” basketball-shooting contest ( Yao Ming is famous NBA player from China), and the hall of Olympic knowledge. “Super Reunion Rabbit’s” personal activity of selling balloons for the handicapped in support of the Olympics and her visit to the special themed Children’s Day event in the Children’s



Palace in her city work together to instill a strong identification with the collectivity of the Chinese nation.

“Super Reunion Rabbit” is also busy with other welfare activities in her daily life. She initiated in her city a campaign called “One Dollar Donation for Children Who Cannot Go to School.” With the help of her mother, she visited small business owners locally and collected money for underprivileged children who live in the adjacent and less developed countryside. She also joined efforts with the Hope Project (a national charity to educate children in poverty-stricken areas) in her city and became the youngest volunteer for the organization. For her three-year-old birthday party, she asked her mother to put an announcement in one of the local papers that she wanted to invite six children from poor families or families that were migrant workers to celebrate her birthday with her family. Her birthday was celebrated in McDonald with six children in her city. She called her birthday “The Birthday of Love.” Among the six children invited was one child with a physical disability. At the end of the blog that recorded this birthday of love, “Super Reunion Rabbit” called on the whole society to show more love and support to the poor, the handicapped and their children. Interestingly enough, most of the blogs maintained for “Super Reunion Rabbit” were written in first person, though in fact, her mother most likely does all the writing.

In the virtual space of blogosphere, Chinese mother bloggers record and reflect on their child-raising experiences. Although each of the virtual spaces is distinctive in the writing style, the appearance, and the content, what runs through all of them is the desire of parents to raise quality children. The examples cited and interpreted in this chapter are not at all representative of what a quality child means to all Chinese mother bloggers. But

together they flesh out the abstract concept of a quality child. At the same time, the resources in terms of money, time, and expectations that Chinese mother bloggers lavish on their children suggest how biopower constitutes the subjectivities of Chinese mother bloggers through disciplining their children and themselves so that both the parents and the children can be teachable and useful bodies in the national scheme of modernization. Biopower, as a modern power, manages and maximizes life so that all essential elements of life can work in fine tune with the economic and political priorities of a nation. In letting the hands of biopower work through their bodies and the bodies of their children, Chinese mother bloggers fulfill the expected roles as both the biological and cultural reproducers because they embody and practice the national dream of modernization both in their daily lives and in the shaping and bringing up of the younger generation.

### *Conclusion*

As biological and cultural reproducers of Chinese collectivity, Chinese women are implicated in the imminent network of biopower concerned with population, social welfare, and economic growth through “the three modes of objectification of the subject (those that categorize, distribute, and manipulate; those through which we have come to understand ourselves scientifically; those that we have used to form ourselves into meaning-giving selves)” (Rabinow, 1984, p. 12). Malthusianism, a driving force in the biopower of China since the 1970s, legitimates the one-child policy. In addition, when the official party narrative is based on the modernization of the country and the strategic standing of China in the world, it is difficult for Chinese women to question the gendered nature of the policy and to refuse to play their roles in the grand scheme of the nation. Chinese women were at first constrained to accept their roles in the context of achieving

modernization in the 1970s. Very soon, they began to “initiate an active self-formation” so that they could utilize the mode of ‘subjectification’ (p. 11) to normalize “one child” and scientific motherhood to ensure quality children. This is where the constitutive and productive nature of power comes to play.

I have only one child. Even though I am in the U.S., literally out of reach of the one-child policy, I chose to have one child only. All of my friends in China also only have one child. After all, China, being one of the ancient civilizations that shone brightly all the way from its beginnings through the 18<sup>th</sup> century, has experienced much humiliation and poverty in modern history. In the national psyche, there is always the longing to be great again. It is almost a self-evident truth that China has too big a population. For the country to be great again, the population has to be curtailed. Consequently, women’s bodies must be disciplined because it is something “unimaginable” to discipline the fertility of male bodies.

Rey Chow (2001) laments that Chinese women cease to become women in crisis and resume their more traditional roles as mothers in times of reconstruction (p. 352). The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present has been a prolonged period of reconstruction. At the beginning of the twentieth century, when China’s sovereignty was severely threatened, it was “natural” for the Chinese intellectuals to condemn the vicious foot-binding tradition and to grant Chinese women a chance to be educated so that they could become strong and virtuous mothers. In the 1970s, when a large population was no longer viewed as an asset, to control and discipline female bodies seemed to be the only option for the state to achieve low population growth rate in order to keep up with the country’s economic development and social welfare.

The historical moments examined in this project are important pieces in the genealogy of gender construction in China concerning Chinese women's reproduction as it is intertwined with the nation's modernization drive and the nation's shifting views on population. The links connecting Chinese nation, population and Chinese women are indeed not only discursive but also material. Chinese mother bloggers seldom complain about their limited reproductive rights. They are constantly examining their ways of child-rearing in the blogosphere so that their children can, from a very young age, join the complex of docility-utility. A rigid schedule, self-surveillance, and self-correction to norms determine the daily routines of Chinese mother bloggers not only in their lives but also in the lives of their children. The norm of nurturing a quality child in China in the age of biopower deems it necessary to rear children into all-rounded, globally-competitive, and socially-responsible people. Chinese mother bloggers strive hard to fulfill their roles as both the biological and cultural reproducers so that both they and their children will be useful to their country, their collectivity, and their families.

### Chapter Three: Happy Motherhood

If there is a feeling which is a mixture of being busy yet delightful, that is being a mother. If there is a feeling which is a blend of being tired yet satisfied, that is being a mother. If we could go back in time and I could choose again, I would choose to be a busy and happy mother again without hesitation. To me, motherhood is the beautiful transformation in a woman's life. It is a starting point to a complete and perfect life. As a mother, my life has become more colorful and the journey of life has become more brilliant/splendid. (Excerpts from a speech delivered by Sunshine Baby's mother in the forum of happiness of mothers sponsored by *A Must-read Magazine for Parents*.)

I am seeking Chinese women's creation of meanings in the blogosphere by looking at their views, values, beliefs, and ideologies embedded in their blogs. This chapter focuses on how motherhood is repeated and reenacted in the blogosphere using the gender regulation theory of Judith Butler (2004). I will first of all delineate the theory itself and then use the theory to understand how motherhood is naturalized biologically, materially, and socially. At the same time, I would like to argue that in the repetition of these norms, the temporality and contingency of norms are also exposed and subjected to change.

#### *Gender Regulation*

Michel Foucault is instrumental in laying the ground work for how individuals are subjected and regulated by modern power. Modern power not only disciplines and regulates but also produces and shapes individuals. Therefore, the subject-position of an individual is made possible because of his/her relation to regulation. In other words, the subjectivity of a subject is brought into being by the operation of power. It is the diffused, regulatory, and constitutive nature of modern power that lends force to its panoptic authority. A regulatory and disciplinary society is one that "increase[s] both the docility and the utility of all the elements of the system" by economic means and political justification through the discrete mechanisms of education, military, industry, and

medicine (Foucault, 1979, p. 218).

There are many feminists who find Foucault's theory on how the operation of modern power constitutes subjectivity enlightening. However, there are also quite a few feminists who have problems with Foucault treating the bodies indiscriminately. As Sandra Lee Bartky (1998) contends, "But Foucault treats the body throughout as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life" (p. 27). Likewise, Judith Butler (2004) points out, Foucault seems to have subsumed gender to disciplinary power and to have neglected the fact that disciplinary power itself is gender-specific. To Butler, it is important to realize "that gender requires and institutes its own distinctive regulatory and disciplinary regime" (p. 41).

In "*Gender regulation*," Butler theorizes how gender as a norm functions as a mechanism of power and explores the conditions under which gender works in the hope of disrupting and transforming gender norms. Gender as a mechanism is understood as "the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes" (p. 42). There are several conditions that secure the smooth functioning of gender. Butler elaborates, "One important sense of regulation, then, is that persons are regulated by gender, and that this sort of regulation operates as a condition of cultural intelligibility for any person" (p. 52). Other conditions for the operation of gender norm are the necessary citation and repetition of gender norms so that "the norm is actively conferring reality; indeed, only by virtue of its repeated power to confer reality is the norm constituted as a norm" (p. 52). Butler advocates

conceptualizing gender “as regulated by social norms” rather than adhering to the timeless and essentialized symbolic structure of gender maintained by Lacanian theorists. This shift in thinking opens up the contingent and temporary nature of norms as well as the possibilities for the displacement and subversion of norms (pp. 47-48).

Butler’s theory on gender as a norm sheds a lot of light on the intelligibility of the Chinese women bloggers that I have observed. I took the trouble of translating the speech word by word for the sake of authenticating the voices of my research participants. This is one of the many blogs that I have read that glorifies motherhood and that defines a woman’s happiness in relation to her family and her child. If I am interested in articulating the subject-positions of Chinese women, it is first of all important to unpack the social norms shaping the gender norms for the very existence of Chinese women because “the viability of our individual personhood is fundamentally dependent on these social norms” (Butler, 2004, p. 2).

### *The Identity of Chinese Women*

Traditionally, Chinese women’s personhood was narrowly defined by the Confucian decorum of *san cong si de* (“the three obedience and four virtues”) and *xian qi liang mu* (“an understanding wife and good mother”). The social and cultural norms in China dictated that having no offspring was the greatest disrespect for the ancestors of one’s family. To secure a family line that was passed from son to son, it was imperative to have boys to inherit family names and property. The main function for Chinese women in society was to be virtuous wives and caring mothers. As a result, a woman’s status was proportional to her fertility which specifically meant how many sons she could bear her husband. If she was barren or sonless, she could legitimately be divorced (Wolf, 1975).

The intelligibility of a traditional Chinese woman depended on her relation to her husband's family and her motherhood to her sons.

The socioeconomic status of Chinese women in the cities has improved tremendously in recent years. However, to imagine a happy life outside marriage and motherhood is still largely impossible in China. Gender as a regulatory norm still defines Chinese women along their identities as wives and mothers. In the social acts of blogging about their raising children as social actors, Chinese women become viable human beings regulated and shaped by gender norms. As Butler points out, “The norm governs intelligibility, allows for certain kinds of practices and action to become recognizable as such, imposing a grid of legibility on the social and defining the parameters of what will and will not appear within the domain of the social” (p. 42). However, in the repetition of these norms, the temporality and contingency of norms are also exposed and subjected to change.

Let me now turn to a more detailed portrayal of my research participants. In doing so, I intend to address the regulatory power of gender relying on Butler's theory of gender regulation. In addition, because this theory understands the conditions under which gender norms function, I hope to investigate the transformative potentials of gender norms through their very repetition and citations to consider the agency that my Chinese women bloggers have.

### *Happy motherhood*

The speech delivered by the mother of “Sunshine Baby” quoted at the beginning of the chapter was made in a relatively formal setting. She defines a complete and happy life for herself as having a family which is made up of a husband, a wife, and a baby, the



nuclear model characteristic of modernity as proposed by the Chinese government. She performs the duties of a wife and a mother on top of her job. For her as a woman, career is not as important as her baby and the center of her universe is her family and her daughter. She told her audience, “Life is full of conflicts, gains, and losses. Which one of them should I put first: my career, my personal life, or my baby? Without much hesitation, I choose the little life that I care for almost every minute. I gave up the chance to be promoted because it may come again. However, if I missed the wonderful moments of my baby’s growth, they would be lost forever. I will treasure these moments and enjoy both the hardships and joy of motherhood to my heart’s content.” She would rather sacrifice chances of career advancement if these interfere with her duties as a mother. For centuries, the worth of a Chinese woman has been determined by her relation to her husband’s family and her children. Women have naturalized sacrifice for their family and their children as a great love and a great virtue.

Also naturalized and essentialized is motherhood itself because of the biological bond between a woman and her child. In her recount of her feeling as a mother, “Little Sky’s” mother recalls her change from being disappointed to being hopeful. When she was first pregnant, she did everything she could to have a healthy baby. She took piano lessons and read books on how to understand and appreciate masterpiece paintings. Of course her dietary habit was formed around the health of her unborn baby. She talked to her baby everyday to enhance the tie between them. She also imagined countless times about how beautiful her baby would be and that perhaps in the near future her baby would be invited to be a child film star shooting advertisements and movies. However, the great pain she experienced during the course of natural birth and the extremely

ordinary appearance of her son upon delivery deflated her so much that disappointment was what captured her emotion at that moment. The turning point came when a nurse brought her baby for her to breastfeed him. She was not sure whether her son was getting any milk from her breast. But the perseverance demonstrated by her son in the simple action of sucking awakened her sense of being a mother. From that moment on, “Little Sky's” mother devoted herself totally to the cause of being a good mother. Besides taking care of the physical needs of her son, she played music to her son every day and she also devoured dozens of magazines on how to nurture children so that she would be qualified to be a good mother. “Little Sky's” mother had to return to work when her four-month maternity leave was over. When her baby in his hunger began to cry for a milk bottle instead of for her, she felt helpless and guilty. Now everyday after work, “Little Sky's” mother took hold of every minute to be with her son “greedily.” She also understood that the appearance of a baby doesn't matter. No matter whether a child is ordinary-looking or beautiful, he/she is the baby in his/her mother's heart. When “Little Sky” was soon to be eleven-month old soon, she said, “My heart is filled with expectation. I imagine his first step walking toward me and his first calling out of ‘mommy.’ The birth of Little Sky brought me radiance and completes my life.”

If the sucking of milk was the moment that awakened the sense of being a mother for “Little Sky's” mother, it was the unexpected news that it was likely the fetus might not survive that stirred up strong emotion in Xiong Ye's mother. This is what she shared in her blog not long ago: “Before becoming a mother, I often bumped into newly pregnant women and saw the contented smiles on their faces. People say that the smiles are manifestations of maternal love and I never agreed with them. I thought life was the

same for both the women with children and the women without children. I often ask the question, 'Why should married women have children?' I thought to myself married life no child would be just as wonderful. When I first found myself pregnant I was not thrilled or excited because I was not ready to have a baby. I just naturally accepted the fact. However, when a doctor told me that I might miscarry, I could not control my tears. If the child could not survive, I should feel happy, shouldn't I? I hadn't wanted to be a mother in the first place. But why were my tears like unstoppable currents? Why was my heart tortured with despair? And why was there great pain in my chest? Isn't this the sign of motherly love? This was the first time that I experienced the nature of a mother and understood how to be a complete woman." Naturalized motherhood is glorified as a source of joy and courage, and the purpose of life. Motherhood to Xiong Ye's mother also encouraged her to become a member of Sina Baby, an online circle created by Sina website to encourage mothers to exchange their experiences on child-rearing, so that she could persist with her writing on child care. The letter she wrote for her son's third birthday not only recalled her change from being indifferent to motherhood to taking great pride as a mother because as she put it, "My son, it is you who made my life splendid and who made me strong. I don't think of your birthday as the day of suffering for me. From the day you were born, we have grown together which helps me truly understand the meaning of 'mother' and know the purpose of life."

The biological experience of going through pregnancy and feeding a baby and the social practices of children-rearing together regulate and reinforce the gender norm for Chinese women so that they are constituted as recognizable beings. In the actions of writing/speaking about their experiences of being happy mothers, they write/speak in a

language that has been in place before their entering the social world. To borrow from Butler (2004), “So that when one speaks, one speaks a language that is already speaking, even if one speaks it in a way that is not precisely how it has been spoken before” (p. 69). Chinese women bloggers, though not speaking in the literal sense of the word, by engaging in the act of writing and by using a language that has been used before, gain a certain authority as intelligible subjects so that they can make sense to the social world. The language norms that are deeply embedded in social norms deem it imperative for Chinese women to embrace motherhood and the nurturance of the next generation. For this reason, I have read many times on the online forum stories about how a child completes a woman’s life and how happiness consists in taking care of babies tirelessly, from feeding to changing diapers to washing babies’ laundry to singing to babies and talking to babies. To happy mothers, “these mundane everyday practices begin to have significant meanings. Everything and every event that is associated with my daughter in everyday life is like it has been dipped in honey. When they are threaded together, they define happiness.” Of course occasionally there are blogs that mention the hardships of being a mother. However, I used the word “mention” to indicate the brief passing of hardship in sharp contrast to the overflowing songs of praises to motherhood.

Chinese women are conscious that they change their habits and identities because of the arrival of their babies. However, they gladly make the changes of themselves and accept their identity of being mothers in relation to their children. Here is what “Angel from Heaven’s” mother wrote in one of her blogs. “I have been a mother for four years and two months. It is not long, but it is not short, either. The birth of my daughter changed me completely. Some of the changes are good, but some are weird. Mothers,

have a look at the list and see whether you share similar experiences.” The first change she listed is that she doesn't know the taste of food anymore because every meal is rushed so that she can get her daughter to her preschool on time or take her for a walk after supper or have more time to play with her. The second change listed is that she likes books with illustrations. Because she usually reads two to three hours everyday to her daughter, gradually, she has begun to find books with vivid pictures interesting. The next change is that she cannot concentrate on anything for a long period of time anymore because children have shorter attention spans. Now she is influenced by her daughter.

Next she shared how she is interested in finding out about all kinds of activities for children and all kinds of scenic spots so that her daughter will have more opportunities to broaden her horizons. She then shared how she enjoys shopping for her daughter using her natural craze and talent for shopping as a woman. In addition, she is into striking up conversations with people who take care of children. If they happen to have a child who is of a similar age to her daughter, she becomes a chatter-box whose speech revolves around all kinds of child-related topics.

She also finds that she has little to share with her friends who are unmarried or married but childless. Now her circle of friends is all made up of mothers. She brags about being a member of a local mothers' club. But at the same time she wonders if this is sublimation or degradation. In addition, she realizes that she has become nameless because all her friends and her daughter's teachers call her “mother of Angel from Heaven.” She delightfully accepts this address. Using her own words, “When I hear people call me ‘mother of Angel from Heaven,’ it makes me feel better than if people called me ‘CEO So-and-so.’” Also listed are her bent back and waist and her neck

problem. She used to feel exhausted after carrying a bag of eleven-pound rice. Now she won't complain a bit when she has to carry her daughter upstairs who weighs 39 pounds. The last change on her list is her forever fresh desire "to learn new knowledge and new skills. I have learned how to use internet and ps, bought a digital camera and a webcam, and started writing blogs. There are so many new things for me to learn." However, her learning is driven by her love for her daughter.

The changes "Angel from Heaven's" mother has experienced are changes Chinese mothers are expected to go through. Children become the center of a woman's life. In addition to devoting her life to the nurture of her child, she doesn't mind having become nameless. Traditionally Chinese women didn't have a name. In their maternal home before their marriage, Chinese women were called according to their order of birth. Once married, they were called "Mrs. So-and so." Their husband's family name was granted to them. Once they gave birth to a son, they assumed the name of mother of so-and-so. In repeating the social norms that dictate the gender norms and in citing the great joy of how motherhood fulfills a woman's life, Chinese women like Angel from Heaven's mother lend force to gender norms. Furthermore, the gender norms at operation confer the reality of motherhood to Chinese women to produce and constitute Chinese women and, at the same time, to renew and revitalize the norms themselves.

Women who don't see motherhood in this way, who don't show the expected enthusiasm in child-rearing or who are found lacking in some way, are openly criticized. When this happens, the regulatory power of gender norms becomes suddenly explicit. One woman, who calls herself Feng's mother, in one of her blogs shared a poem written by a twelve-year-old child. The poem went, "How I wish life were not this boring. How I

wish life were not this lonely. How I wish life were not like this. Daddy leaves for work early and comes back late. Mommy is in another city. This is life. Loneliness makes me strong.” She criticized the mother of this twelve-year-old for neglecting her child and for shifting her natural duties of taking care of her child to her husband.

She also shared an incident in the same blog. In their neighborhood there is a little boy who has a bad reputation for pinching children younger than him. Once he pinches someone he won’t let go. Feng’s mother knew who his mother was because she had bumped into her briefly a couple times and observed that this woman appeared to be absent-minded. One evening when Feng’s mother took Feng to play downstairs, she had the chance to talk with the woman. From their conversation, Feng’s mother learned that this woman was recently divorced and she had been awarded custody of the child. On learning this, Feng’s mother wrote, “Only then did I realize that if a woman does not have complete love with a man, she won’t be able to devote herself whole-heartedly to her child.” She continued her blog by recounting how the trouble-making child was taken care of by his maternal grandmother who complained to her daughter, “If you knew what were going to happen, would you have this child?” A divorced woman is judged as an inferior mother who cannot take care of a child the way she is supposed to. Motherhood in a broken marriage is deemed bad for the growth of a child. In this reiteration of motherhood, womanhood, and a complete family, this poor divorced woman is triply disciplined. Feng’s mother seems to infer that a divorced woman cannot make a good mother, a woman’s life without a man is unhappy, and a family not made up of a man, a woman, and a child is not a family.

To use her own words, “To a child, a family is not simply the 100-square-meter

house or a piece of lifeless concrete architecture. To a child, a family is one that is made up of a father, a mother, and himself/herself. Family is the place where every morning when the child opens his/her eyes, he/she can touch mother then father. Family is when a child takes a bath, mother makes the tub water ready and father fetches a towel. Family is the weekends when a child can hold both his/her father's hand and mother's hand on the way to..." At the same time, Feng's mother finds great solace in her sacrifice for her family because it is she who gave up her job so that she could live together with her husband. She wrote, "Although I gave up many things in the rush, if I had decided to maintain the status quo and always only talked about waiting for the perfect opportunity for the family to be together, then the courage to give up would dwindle. Then we would be confronted with new problems: Do we want to have a child? It is not good for a child to grow up in an environment where he/she cannot have both motherly love and fatherly love at the same time. It will bring harm to the mental health of a child. I dare not imagine." The advice she gave at the end of the blog to those who live in different cities from their husbands but have a child is that it is worth it to sacrifice your career for the sake of the child. However, she didn't state that many times it is women who are expected to make the sacrifice because that is defined as part of motherhood.

Chinese women began to enter the workforce in great numbers during the Great Leap Forward (1958-61) (Yang, 1999, p. 38). During the Culture Revolution, Chinese women were exalted to the status of "holding up half the sky" by Chairman Mao, the founding father of China. Women worked to the terms laid down by the patriarchal state. "Iron maidens" was the ideal promoted by the state for Chinese women to exert their utmost for the socialist construction. What is worth noting here is that, "While these state



feminist portrayals of women avoided traditional stereotypes of weak and passive women or images as sexual objects in capitalist societies,” they also made invisible the double shift that women had to shoulder and the gender hierarchy in public spaces where men were the decision-makers and women the followers (pp. 42-43).

If “the erasure of gender and sexuality” in public space is what characterized the decades of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s for Chinese women, the binary gender difference was resurrected in the economic reforms in the late 1970s. The economic reform, according to Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (1999), brought into being a new consumer culture that “is based on a fundamental gender bifurcation, and the exaggeration and celebration of gender difference” (p. 50). The economic reform began in the late 1970s witnessed the paradoxical situation of Chinese women. On the one hand, Chinese women had better chances for higher education and of working in more elite jobs. On the other hand, women workers are always the first to be laid off and marginalized when the economic situation was not good. In addition, women graduates from universities and colleges incurred more discrimination in securing a job because of their gender. Furthermore, the gender norm dictating biology as destiny seemed to revive after the revolutionary rhetoric faded away that stated, “Everything male comrades can do, female comrades can do also” (Chairman Mao’s remark quoted in Yang, p. 45). The male-can-do female-can-do revolutionary rhetoric was substituted by images “virtuous wife, good mother;” “battery victims;” personally unfulfilled “strong woman;” and the figure of the “immoral woman” in the reform years of China (pp. 54-55).

The very first image of virtuous wife and good mother is very relevant to this study because of its historical continuity and genealogy. Tani Barlow (1994) traces the

changing categories of women in modern China. The later imperial society applied the “kin-inflected” gender categories of a daughter, a wife, and a mother to Chinese women. “No position existed for female persons outside the *jia*’s [family’s] boundaries” (p. 259). The early twentieth-century’s China under Western imperialism witnessed “a modern, post-Confucian, professionalized intellectual” who transcribed a new colonial biological and sexual “women” (*nüxing*) for Chinese women. This new transcription was embedded in essentialized physiology. Barlow laments, “No positivity, no universal woman independent of man could exist under the terms of recoded Victorian sex binary” (p. 267). When Chinese women were integrated into the category of “women” (*funü*) by the Maoist state, they were subordinated to the dominant categories of class and state biological designs for reproduction (pp. 268-276). The trajectory of the changing categories of women in modern China reveals that the relations of women to men and their families are at the root of their intelligibility. In revolutionary China, state was also added as a defining power in shaping the subjectivities of Chinese women. Consequentially, Chinese women are expected to and also they themselves are prepared to sacrifice once there is a conflict between their work and familial obligation or family life.

One of the blogs I collected was titled “Am I willing to fall behind?” In this blog, “Harvest’s” mother lamented the fact that when her colleagues discussed the features of the latest computer hardware, it sounded like gibberish to her and she could not join in the conversation at all. She would either do her work quietly or smile pleasantly pretending to understand what was going on. In her blog, she could not help expressing her helpless and inexplicable frustration. What is disheartening to me is that she wrote

that she understood why companies were reluctant to hire female graduates from her lived experience, reinforcing the age-old gender norm that women should take care of families and men should bring their potential into full play in the wonderful outside world. She majored in computer science with a concentration on computer programming in college and was very much “into” her subject. Computer journals were her love. However, she ended up working as an accountant. Yet, she always had the dream of going back to IT one day so that she could become a computer programmer. The birth of her son interrupted her dream of working in IT and she became a contented mother. She had no time for computer journals anymore. After six years of taking care of her baby, one day she suddenly realized that she could not understand the tech talk of her colleagues anymore. To make up for this, she bought secretly several journals only to find, first of all, her interest in computer programming was gone, and secondly, the ever-changing IT baffled her so much that she didn’t know where to start or how to catch up. Her interest now is in the computer applications such as Photoshop, Premiere, Cool Edit, and blogging. After all, these applications give her a sense of achievement and can also help her record the growth of her son.

Similarly, “Orange’s” mother wrote about her dilemma of baby and career. She asked for leave to be with her husband in Shanghai when she was four months pregnant. Currently in China, more and more jobs operate on a contract basis. According to an article titled “*China: Women's employment changing*” published in Autumn 1995,

A new employment system called resource-redistribution is already in the works.

For example, women workers are temporarily removed from their posts when they have a child. Joint ventures and private enterprises have put this system into

practice regardless of women's feelings on the matter. When women return to work after their maternity leave, they may find different locations, working hours, working terms and wages related to the specific type of job. These changes give women more options about the kind of job they want to do, changing their outlook and lifestyles. p. 64.

It appears from her blog that "Orange's" mother works for a private enterprise that has this type of resource-redistribution system in place. This enterprise has its headquarters located in Shenzhen and many branch companies in other major cities. Orange's mother was an executive manager of the accounting department of her branch company in Jinan, the capital city of Shandong province. When her maternity leave was almost over, she didn't feel like going back to work at all. Ideally she wanted to be a full-time mother for three years because so many sources told her that these are the crucial years for early childhood development. But at the same time she did not want to stay at home forever. The contradictory feelings she experienced were resolved temporarily by her determination to be a good stay-at-home mother because to her, like many Chinese women, child is much more important than career. She comforted herself by telling herself that she was still young. She should be able to compete in the job market in three years' time if she can recharge herself. The changes in different branch companies made it possible for her to work in Shanghai where her husband was. As a result, when the head of the branch company asked her to come back to work, she took the offer. In her blog, she criticized herself for doing this because it happened so quickly and she didn't have time to think it through. On her first day of going to work, she was tortured by the thought that her mother-in-law would not be able to keep an eye on her daughter all the

time because of her age; she would not be able to cook nutritious meals because she didn't know anything about food science; she would feed "Orange" too much junk food; "Orange" could not understand the Shanghai dialect that her grandmother speaks because she was used to the standard Mandarin spoken by her mother; and her husband would have to pitch in to take care of their baby more. There were countless worries and concerns. To her great relief, everything turned out to be fine and now she is learning to balance work and family life. Encouragingly enough, "Orange's" mother seems to be doing fine.

Chinese women are willing to sacrifice for their families. If they only focus on their career, they would be pitied as "personally unfulfilled 'strong woman.'" What is important to point out is the fact that, "This image is always presented negatively: she does not know how to be a real woman, she neglects her family and children, and she fiercely dominates her husband" (Yang, 1999, p. 55). For Chinese women to be "real women," they had better adhere to the image of virtuous wife and good mother who is willing to put her family's interests before her own self-fulfillment and career advancement. However, more and more career women try their best to manage both their career and families. Here is one example. The following blog was written by the mother of "Flying Seagull."

Tks for writing 'my dear angel' here, angel's papa! I think just when our baby girl old enough, she will understand you. You are now striving after for giving her a good education in the future.

In fact I feel very sorry. Though I was with our baby girl at home, I couldn't spare more time to accompany her because of busy study and work tasks in the past three years. Finally, at the end of 2005 I finished the study tasks in the University and got my master degree, and I changed myself to a new work in a new company, broadband technology related in June in 2006. I was trying my best to study technologies and happy to do that. You know I have such a hope that I can have chance to do technical works while studying related technologies, that's it!

From the end of 2006 on, my work has had been changed again to another dept., value-added services related. It's a happy thing because I'm interested in value-added services. But I can't help but allocate most of my time for so many other farfetched things at work. I'm always trying my best to arrange them better and go home as soon as possible. I think everything will be better than before. So don't worry too much about us. Though I'm still very busy, I'm doing my best to accompany [spend time with] our baby girl more and more after work or in my holidays.

Flying Seagull's mother is one of the many career women in China who struggle to do a good job in both their work and familial obligation. She felt sorry for not being able to devote more time to her daughter and she promised her husband studying in another country that she would do her best to spend more time with their daughter so that he could concentrate on his studies. With more and more people going abroad to study, believing the West to be the source of the latest technology and the best education, many families in China are experiencing long-distance relationships. In many cases, it is the men who study in a foreign country while their wives and children are left behind.

So far, I have been focusing on the regulatory power of gender norms on Chinese women bloggers in regard to their identities, their children, and their families. It is undeniable that Chinese women are defined by the gender norms that dictate women are happy and complete only when they are good mothers and wives. In the case of blogs devoted to how to raise a child, motherhood defined by biology as destiny becomes more salient. However, to pessimistically claim that there is no hope for Chinese women to change the age-long gender norms is misguided. Gender norms require repetition and citation to refresh and reassert themselves. It is precisely the repetition and citation that provide chances for gender norm transformations. After all, gender norms are sedimented to appear to be natural. If in each repetition and citation of gender norms there is a slight change here and there, gender norms become transitioning. The very repetition and

citation of gender norms are also where human agency resides. Butler (2004) eloquently argues, “My agency does not consist in denying this condition of my constitution. If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never choose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility” (p. 3). Indeed Chinese mother bloggers are constituted as happy mothers who enjoy their identity as mothers so much. However, in the very repetition and enactment of motherhood, they give new meanings to motherhood in relation to their daughters.

### *Motherhood and Chinese Daughters*

I mentioned at the beginning of this paper that traditional Chinese social norms only deemed boys to be valuable. The birth of a girl was not occasion for celebrations and the family resources were not likely to be spent on bringing up a girl. I don’t know whether my readers have realized that the Chinese women bloggers I have quoted in this chapter take great pride in their motherhood whether it is a girl or a boy that they gave birth to. Fong’s (2002; 2004) works show that urban daughters enjoy higher status in contemporary China as an unexpected result of the one-child policy because now with usually only one child in a family in cities, it is logical to see the parents investing heavily in their child. While reinforcing the honored motherhood, when enough women think highly of their daughters, the social norms that devalue women will gradually be destabilized and de-idealized. This in turn will bring about changes to gender norms because the former determines the latter. To Chinese women bloggers, their daughters are “lovely angels,” “precious gifts,” and “superb perfections.”

Even women who have boys have begun to question the seemingly entrenched

gender norm that boys' lives are more livable than girls. In one blog, Chenchen's mother entitled her blog with a question, "What if I had given birth to a girl?" At the beginning of her blog, she shared a story she read from a newspaper about how a woman had to bear the burden of raising her daughter all by herself *because* she gave birth to a daughter. Both her husband and her mother-in-law neglected the poor woman and her daughter. With this woman's perseverance and hard work, her daughter was able to go to college and major in dancing. The article reminded Chenchen's mother of her conversation with her father not long after her delivery. Her father told her that the great-grandfather of Chenchen was so happy at a small dinner party for the birth of Chenchen that he remarked, "Only since a boy was born can we enjoy the happiness of having four generations." Chenchen's mother asked herself, "In this patriarchal family, if Chenchen were a girl, would he still be indulged so much by his great grandparents and grandparents?" Chenchen's mother also related how her husband responded when they had argument. He said, "You gave birth to our son and for this you enjoy a special status. Everyone in the family accommodates you. What else do you want?" Chenchen's mother wonders if it is really so good to have a son? "What are the differences between men and women nowadays? There are many successful women and countless good-for-nothing men. Why is people's bigotry so strong? Why can only a boy be counted as the fourth generation and not a girl?" She dared not imagine what would happen to her and her child if Chenchen were a girl. She hoped to use her blog to urge people not to be influenced by these gendered attitudes anymore. She ended her blog entry by saying, "If I could have a second child, I wanted to have a girl to counteract this patriarchal family." Chinese women are fighting a hard battle against the seemingly naturalized social norms.



However, by questioning these social norms and by repeating them in a slightly different way substituting boys with girls, Chinese women become agents rather than victims.

What I see as very encouraging on the online forum is that not only women themselves love their daughters, but they record how their husbands help do housework and take care of their daughters. It is not enough if only women initiate the change in citing their motherhood in subversive ways. When men are involved more and more in opening up the possibilities of valuing girls, there is more hope.

In the introduction, I stated that all my data consist in blogs by Chinese women with one exception. By now, the reason may be clear because I want to use this blog as an example to illustrate the agency Chinese women have in their life and in their families. The letter Dawn's father wrote to her was prefaced by Dawn's mother. She said, "This is the first time that Dawn's father has written something for his daughter. He finished this first letter to his daughter at my request. He usually writes reports at his company. For him to write a prose-style article focusing on emotion is something unusual. Please give your support and encouragement."

In his letter, Dawn's father started his letter by saying, "People have to make plans in their life. When these are realized, new plans will be made." His plans in life were for career, a wife and a child. When having a child was put on the agenda, Dawn's father and mother had some disagreement. He wanted to have a son so that when his son grew older the two of them could swagger down the street whistling. How "cool" that would be. In contrast, his wife wanted to have a daughter because daughters are like warm vests to their parents and she could also dress the little girl like a princess. How wonderful that would be. Of course, he continued, his child was predestined. No matter

whether it was a boy or a girl, it would be a priceless treasure in his life. The pregnancy process saw him doing all the cooking as well as being involved in the early education by talking and reading to the unborn. The first cry at the hospital brought him exhilaration beyond words. When he saw his daughter for the very first time, he said, “My baby, I’m your daddy.” He was disappointed with himself because he could not find any impressive statements to express his great joy and exhilaration. The birth of his daughter changed many things in their family. His knowledge on how to raise a child was almost zero to start with. Now he considered himself an expert in not only how to change diapers, to make bottled milk, to bathe a child but also in child health and psychology.

When his daughter was able to call him “daddy” when she was nine months old, he said it was like falling into a dream world. This simple utterance is more stunning than music from heaven. “Blood is thicker than water” is the phrase he used to describe the bond between him and his daughter. From being actively involved in raising his daughter he deeply understands the continuation of life and the value of life. This father who treats his daughter as his most valuable treasure ends his letter saying, “I don’t know where I read this. But it says that a daughter is a rose planted by a father in a life before the present one. I was deeply touched by this allegory. Dawn, you must be the most beautiful and tender rose that I planted. My life was predestined to have a daughter for me to love and to care for. I will accompany her every minute of her growth. In the next life, I hope she is my princess and we are still a happy family.”

Although destiny and biological lineage are the tropes used in this letter by Dawn’s father to his daughter, the strong love reflected is evidence that Chinese men are becoming a part in the transformative potential of gender norms. On the surface, gender

norms appear to be independent of the social practices that they control. In actuality, their very authority and “ideality is the reinstituted effect of those very practices” (Butler, 2004, p. 48). Promisingly, as Butler contends, “This suggests not only that the relation between practices and the idealizations under which they work is contingent, but that the very idealization can be brought into question and crisis, potentially undergoing deidealization and divestiture” (p. 48). The idealization of true womanhood in relation to motherhood is realized again and again when women participate in the reiteration of the glorification of motherhood. However, when men participate in the same ritual abiding by the same social scripts, we see the social construction of gendered motherhood.

### *Conclusion*

If we take Butler’s theory on gender regulation to understand the social practices of raising a child in China, it is not difficult to see that social practices are undergoing some changes as far as raising girls is concerned. Although motherhood is cited, repeated, and honored again and again in the blogs that I collected, the citations and repetitions are slightly different each time the gender norms are reinstituted. I see more girls being valued. I also see Chinese women striving hard to balance between motherhood and their career, though the latter can never stand in the way of the former. In addition, I also witness more and more Chinese men writing blogs for their daughters. The very constitution of Chinese women’s subjectivities by the regulatory and disciplinary power of gender norms is temporal, conditional, and transitioning. I would like to conclude this chapter by quoting Butler (2004): “Gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized” (p. 42). Gender

constitutes the meanings of true womanhood for Chinese women which are primarily defined by their roles as virtuous wives and good mothers. This lends insight to the blissful state that Chinese mother bloggers experience and cherish. However, the very repetition of the gender norm of good mother, this time by many women collectively to their daughters, redefines what it means to give birth to and nurture a daughter.

#### Chapter Four: Protecting the Sexual Innocence of Our Children

‘Start sex education at home as early as you can’ is the suggestion that dominates the blogs posted in one short period in the summer of 2007 in the blog community featuring the wonderful moments of children’s growth. As good mothers, Chinese mother bloggers are obliged to protect the sexual innocence of their children. The anger they express towards perpetrators of rape and their concern for the safety of their children intrigue me. To understand Chinese mother bloggers’ concern for their children’s safety in terms of sexuality in their overall maturing process, it is important to have a general understanding of the meanings of sexuality in China. It is also necessary to make connections between Chinese mother bloggers’ strong desire to educate their children in terms of sex and sexuality and the institution of heterosexual marriage.

##### *Sexuality in China*

As has been addressed in Foucault’s book, *The History of Sexuality Volume One*, issues of sex and subjectivity are tied together. In China as is in many parts of the world, one’s sex prescribes, to a great extent, what one can do as an individual. Rarely is the concept of sex questioned because of its fundamental role in shaping our understanding of who we are and what our positions and roles are in the social organization. Suiming Pan (2006) points out the fact that there is no Chinese equivalent of the word “sexuality.” He coined the term “*xing cunzai*” to “refer to sex not as a natural category, but rather as something that exists and is understood in terms of existing social frameworks, or as something that refers to the nature of the social organization of sexual behaviours in contemporary China” (p. 24). In spite of the linguistic untranslatability of the term

sexuality, there is no lack of normative discourses on sex and sexuality in people's everyday life practices.

Foucault demonstrates that power functions not only to limit discourse about sexuality, but to produce new discourse about sexuality. He uses the example of the hysterization of women in the West to demonstrate that the female body was thoroughly saturated with sexuality. The discourse of hysterization works to enforce the social regulation of reproductive behaviors and women's bodies. He shows, with this example, and other examples such as the control of children's sexuality and the psychiatrization of perverse pleasure, how sex and sexuality play a fundamental role in the discipline of our moral and social behavior. In China, contrary to the popularly-held idea both in the academic circles and in ordinary people's understanding that "sex was a taboo subject during the period 1949-1980" when "any materials relating to sex ...were strictly forbidden" (Zha & Geng, 1992, p. 2 quoted in Evens, 1995, p. 358), Harriet Evan's research reveals a proliferation of official discourse on gender and sexuality in the 1950s and the continuities between the seemingly rigid 1950s and the seemingly open 1980s in terms of sanctified official discourse on sexuality.

Harriet Evans' (1995) research explains that "disseminated principally under the auspices of official agencies – official publishing houses and state medical, educational, and legal institutions – these materials [articles published in official journals on women and youth such as *Women of China*, *China Youth*, and the *Marriage Law*] transmitted a view of sexuality and sexual differences as a set of biologically determined binary opposites that governed gender behavior" (p. 359). The official discourse on sexuality in the 1950s was "highly selective and explicitly didactic" with the purpose of controlling or

regulating sexual practice in line with the socialist construction envisioned by the new government. The distinctions between right and wrong, normal and abnormal are not at all ambiguous. The scientific authority of medicine that the new government relied on codified normative sexual and gender expectations. In other words, only normative heterosexual relationship for the purpose of reproduction was recognized. Children's sexuality was erased and homosexuality condemned and labeled "as a physical and psychological perversion and violation of nature, if not simply an abysmal crime" (p. 370). Even in recent years, scholarly work has shown how the official discourse that defines and polices sexuality stigmatizes and punishes homosexuality in various ways in China (Li, 2006).

Likewise, the legal discourse embodied by the 1950 Marriage Law reinforced the conflation of sex with reproduction by withholding the right to marriage to those who were impotent or had hereditary diseases or mental disorders (Evans, 1995, p. 367). At the same time, "The law was also premised on a naturalized and hierarchical view of gender relations" (p. 362). The 1950 Marriage Law was revised first in 1980 and then in 2001. Both the 1980 revision and the 2001 revision reaffirmed the principles of the 1950 Marriage Law and the revisions included in the legal concerns issues such as domestic violence and compensations for losses due to divorce. The continual revisions aim to ensure equal rights between men and women in the family (Chen, 2004, p. 159). However, the legal sanctity of monogamy is reaffirmed and strengthened. Although Chinese women can now choose whom to marry and have monogamy as a legitimate form of marriage, which is a great improvement when compared to the widely practiced arranged and often polygamous marriages before 1949, their gendered roles as wives and

mothers as well as their social behavior are clearly defined for them. To sum up, “official discussion of sexuality marked the nexus of knowledge and power – the texts, themes, and representational practices through which knowledge was produced and controlled – as a means of legitimating certain values, practices, and their exponents” (Evans, 1995, pp. 362-63). The joint work of knowledge and power in recent Chinese history has reiterated the normative heterosexual relationship between a man and a woman as the only legitimate form of sexuality.

Harriet Evans (1995) argues that the 1950s official discourse established the terms and gender values for the writings in the 1980s because “throughout the Cultural Revolution, the official discourse contained no public discussion of women’s marital and sexual relationships” (p. 365) and the texts since the 1980s have only the discourse in the 1950s as a reference. She concludes that many of the later texts about sex-related issues resonate those of the 1950s. On the one hand, images of and information about sex have been ubiquitous since the 1980s and there has been more open discussion of women’s sexual pleasure and not solely sex for the purpose of reproduction. On the other hand, as Harriet Evans contends, “a fundamentally biological construction of male and female sexuality continues to inform current discourses about sex, love, and marriages” (p. 384). Sexual pleasure which was not allowed to be talked about in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s was given considerable attention in the 1980s if only for the purpose of ensuring the harmony of nuclear families embodied in married heterosexual couples (Sigley, 2001, p. 133-34). The knowledge/control nexus continued in the 1980s only with changed agents. At this time, instead of only the all-powerful state having a voice, it was joined by other agents such as the medical profession and various commercial forces. In short, although there



were great changes in the context of the discussion of sexuality, in people's attitudes toward sex in China, and space was created for the discussion of sexual pleasure for both partners, the dominant discourse that assumed women's biologically determined gender subordination remained mostly intact (Evans, 1995, pp. 388-389; Siegley, 2001).

Heterosexuality protected by state-sanctified monogamy was and still is the norm. It will be a long time before Chinese women can achieve sexual autonomy.

Heterosexual normativity as exemplified in monogamy as a discursive practice constitutes and dictates the sexual and gender behaviors of Chinese women. As Harriet Evans (1992) argues, on the one hand, monogamy is progress in contrast to the socially accepted polygamous family structures before the women's movement accompanying the May Fourth Movement (1915-21). Both the Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Communist Party identified free-choice monogamous marriage as a necessary step in weakening patriarchal control over women. On the other hand, "Central aspects of the post-1949 official discourse of sexuality represent the monogamous union as a predominantly female standard of marital conduct" (p. 148). As a result, monogamy as a discourse upholds "female fidelity, self-sacrifice and self-denial in the marital context" (p. 148). More importantly, female conformity to the sexual and gender principles consecrated by monogamy is regarded as a condition for familial and social stability and individual happiness. Female sexuality within the boundary of state-recognized monogamy in harmony with the biologically-determined human need for reproduction is naturalized and taken for granted.

Moreover, there is a striking continuity between the discourse on female sexuality in the old patriarchal society and the official discourse of female sexuality after 1949 in

the socialist society. As Lu (1993) laments, the only sexual right a woman had was to bear children, especially sons. Lu writes,

In Chinese patriarchal society women are either used as visual and representational images or as reproductive instruments. In the first instance, women serve as visual or representational images in which the male subject “invests” his erotic desire or ideological beliefs. In the second instance, the female body is treated as a reproductive instrument by means of which the male’s image can be multiplied in time and space. (p. 197)

To carry on the family line was one of the wifely services expected of any virtuous woman though it could, at the same time, become a means of improving her lot and status (Yu, 2004, p. 172). If this summarizes female sexuality in patriarchal society in old China, Chinese women in the post-1949 new China do not fare much better in terms of sexual autonomy as understood by feminists. Chinese women have to constantly discipline their own bodies so that their sexual conduct is in agreement with the needs of their society and family as embodied in monogamy. Harriet Evans (1992) insightfully points out, “The meaning of monogamy as a discursive practice was extended to include what it was not; it served to identify positive forms of behavior and simultaneously isolated as deviant or abnormal modes of conduct which could not be assimilated into the standards of the official discourse” (p. 152). Among those isolated as deviant are the homosexuals, those who choose to remain single, those who do not bear children, and those who engage in premarital sex.

*Save Our Girls*

In China, like in many other countries, rape is understood as a hideous crime. Of all the rape stories or reports, the ones that incite the most public condemnation are those inflicted by an adult on a child. In these cases, it is usually an adult male raping an underage girl. More importantly, rape in Chinese society has specific social and cultural meanings. Originating from patriarchal concern for legitimate male heirs, traditional Chinese culture has morally mandated female virginity or chastity (Stacey, 1983). The cultural fetish for female virginity or chastity contributes to the repression and regulation of female sexuality in China and also to a specific cultural construction of rape. Rape, instead of being cast as violence against women as individual human beings, has been perceived by men as the illegitimate deprivation of a man of his wife's/finance' cherished chastity (Ng, 1987). It is associated with family honor and one's reputation as a virtuous woman. Given this cultural construction of rape, it is not difficult to understand the rage expressed by Chinese mother bloggers when they discuss different rape stories. Almost without exception the perpetrators are adult males and the victim underage girls.

One of the blogs shared a news report from an online source on how a male teacher in a junior high school in a province in the Midwest raped 18 female students about 70 times. According to the online news in the blog, the male perpetrator used both force and seduction to achieve his purposes. The blogger could not help asking why his not-so-smart tactics could work so many times. She concluded that children today lacked sexual safety knowledge, which resulted in the success of "this evil monster." She called her blogosphere friends to pay attention to the exigency of early sex education by saying, "These highly frequent sexual crimes caution us: the destructive hands of evil monsters

have already tried to reach our defenseless, tender, and powerless flower buds. When we are faced with our young, innocent, and naïve children, can we still try to find various excuses to be euphemistic on or even to avoid the subject of sex education?” She continued her reflexivity by asking a series of questions to those mothers who have daughters. She urged those mothers to think about how they could protect their daughters from dangers like the one she shared; how they could teach their children self-defense tactics if they fell into this kind of danger; most importantly, how they could create an environment in which their daughters would tell them about the tragedy right after its occurrence so that remedial action could be taken. All in all, she encouraged her readers to begin sex education as early as possible. She used her personal example to illustrate how to cultivate a sense of the need for self-defense in the heart of her daughter when she was only four years old. But she realized that at the age of four, there is little sex awareness she could instill. She said that she would continue her daughter’s sex education according to the different phases of her daughter’s growth and the changes in her circumstances.

Calling the mothers who have daughters to pay special attention to the sex education of their daughters is a common concern in the blogs. The mother of “Beautiful Princess” also shared her ideas on how important it is to teach girls at a young age to protect themselves so that their chastity would not be compromised. She wrote in her blog that a TV program called “The Soul Garden” featured a fifteen-year-old girl being lured into the house of an acquaintance and raped. The fifteen-year-old did not know that she was five months pregnant. When her parents learned about what had happened, they declared that they would kill their daughter because she had tarnished the family name

and caused them to lose face. The girl chose to have an abortion but her parents refused to sign the medical form. To the mother of “Beautiful Princess,” the man who raped the fifteen-year-old girl was just “an animal who deserved to be shot a hundred times.” The parents of the girl were “like cold-blooded animals” who refused to show sympathy and care for their victimized daughter. “They were not qualified to be parents; they weren’t even human.” The mother of “Beautiful Princess” apologized in her blog for cursing the rapist and the victim’s parents. However, she could not help doing it because tragic stories like this ripped her heart into pieces and caused her to boil with anger.

The mother of “Beautiful Princess” continued her blog by pointing out the urgency of starting sex education as early as possible. She even compared and contrasted the situation of sex education in China and in foreign countries. Foreign countries, as Fong (2004) explains in her work on singletons growing up in the one-child policy environment, refer only to more developed countries in the West. In her ethnographic research, many of the parents of her research subjects “frequently talked about how China was a ‘poor’ (*qiong*), ‘backward’ (*luhou*) ‘developing country’ (*fazhanshongguojia*) that needed to ‘develop’ (*fazhan*) and ‘modernize’ (*xiandaihua*) in order to ‘catch up to’ (*ganshang*) ‘rich/developed countries’ (*fadaguojia*), which were also known as ‘advanced countries’ (*xianjinguojia*) or simply as ‘foreign countries’ (*waiguo*)” (p. 20). The mentality that China is not as prestigious, affluent, or liberal as its foreign counterparts is deeply entrenched in the national psyche of many Chinese people.

It seems that the mother of “Beautiful Princess” thinks that sex education starts the moment a child is born in the West. She claims that parents in foreign countries tell their children their sex, the various physiological differences between men and women,

and pass on knowledge about AIDS and contraception to their kids in a very enlightened manner. She comments that in a country like China that has had almost five thousand years of feudal culture, sex is a dirty word that people seldom mention. However, with globalization, the development of the Internet and the ubiquitous media, children will have access to information on sex sooner or later. So she asks her readers, “Why don’t we take it easy?” She admits that as mothers they are not experts and did not get any information about sex and sexuality from their own parents. However, she believes that as responsible mothers, they should consult books, learn from their foreign counterparts, and use examples from everyday life to teach their kids. She really thinks it important to cultivate a sense of self-awareness in the hearts of children, especially girls. Her suggestion to those parents who have boys is that they should teach their sons to be responsible men in the future.

Chinese women, by and large, learn about sex through their own experience or from peers. Their parents usually regard the discussion of sex as a taboo subject. The mother of “Elegant” in her blog also found it difficult to start sex education. She knew that pretty soon her daughter would ask her questions like “Where did I come from?” When she was young and asked her parents the same question, their answer was “you jumped out of a rock.” For a long period of time in her childhood, the answer her parents gave her made her doubt whether or not they were her biological parents, creating an unnecessary psychological burden for her. She comments that for women of her generation who were born in the 1970s, on the surface, they appear to be liberal and open. But deep down, they are very conservative. She did not know her own body until much later in her life. The little sex education she got from her biology class in junior

high was only very brief and superficial. Her mother never guided her in her transformation from a girl to a woman. She went through menarche, pregnancy, and giving birth all by herself, knowing little about what was happening when it happened. Even after experiencing all these physical changes, she still knows little about them.

Similarly, a rape survivor's narrative quoted in Vincent E. Gil and Allen F. Anderson's (1999) research attests to the almost taboo status of the subject of sex between parents and children in Chinese culture. The woman who did the narrative was raped when she was eighteen. She related,

After the rape, I became more and more angry. Inside, I blamed my family for not telling me anything about sex, about men, about what can happen to people. They should have told me! They should have! I was enraged that they could be so ignorant. My mother never even told me about menstruation; I once saw her menstrual blood and asked where it came from, and she only told me, "Don't ask such foolish questions!" But these are people with some education; they should have talked to me! p. 1159

Recent research on adolescent sexuality in China has shown that adolescents frequently do not obtain knowledge regarding sexuality from their parents. Liying Zhang, Xiaoming Li, and Iqbal H. Smith (2007) offer some explanations, one of which is "the traditional culture norms related to sex education" (p. 360). Nevertheless, the taboo subject of sex does not necessarily mean that there is only repression of sex in China. As has been explained earlier, official discourse flourishes in various forms to uphold heterosexual marriage. The cultural norm of silence on sex is only complicit in ensuring the purity of

girls and women so that they can be constituted as the most suitable for the heterosexual normativity.

Although there has been a considerable lax in the attitude toward premarital sex since the 1980s (Evans, 1992, p. 156), premarital sex that results in pregnancy is still frowned upon. It is the women in these cases that have to bear not only the physical pain of abortion or childbirth but also the stigma of sexual immorality. In the blogs collected, there are two accounts by the mother of “A Child’s Heart” of how her husband who works at a hospital as a gynecologist had a very busy night shift assisting two unmarried women give birth. The first woman who was twenty-one was a migrant worker in China. When she came to the hospital accompanied by her parents, they went to a general department first because she was suffering from a ‘stomachache.’ However, the doctors could not find anything wrong, so they called the father of “A Child’s Heart” to help them so that they could figure out the cause as a team. From the body shape of the woman, he suspected that she was pregnant and in labor. However, no matter what questions he asked the woman, she denied that she was pregnant. It was not until the stethoscope amplified the heartbeat of the baby that the woman admitted that she had fallen in love with a fellow migrant worker. However, her parents were against her marrying him.

At the insistence of her parents she went back home and stayed for half a year. She did not understand much about the changes in her body. Although she noticed she was missing her periods, she felt too ashamed to tell her parents about it. So now she found herself ready to give birth. When the news was broken to her parents, it was like a thunderbolt striking them. The face of the woman’s father was covered with clouds while



the mother of the woman rushed into the examination room to interrogate her. When silence was the only response she got, she burst into uncontrollable shrieks and cries, cursing her daughter for failing to live up to her expectations. It was quite a scene at the hospital. To make a long story short, an unwelcome boy was born into the world because he was born out of wedlock. On top of it, his birth was under the surveillance of not only the hospital, but also the person on duty for municipal family planning and the security personnel in the hospital so that the expenses of the child birth would have to be paid in full by her family and the birth recorded as in violation of family-planning policy.

On the same night, a female college student also visited the hospital with the same symptom. Similarly, she denied that she had had any sexual intercourse. It was again the heartbeat of a baby from the stethoscope that threw the hard fact right in the face of the female college student. She finally admitted that she had only had sex once and never expected and suspected that she would be pregnant. She finally gave birth to a healthy boy but insisted that the hospital not contact her parents or her school. However, the persistent and patient strategy of the hospital finally succeeded in getting the contact information of the female college student. When the parents of the female college student showed up, there was another inevitable big public scene.

The mother of “A Child’s Heart” who offered these accounts wrote in her blog that it was understandable that the parents of these women would be angry and desperate in this situation. However, it was the immature girls in these stories who deserve more sympathy in her opinion. Instead of denouncing the so-called immoral sexual behaviors of these women – condemnation endorsed by the official discourse – this mother blogger thought that it was the responsibility of both parents and schools to disseminate the

necessary sex education to eradicate sexual ignorance so that adolescent girls and young women would know the meanings of their menstrual cycles and how to avoid pregnancy. She pointed out that neither their parents nor their schools had given sex education enough attention. They either avoided the topic altogether or were very indirect in their discussions. It is not difficult to see why children growing up in this environment would make such mistakes.

On the one hand, the mother blogger challenged the official discourse on female sexuality by not placing total responsibility on those two young women involved. On the other hand, she thought that these pitiful women had made a terrible mistake in their lives which would certainly create a number of side effects for their physical, psychological, and moral well-being. Associating female sexuality with morality and social stability is the very effect of the discursive practice of the official discourse on female sexuality. As Harriet Evans (1992) contends,

For alongside the abundance of advice and information about sex-related matters [in the reform years], and despite the changes in the modality of the official discourse of sexuality, it is clear that much of it is, as in the 1950s, oriented towards channeling individual, and particularly female, behaviors in the service of social and moral order. More specifically, in the context of the present discussion, much of the discourse continues to identify the monogamous relationship as the site in which women's responsibilities to society are properly realized. p. 156

Likewise, Gary Sigley (2001) argues that there are two discourses on sexual pleasure in the post-1949 China. One is "the sexual austerity of the Mao period (1949-78)" and the other being the "confinement of sexual pleasure to the married heterosexual couple" (p.

131). All in all, appropriate sexual behavior is still defined by and large by the officially endorsed heterosexual monogamy.

The physical, psychological, and moral well-being identified by the mother of “A Child’s Heart” are implicitly embedded in the discourse of monogamy which functions as a disciplining power. It is made more powerful when universal marriage for women is almost a complete reality. If as a woman, you maintain your behavior, whether it is social or sexual, within the boundaries of a good woman, you will enjoy happiness. Otherwise, your life will be miserable. Premarital sex resulting in pregnancy is bad for the women because they have to bear both practical and social consequences. In addition, in contemporary China within the mandate of the one-child policy, good womanhood is paradoxically embodied in “monogamy [that] is associated both with sexual fidelity and with fertility control” (Evans, 1992, p. 160). Only when Chinese women fulfill their wifely service, maintain their sexual fidelity, and are able to reproduce an offspring within the state-allowed quota can they enjoy happiness associated with true womanhood and domestic bliss. Those who have had ‘deviant’ sexual experiences are doomed to suffer various consequences that will adversely affect their adult life.

#### *Sex Education for Our Children*

Along with the fear that sexual ignorance might make their daughters victims of rape or sexual assault, the hope that their daughters will have a normal and satisfactory adult life characterized by heterosexual monogamy undergirds the strong desire on the part of Chinese mother bloggers to start sex education at home. Gary Sigley (2001) traces key components in the governmentalization of the Chinese family and concludes that it is

Chinese women who have to relay “governmental programs from the macro level of the population to the micro level of the family” by being virtuous wives and good mothers (p. 142). They have to satisfy and support their husbands, manage family relations, and raise quality children. Quality children, or girls in particular, entail more than a body that is strong, supple, aware, and moving forward as discussed in Anagnost’s (1995) research. It means chaste girls who will make virtuous wives and good mothers in their adulthood. One dimension of the micro level of the family is reflected in the blogosphere in the sex education for their daughters by Chinese mother bloggers.

Both the mothers of “Angel from Heaven” and “Sunshine Eva” started sex education for their daughters at the early age of two. The mother of “Angel from Heaven” wrote, “There might be some people who wonder why we should teach sexual knowledge to kids. In fact, I don’t think that it is embarrassing to impart sexual knowledge to children. It is we adults who mystify it.” Similar reasoning was given by the mother of Sunshine Eva. She said that “I don’t know the big reason. But I feel that these should be shared with our children frankly.” When she bathed her daughter, she would name the different body parts of her daughter so that she would know their names. She encouraged her daughter to “wash your hands,” “wash your chest,” and “wash your vagina...” She thought that as body parts, sexual organs were not any different from other body parts.

In addition, the mother of “Angel from Heaven” shares her experience in using books with illustrations for kids as a good resource to be “scientific” in imparting the necessary knowledge. In her blog, she shows what kinds of books she uses for the subject. She also shares some of the interesting moments when her daughter has applied her knowledge on different occasions. One day at kindergarten, for example, “Angel

from Heaven's" teacher asked her class to come up with some examples for liquid. Her answer was "Amniotic fluid." When Angel from Heaven learned that her aunt was pregnant, she asked her mother to tell her aunt that when she felt pain in her stomach it meant that the baby was on its way. There are also other humorous examples illustrating how Angel used her knowledge in her everyday interactions.

In the blogosphere, mothers who have boys are also keen on sex education. The mother of "Rain Son" bought a book titled "Where did I come from" as his gift for Children's Day. When she thumbed through the book and came across the following description, she stopped. The book says, "They want to have a baby. On a special day, they have physical contact with each other. They desire to be more intimate, so the man inserts his penis into the vagina of the woman. The penis gets very excited. The testicle attached to the penis contains large amount of sperm. They come into the body of the woman through her vagina and get into the egg in the woman's body. Thus a fertilized egg comes into being. This is the beginning of a new life." When the mother of "Rain Son" read this part of the book, she had a strong urge to tear this page out of the book because it uses such plain language. However, the content on the following page changed her mind. It basically says to the child reader that the body of your mother has room for a baby to grow. However, it does not have the seed of a baby. The body of your father has the seed but does not have the necessary room. Therefore, it is only through the union of your father and mother that a baby can be born. In other words, you are the crystal of their love. The dilemma of whether to read the book verbatim was finally resolved when this mother decided to emphasize to her son the importance of having a baby after

marriage. In this context, it is clear that her point of reference is the heterosexually normative monogamous sanctity.

Early sex education is regarded as an important topic by Chinese mother bloggers. They resort to published books as a valuable resource to disseminate knowledge on sex, believing in the ultimate authority of science and knowledge. However, what we have to realize in the context of Chinese society is the persistent presence of the nexus of knowledge and power. It is the discourse that is in agreement with the biopower of the state that is multiplied. The dissemination of knowledge about sex is inevitably connected with the reiteration of the normative monogamous family. Both boys and girls are indoctrinated into the realm of heterosexual monogamy. The micro level of the family as reflected in the efforts Chinese mother bloggers have made in imparting sex education reinscribes and rejuvenates the moralizing and disciplinary power of monogamy, strengthening its normative status.

In the blogosphere, by showing concerns to the possible danger of their daughters falling victims to sex ignorance and by sharing information on how to use the so-called scientific knowledge to equip their children, the Chinese mother bloggers fulfill their expected roles of being responsible and good mothers. The discursive practice of monogamy leaves deep imprints on the everyday practices of the Chinese mother bloggers so that they not only perform their wifely and motherly duties faithfully but also make sure that their children would remain innocent, pure, and chaste in order to enjoy the conjugal heterosexual relations when they grow up. However, in participating in the normalizing process of heterosexual monogamy, they contribute to the reiteration of a confining and limiting female sexuality and the pathologization of infantile, adolescent,

and homoerotic sexualities. Female sexuality is defined by and confined within heterosexual normativity.

Ann Oakley (1996) addresses the socially constructed nature of female sexuality in the West. She exposes the stereotypes assigned to female sexuality. She writes, “The female sexuality is supposed to lie in her receptiveness and this is not just a matter of her open vagina: it extends to the whole structure of feminine personality as dependent, passive, unaggressive and submissive” (p. 36). Her argument is shared and supported by other feminist works. Stevi Jackson (1996) also endorses that the definition of sexuality includes not only the genital sexual activity, “but [to] all the attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors which might be seen to have some sexual significance in our society” (p. 62). She urges us to not overemphasize the biological determination of sexual attitudes and behavior but to take into consideration the historical and cultural impacts on shaping how we understand sexuality. She strongly thinks, “To understand why female sexuality takes the form that it does, we need to explain cultural notions of femininity, attitudes to sexuality, and the whole interrelationships between our private lives and the structure of our society” (p. 64).

At the risk of extreme oversimplification, I would like to make an effort to unpack these three interrelated dimensions. The cultural notions of femininity in China are very much shaped by the Confucian teachings that stressed chastity as the greatest of womanly virtues. Among the highly valued feminine qualities were modesty, gentleness, obedience, and supportiveness. In terms of sexual life, women could only have intercourse for procreation within the institution of marriage while men could pursue sexual pleasure with their secondary wives and/or in brothels. For Chinese women, their

sphere was confined to the private domesticity. It was not until the 1950s that Chinese women “completed two leaps at the same time” because of the discursive dominance of revolution: “the first out the feudal family and into society, and the second out of feudal society and into the modern sense of the nation-state” (Li, 1999, p. 267). However, Chinese women stepped into the public sphere and structure established by male patriarchs on their terms.

As mentioned above, the Mao period, which spans from the 1950s, the 60s, to the 70s, was characterized by “sexual austerity” and the deployment of sexuality since the 1980s has been very much tied to its utility for the economic and political reform and the stability of society (Sigley, 2001). A new component of “femininity” in the economic reform era is the “housewifization” of women so that they are encouraged to think of themselves housewives first, workers second (Jordan, 1996). Similarly, Harriet Evans (1992) discusses the impact of the “refamilisation” of Chinese society on Chinese women’s sexuality. At precisely the time when Chinese women would seem to have been freer than ever before to engage in activities and experiences outside the domestic sphere, “the recurring glorification of women’s domestic roles” constantly reminded them that heterosexual monogamous families are the place where their primary societal responsibilities lie (pp. 160-161). As Harriet Evans point out, “Within the family, it is the conjugal couple that is the fulcrum of order, and within this relationship, it is women who are asked to bear the major responsibility for domestic affairs, whether as the main consumer of labour-saving devices within the household, or as the bearer and nurturer of children” (p. 160).



As bearers and nurturers of children, Chinese mother bloggers take their responsibilities seriously of imparting sex education to their children, their daughters in particular. In so doing, they are reconsolidating the ideology of chastity that shapes their very female sexuality, emphasizes wifely service and female fidelity, hence the social and cultural meanings of female sexuality. However, in arguing that Chinese mother bloggers are constituted by the discourse of monogamy that consecrates only heterosexual normativity, I am not suggesting that they are only passive recipient of social forces and the embodiment of the oppressive female sexuality in China. It is also important to emphasize that by engaging in the active discussion afforded by the blogosphere with those who are in similar situations, Chinese mother bloggers are actively engaged in exercising their agency in defining what sex and sexuality mean. Although their purpose in addressing this issue is for the protection of the sexual innocence of their children, the discussion itself and the action of telling their daughters about their body parts and the importance of self-defense are breaking the spell of female passivity and submissiveness, which are important steps on the way to achieving sexual autonomy.

Margaret A. McLaren (2002) contends that it is important to understand subjectivity as “multivalent and complexly constructed” (p. 60). Her insightful readings of Foucault’s works show that Foucault’s subjects are intrinsically produced by social relations. However, they are capable of resistance. “It is through power and its constitution of the subject that resistance is possible” (p. 66). Chinese mother bloggers are certainly the effects and vehicles of power embodied in the cultural notions of femininity, attitudes toward sexuality, and institutionalized heterosexual monogamy.

They are, at the same time, self-constituted subjects in the blogosphere and in their everyday life.

This active self-constitution is well documented in Xiaojiang Li's (1999) research. In her work, she addresses the different discourses that shape Chinese women's subjectivities historically, culturally, and socially. She points out that even "in the tightly sealed environment of those times [the 1950s, the 60s, and the 70s]" when the discourse of revolution was the only legitimate ideology,

Our generation of women can take our own life experiences to prove that the feelings and emotions of real life are the most effective weapons with which to overturn a dominant discourse of power. While losing our control over language and even our ability to think reflectively, life experiences become a potential form of discourse that can smash through the barriers encasing us in discourse. They can cast doubt on consciousness that has become rigidified and institutionalized. Real-life experiences enable us to say "No!" to discourses that try to construct and regulate our lives. (pp. 271-72)

If Chinese women could resist the dominant discourse of revolution in the times of the autocratic and tyrannical control of the Maoist era, how much more can they forge new forms of resistance in the more relaxed atmosphere since the 1980s? Although monogamy as endorsed by the state is still the only legitimate space to express one's sexuality, Chinese mother bloggers are no longer satisfied with silence on the topic of sexuality. In addition, they begin to place sexual responsibility both on both men and women. Further, they are starting the journey of explicitly defining sexuality for their children through open dialogue. Hopefully, from their lived experience, Chinese mother

bloggers will influence their daughters in demanding their rights to make autonomous decisions about their sexuality and demand policy changes so that sex education will be mandatory in schools.

## Chapter Five: Blogs and the Self in Relation to Others

The previous chapters have mainly been focused on Chinese mother bloggers' involvement in the formation of their children's subjectivity or on who they want their children to be within the context of globalization. In other words, I have looked at how the technologies of power or domination have constructed Chinese mother bloggers' subjectivity so that they participate actively not only in self-constitution but also in the shaping and reconstructing of the gender of their children, most of whom are girls. Technologies of power, according to Foucault (1988a), work on both the bodies and souls of individuals so that they become docile and useful subjects of domination. In addition, technologies of power or domination are the means of "objectivizing of the subject" (p. 18). Individuals are thoroughly enmeshed in power relations and they are the products of disciplines and various discourses. They not only participate in the production of their own subjectivity, they also actively engage in the processes of objectivizing their children so that their children will join the docility-utility complex. However, this is not the only technology that Foucault has explored. In his later works, he is more interested in how individuals act upon themselves or engage in the technologies of the self. In this chapter, I will explore how blogs as self-writing can be a process of subjectification. By subjectification, I mean the processes through which individuals "act upon, monitor, improve, and transform" themselves to constitute themselves into active agents (Foucault, 1990, p. 28).

In the face of the technologies of domination, Chinese mother bloggers are constrained and constituted by the discourse of quality child and nation-building and biopower. They emerge, as a result, as responsible citizens and mothers who not only try

their best to give birth to healthy babies but also ensure that their children are quality children, well-rounded and able to compete globally. Their blogs on how they participate in the education of their children both produce and maintain truth about themselves. That is, they are “sensible” parents and citizens. In regard to their relational role as mothers, Chinese mother bloggers reify the glory of motherhood and the seemingly essential and universal connection between motherhood and womanhood. Many of them participate in the making of motherhood as the solely most meaningful endeavor worth pursuing for any real woman. In so doing, they not only naturalize women and motherhood but also exclude many others who choose not to be mothers or those who, for various reasons, cannot be mothers. Their gendered selves in relation to motherhood play an active part in gendering motherhood. In addition, as far as sexuality is concerned, Chinese mother bloggers again work together with the dominant discourse on sexuality that deems chastity for girls imperative for happy heterosexual marriage in the future.

However, my intention in reflecting on how Chinese mother bloggers, through their blogging practice of the self, reproduce and reify the dominant discourses on quality child, motherhood, and sexuality in China, is not to show that they are helpless in being complicit in their own constitution and oppression. On the contrary, I would like to emphasize the importance of understanding subjectivity as “multivalent and complexly constructed” (McLaren, 2002, p. 60). Instead of understanding the subject as a determined, passive body incapable of agency, I would like to look at their self-constitution through the act of blogging.

Using feminist appropriation of Foucault’s (1988) theory on the technologies of the self, I investigate “how agency and control are activated collectively and in context”

as theorized by Morwenna Griffiths (1995, p. 79). Feminist thinkers like Margaret A. McLaren (2002) see the connection between Foucault's notion of technologies of the self and some contemporary feminist practices such as consciousness-raising, journal writing, and women's autobiography. She argues that they are practices or technologies of the self because all of these practices have social transformation as the aim. Building on this feminist understanding of self-writing as a practice of the self, I contend that blogging, as a form of self-writing, reflects the gendered, embodied, and ethical subjectivities of Chinese mother bloggers as well as their agency. Their practices of the self are in relation to their multi-faceted selves as mothers, wives, career women, and friends, to name a few, as well as to their culture, and to the historical background that they live in.

Chinese mother bloggers' blogging manifests the gendered subjectivity of Chinese mother bloggers in that motherhood is still defined and understood as a given in the blogosphere. Their blogging also suggests their embodied subjectivity because it is firmly grounded in their lived experiences as women with children. Simultaneously, it reflects their ethical subjectivity because they are engaged in self-transformation, reflection on their practices, and the creation of a new culture of the nurturing of the next generation. The embodied subjectivity and ethical subjectivities of Chinese mother bloggers witness their agency in the practices of rearing children. Chinese mother bloggers question the rigid educational practices in China starting from a young age. They also foster a new relationship in the mediated space of the blogosphere characterized by more equal friend-like relationship between parents and their children. At the same time, their agency in the context of child-rearing promises a prospect of shared parenting, thus subverting the assumption that parenting is a sphere naturally

associated with a specific gender. Equally important to the issue of agency is the fact that Chinese mothers form their own online community. By creating and maintaining a community of their own, Chinese mother bloggers break through the barriers to their voices being heard and carve out a space for themselves to articulate their distinctive interests in child rearing.

*Feminist Appropriation of the Technologies of the Self*

Foucault's later works such as *The history of sexuality volumes Two* (1990) and *Three* (1988b), as well as essays and interviews are concerned with the self's relation to self. He points out that there are four major types of technologies: technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, technologies of power, and technologies of the self. What is important to bear in mind is that these four technologies are present simultaneously. They interact with one another. To Foucault (1988a), technologies of the self "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (p. 18). Technologies of the self are not static over different historical periods. Foucault's exploration of technologies of the self in antiquity reveals that techniques of the self include practices such as dream interpretation, correspondence between friends, careful regulation of the body through diet and exercise, and sexual austerity. However, the technologies of the self in antiquity, or what Foucault (1990) terms the "arts of existence" (p. 10) in the Greek and Greco-Roman cultures were only concerned with ethics for men, or for free men, to be exact. The goal of the arts of existence was for free men to "constitute themselves as subjects of moral conduct" (p.

29) so that they could fill their proper places in the household, society, and politics. An ethical subject is formed through “modes of subjectivation” that act upon, monitor, test, improve, and transform the subject.

In spite of this limitation to only male ethical subjects, Margaret A. McLaren (2002) sees the connection between Foucault’s notion of technologies of the self and some contemporary feminist practices. She argues that consciousness-raising as a practice or technology of the self draws the connection between “individual experience and social transformation” (p. 146). Although, as McLaren points out, the focus on a shared experience of women, and the assumption that sexism affected all women in the same way were some obvious limitations of consciousness-raising, the aim of consciousness-raising was to generalize from the experiences that women share so that they could see that their individual experiences, sufferings, or problems did have political implications. In this way, they could develop strategies for political action. The ultimate goal of consciousness-raising was the change of social and political institutions. Consciousness-raising, according to McLaren, “exemplifies the type of self-transformation that Foucault refers to in his discussion of practices of the self. One engages in practices of the self to produce self-transformation within a social context” (p. 159). What is important to point out is that self-transformation is an important step toward social and political transformation. While the practices of the self are still constrained by the social, political, and historical contexts and the culture that the self is embedded in, the practices of the self can achieve agency by forming “nonnormalizing modes of existence and relationships” (p. 159). It is through the practices of the self such as consciousness-raising that women can see the political implication of their personal



lives and demand and work for changes in society.

Besides consciousness-raising, journal writing and women's autobiography are also thought of as "feminist practices of the self" (McLaren, 2002, p. 151). Foucault (1988a) deems writing important if one is serious about taking care of oneself in the Hellenistic age. He explains, "One of the main features of taking care involves taking notes on oneself to be reread, writing treatises and letters to friends to help them, and keeping notebooks in order to reactivate for oneself the truths one needed" (p. 27). The self's relation to self is thus also achieved through the act of writing because the writing activity itself provides space for self-reflectivity and self-knowledge, both of which are important for self-transformation. "The self is something to write about, a theme or object (subject) of writing activity" (p. 27). Foucault's elaboration on the importance of writing to the culture of taking care of oneself lends force to the feminist argument that journal writing and women's autobiography are practices of the self. As different forms of self-writing, both are important feminist practices of the self because both draw on personal experiences and both allow "the woman to speak for herself" (McLaren, 2002, pp. 151-52). They give voice to subjugated knowledge. However, the writing activities of journaling and autobiography do not take place in a vacuum. They happen within specific historical and cultural conditions. Blogging as a kind of self-writing in the public sphere of the online space is a new phenomenon in the age of Web 2.0. McLaren insightfully shows that self-writing "can either be an exercise in subjection, if it produces the required truth about oneself, or it can be a process of subjectification, if one critically examines how one came to be as one is with reference to normalizing discourses" (p. 152). Likewise, blogging can be a process of subjection or subjectification.

Indeed many of the blogs I observed are about mundane daily practices such as the new hairstyle of a child, the kind of meals most suitable for children in the summer, and the stories that parents read to their children. There are also many blogs about how to gender their children in terms of their sexuality and how to form their children's subjectivity in the context of globalization. However, in the blogs I collected, there are also many mother bloggers who actively reflect on their practices of rearing their children.

*Too Much Pressure is No Good*

One such reflection is along the dimension of whether it is sensible to put too much pressure on children. One of the blogs maintained by "Little Moon" expresses her doubt regarding the necessity of sending one's child to a so-called five-star daycare in the city of Shenzhen, one of the most developed cities in China (because it is being used as an experiment for Deng's open-door policy). She recorded in her blog that in May 2007, a daycare called "British Royal Daycare" had a grand opening ceremony in a residential area for the well-to-do in the city. The head of the daycare boasted about the state-of-art facilities as well as the quality of their teachers. The library houses many books published in the West in English, many kinds of reading materials in digital format, the classical readings in Chinese in hard cover and so on and so on. In the daycare, there is also a theater which cost 5 million Chinese yuan to build, a multi-purpose dance hall, an art gallery, and an abstract-thinking training hall. All of the teachers are college graduates with at least a bachelor's degree who are proficient in both Chinese and English. Each class would also be assisted by a British teacher to ensure an environment where the children could "learn English seamlessly." To enjoy this so-called first-rate, five-star

head start preschool education, parents would have to pay 60,000 Chinese yuan a year, the equivalent of almost \$8,300.

On the one hand, “Little Moon” admitted that there must be a reason for its existence if something exists in the first place. On the other hand, she could not help expressing her discomfort at the thought of the glaring disparity experienced by children located in different parts of China. Her heart was troubled by the thought that there were children in the poor and remote areas of China who had to study in debilitating and crumbling buildings often exposed to the elements while children in rich places like Shenzhen could enjoy such luxurious facilities. She asked why children growing up under the same red flag could have such different experiences in terms of education. She also asked whether it is really that important to learn English. Even if it is important, couldn’t children wait until they are a bit older? She questioned the functionality of the theater in the same blog. Could children who perform there really become “superstars” in the future? She pointed out that after all, this daycare was indeed only a daycare with a lot of fun-oriented facilities and how useful was it really in cultivating the children into truly useful people?

“Little Moon” lamented the trend that children were thrown at a very young age into the vicious cycle of endless competition. Before they even know the basics of life and themselves, they are sent to receive “demon” training that emphasizes competition and supremacy in the arena of life. What if a child cannot emerge as a winner? Would this have ill effects on the psychological well-being of the child? Would the child become an unhappy person? “Little Moon” ended her blog with her memory of a happy and carefree childhood even though at that time in terms of material comfort, her generation

could not match the high living standard enjoyed by the young generation of today. She concluded her blog that day by stating “we decide to choose happiness rather than competition for our child.”

In terms of decreasing pressure for children during their formative years, “Little Moon” is not alone in her call to choose happiness rather than competition for her child. Fong’s (2004) ethnographic work has forcefully shown the importance of being admitted into prestigious universities in China. Toward this goal, many parents are willing and earnest to participate in disciplining their children by imposing a rigid schedule on their children’s extracurricular hours on top of the endless homework and test-oriented education from the school system. Discipline of the younger generation in terms of education has become the normalizing practice. However, this norm is not always happily accepted by Chinese mother bloggers. In the blogosphere, Chinese parents address the role parents should play in ensuring a bright future for their children.

One of Charming’s blogs tells stories about how children from her hometown, a small ordinary town in China, became students in Beijing University and Tsinghua University, the two most famous universities in China. In her blog, she recorded her memory of one student, who was the daughter of one of her colleagues. This little girl, according to her recollection, was a student with inborn talent. Rather than being studious all the time, she would be the one who created troubles by chit-chatting with her peers or playing with little toys while the teacher was lecturing. “A Little Elf” was the nickname used for her in the blog. Back when “Little Elf” was in elementary school, extracurricular training classes were not the norm yet. She was not sent to special training afterschool classes like the Math Olympics Class. There was little homework for the kids to work on

each day. So the after-school hours of the children were spent on all kinds of play and “Little Elf” was always remembered as the one who knew how to have the most fun.

Charming commented that the Little Elf was lucky because she grew up in a stress-free environment so that her overall aptitude was well protected. There was little discipline and didactic teaching. It was not until her senior high school years that she began to concentrate more on studies. The Little Elf’s time and interest were left to her in most cases. As a result, she learned everything with a delightful heart and without any extra burdens.

Through the story of “Little Elf” who finally made her way to Beijing University and the reflections on her own schooling, “Charming,” like “Little Moon,” grieved over the deplorable situations that many children find themselves in today. Once they step into the doors of schools, they have to live with countless hours of homework and under immeasurable pressure. The so-called best is only manifested in terms of grades. To earn better grades, students are forced to read more, to memorize more, and to do more mechanistic and repetitious homework. “Charming” doubts whether doing endless homework will really be useful in the long run. She also thinks that the different kinds of special training classes are only after money. When students are thrown into “mountains of books and seas of tests,” they can not see any hope of reaching a destination. As a possible consequence, they may often fall into an abyss of desperation. The education as “Charming” understands now only cares about the endurance of students. Whoever can endure until the end might be able to go to a good university. However, even if children become successful, what kind of success will it be? Children who become so-called successful in this kind of cut-throat competitive environment may be rebellious in the

end, or lose themselves in the pursuit of a “successful” life, or can not function without other people forcing them and telling them what to do. In addition, she worries that children growing up like this may not have a well-rounded character and may not be able to live a healthy life in the future.

To “Charming,” it is fortunate for kids to have the guidance from teachers and it is lucky for them to have the love and care of their parents. However, most important of all, children should be able to enjoy independence and freedom and to use their own time in the way they see fit. She finished this particular blog by saying that not every child will go to Beijing University or Tsinghua University. But being educated in a famous university is not the only way to become successful and useful. The advice she gives to parents is that they should give their children more opportunities to experience and learn from life and interfere as little as possible.

Many parents would like to see their children live a happy and stress-free life. However, they have to live within a lot of contradictions. On the one hand, they know the importance of cultivating interest in their children’s heart without too much external influence. On the other hand, when they witness their peers rushing their children into the rat race by imposing a rigid schedule with all kinds of special training programs, they are afraid that their own children will be left behind on the starting line. The mother of “Happy Flower Bud” is just one of the many examples. “Happy Flower Bud” is a girl of seven. Her mother in one of her blogs questions the point of rushing her daughter, “Happy Flower Bud,” to different contests. She records that during the first week of May 2007, when many people enjoyed the week-long Labor Day holiday, her daughter attended at least five rounds of two kinds of contests: story-telling and chess. Each

contest was delineated into the initial selection, second screening, semi-final, and final. Although they seemed endless, to her comfort, her daughter won the second place in the chess contest. The strong performance of her daughter resulted from her own trying her best as a mother: she accompanied her daughter throughout the contests, played with her daughter in mock chess contests, cooked nutritious food, ensured enough sleep, and so on. She could not help expressing the tiredness that she experienced as a “good” mother.

At the same time, although she took her daughter for every round of the contest, she asks herself in the blog, “Is it worth it to torture the child again and again for the contests?” She does not think that it is a good idea to train the rote memory of small children just for the sake of telling stories. But she is well aware of the fact that very soon when her daughter would start her elementary education in the fall, she would have to recite one text once every two days. Maybe the rote memory training she received for the purpose of the contests would help prepare “Happy Flower Bud” for her school life ahead. She also asks which child in contemporary China does not have to go through the ordeal of numerous special interest training programs and myriad of contests or competition of different kinds. Instead of coming up with some lessons for the blog community to learn or giving advice to parents who have to go through similar situations as hers, she ends her blog with a question of what she should do: to accompany her daughter to different contests or let her daughter enjoy herself.

My focus throughout this research is on Chinese mother bloggers blogging about their practices of rearing children; it is important to insert here the importance of community. Blogging is comparatively an individual mode of technology of the self in that it is an individual blogger herself who is engaged in the act of self-writing. However,

as Foucault explains, the technologies of the self can be achieved by the individual's reflection or by the individual with the help of others. In the case of Chinese mother bloggers, the community is formed by women who share the common experience of raising their children. Many blogs get responses from the community members. Take the question of the mother of "Happy Flower Bud" for example. Her question was not left unanswered. Quite a few responses point out the importance of having the right attitude toward contests. It is not the number that really matters. The suggestion is that if both the mother and the daughter can treat each and every contest as a chance to cultivate strong will, patience, and perseverance, they should be beneficial. But if they participate only for the sake of winning, then they may find themselves living under constant pressure.

So far, I have only elaborated on one of the kinds of reflection that Chinese mother bloggers engage themselves in their blogs. They definitely address the issue of what kind of education is good for their children in the future. Is it the kind that dominates the education landscape in contemporary China, which emphasizes competition and supremacy? The few reflections discussed here seem to suggest otherwise. It seems that they long for an education that gives room for the individual development of their children according to their aptitude and interest and time. Now I will turn my attention to another kind of reflection that emerges in the blogosphere that is also important in addressing the issue of agency: the formation of new relationships between parents and children and also between husbands and wives.

### *New Relationships*

Chinese culture, from a Western perspective, is high context, collectivistic, and has large power distance (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980). When taken together with



research conducted by intercultural researchers, it is not difficult to see that the Confucian notions of harmony, face, and filial piety are still the main determinants of Chinese communication patterns and parent-child relationship (Chen & Starosta, 1997; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Jia, 1997; Wu, 1996). Traditional Chinese parents expect their children to respect and obey them. The relationship is usually characterized by an institutionalized hierarchy that gives parents more power over their children.

In regard to child rearing, Chinese culture has endorsed the myth that women have been and are better at the day-to-day care of children, especially when the children are young. However, recent psychological and sociological studies cited in Diane Enrensaft's (1994) research reveal that men are as capable as women both physically and emotionally to parent. Parenting here does not only refer to the day-to-day care of children, but also the parent-child relationship. If children only grow up in female-dominated parenting situations, it is very likely that they will follow the gender-differentiated cultural institutions when they grow up, reproducing the gendered practices of parenting. It is shared parenting that fosters an individualization of self in a child, who is from two people, both a mother and a father. It is also shared parenting that breaks the gender-linked parental interpersonal environment. Enrensaft argues, "If different interpersonal environments for girls and boys in the family create different 'feminine' and 'masculine' personalities and preoccupations, an elimination of the different interpersonal environment through equal parenting by men and women should eliminate those personality differences" (p. 437). If we admit that families are the primary force in gender socialization, then the involvement of men in parenting is of great significance for fostering a new interpersonal environment at home.

With the advent of techno-space such as blogosphere, with the normalization of having only one child most of the time for urban people in China, and with parents today eager to learn new ways of parenting, a new relationship is emerging in the mediated space of blogosphere characterized by more equal friend-like relationship between parents and their children. At the same time, parenting is less regarded as a sphere naturally associated with a specific gender. More and more men are involved in the care of children. Very encouragingly, the blogosphere presents a prospect of shared parenting.

Let me first elaborate on the emergence of shared parenting in the blogosphere. In Chapters Two and Three, I already touched a little on men's presence in the blogs devoted to child rearing. For example, Jack and Lily's father participates in the blogging on how the family creates an English-learning environment for the kids. Another example that is relevant here is the man who wrote how his daughter was like a rose he planted in the previous life. Here I will focus on shared parenting. During my data collection, I was struck by the fact that there are quite a few fathers who take their fathering so seriously that they are willing to devote a lot of time recording their practices of parenting. At first, I did not know what to do with them because my focus was on Chinese mother bloggers. Blogs maintained by men for their children didn't fit my criteria of data collection. However, I decided to keep a few of them. It was not until I came to the writing of agency that the meanings of these blogs began to dawn on me. They are indeed examples of shared parenting, although it may not generally be equal parenting.

An exception is the case of "Uttering Long Wheezing Cries in the Open Air;" he lives out a perfect example of being the primary caretaker not only in the day-to-day care but also in the intellectual, emotional, and social development of his daughter. From one

of his blogs I learned that his wife works in a middle school and she devotes a lot of time and energy to teaching. He has a more flexible schedule compared with his wife's. This blog is entitled "I love my daughter wholeheartedly and my daughter brings me immeasurable affection." He records in this blog how he has tried to be a good father ever since the birth of his daughter all the way, from bathing her daily to taking her to dance training programs, playing chess, and storytelling. He comments in his blog that the majority of men in Fujian province are "hands-off husbands" and seldom bother with parenting. Hands-off husbands, according to *A New Century Chinese-English Dictionary*, means "caring little about housekeeping," yet being in charge (p. 1510). But to "Uttering Long Wheezing Cries," parenting is not only one's responsibility and obligation; it is also the source of happiness. He shares in his blog how his daughter loves him. This love and his daughter's growth in various aspects are the greatest reward he is proud of and satisfied with as a father. His blogosphere is categorized into stock, sports, humor, reflections on life, career, and rearing his daughter. It is in the last category that he spends the most time and effort.

This is not the only case in the blogosphere that evidences the new trend of parenting. The father of "Orange" made his appearance on the homepage of the website because his wife posted his photos in her blog. The photos captured the moments of Orange's father fixing her hair for her. In the blog, the mother of "Orange" wrote in her blog, "The task of doing Orange's hair has been performed by her father since I went back to work. What I enjoy the most is to see the gentleness of her father when he fixes her hair for her. My heart is touched tremendously whenever I see him using his thick fingers to fasten the thin hair band in her hair." More and more Chinese fathers are

beginning to get involved in the day-to-day care of their children. Although some women's intentions in getting their husbands involved is that they want their sons to be more masculine in the future, many women in their blogs share their family time together through articles and family photos. Their blogging on how their husbands play an active part in the rearing of their children is the first step and a very important one in fostering a culture where more and more people practice shared parenting. By a few men sharing their child-rearing experiences and by many women sharing their husbands' involvement in parenting in their blogs, we see men removing themselves from the "patriarchal pedestal as the breadwinning but distant father, a position crucial to men's power in the traditional family" (Ehrensaft, 1994, p. 436). At the same time, we see surfacing Chinese mother bloggers' other identities such as career women. Although many of them experience strong ambivalence when they have to choose between having a job and taking care of their children at home and they often suffer from a sense of guilt, their courage in balancing the two challenges gender stereotypes.

It is also through sharing parenting with their wives that husbands begin to appreciate more the housework performed by their wives on a daily basis. Ehrensaft summarizes the benefits of shared parenting this way. It allows women to develop their potential. It also gives children the chance to benefit "from the full access to two rather than one primary nurturing figure, affording them intimacy with both men and women, a richer, more complex emotional milieu, role models that challenge gender stereotypes" (p. 434). For men, the benefit is that they have a chance "to develop more fully the nurturant parts of themselves as fathers, an opportunity often historically denied to men" (p. 434). I agree with her when she argues that shared parenting is necessary for equal

relationships between men and women. It is also important in creating a new interpersonal family environment where mutual respect between husband and wife and between parents and children become the non-disciplining norm.

In traditional hierarchical Chinese families, it is difficult for children to have an equal relationship with their parents because of the power distance between them. Parents are the authority figures while children are expected to defer and obey. In the blogosphere, Chinese mother bloggers share their reflections on how to cultivate a more equal friend-like relationship between their kids and themselves. Many parents emphasize the importance of teaching their children to be socially responsible people through actions rather than words. Instead of commanding their children to do things, more and more Chinese parents are becoming role models for their children. For example, when a Chinese mother blogger saw litter on her way out to take a walk, she picked up the litter and disposed of it properly. When Jack and Lily came back from a trip to a nearby mountain, their home became a mini-zoo because the children brought back a little bird, cicadas, a cricket, and a dragonfly. The mother tried to teach the children how to love nature and protect every creature in nature by showing them that a bottled environment at home was not good for the little creatures. The children finally decided to release them back to nature.

Chinese mother bloggers also engage actively in the ongoing development of their children by choosing parenting styles that are appropriate for the ages of their children. The mother of “Sunshine Eva” adapted the story of the big bad wolf into a play for the whole family. Everyone in the family had a role to play. They made some props together and acted out the story. The father was the big bad wolf, the mother played the parts of

both the hunter and the grandmother, and their girl was the Little Red Riding Hood in the story. The family play made it not only easier for “Sunshine Eva” to learn the story, but also created an occasion for the family to enjoy an open and delightful interpersonal environment together. There are many blogs that record the happy time that parents spend with their children playing with toys, taking walks, and swimming or doing other activities together.

Age appropriate parenting styles are also demonstrated in the effort Chinese mother bloggers make to ensure open communication between their children and themselves. One of the blogs collected is entitled “My child, you are not simply copying my childhood.” In this blog, “Working Hard” told her readers that her daughter would be an adolescent soon because June 1, 2007 was her last chance to celebrate Children’s Day. She knew that her daughter would encounter many problems in this special phase of growth. She also stated that it was even more difficult for parents because they should not only provide for their children materially, but also constantly get involved in every dimension of their children’s growth. She was grateful that her daughter understood the kind of pressure that she had to deal with. Like other parents, “Working Hard” wanted her daughter to excel academically. However, she made it clear in her blog that in countless conversations with her daughter, she got this message across. That is she would not transform her own regrets in life into pressure for her daughter. On the contrary, she was ready to share her lessons and regrets from life with her daughter so that she could learn some valuable lessons from them.

In one of her blogs a few days later, “Working Hard” titled her blog “Thank you, my daughter. You made it possible for me to relive my childhood.” She had had to live

far away from her parents when she was growing up. So her memory of her childhood was filled with loneliness and fear. She was determined to be a good mother and a good friend to her daughter so that her daughter's life would be filled with love. She also shared in her blog that many times adults are so buried under the heavy burden of life that they forget to appreciate what is around them. Her daughter was her teacher in this respect because she invited "Working Hard" to see the sunset and enjoy simple happiness in life. "Working Hard" wrote in her blog that her daughter was growing up and she as a parent was also "growing up." She tried to adapt her parenting style according to the development of her daughter so that they could always be friends.

Chinese mother bloggers, instead of maintaining and adhering to their authoritative positions as powerful parents, are ready to admit that parenting provides them a great opportunity to learn. Their children are their friends, teachers, and their most loved ones. It is not they themselves who always know the answer and who should have the final say. They also become more sensitive to small details. One of "Beautiful Sea Corner's" blogs recorded her response to her son's drawings. She usually would discard those drawings that she thought were poorly done because her original logic was, "There is little point in collecting them." One day when she was ready to do the same with a drawing showing a house covered by black clouds, her son asked her what she thought of it. Not to dampen his interest, she told him, "It is good." Her son explained to her why the clouds were black because it was the middle of the night and the bean-shoot like things were some lampposts by the side of the house. His description breathed life into the piece. "Beautiful Sea Corner" realized the importance of getting closer to the soul of her son because she had seldom had time for it and had not been willing to do it either. A lot

of times, parents think that they are always the smarter, the more rational, and the more far-sighted. They are used to their authoritative power as parents. It is refreshing and heartening to see Chinese mother bloggers willing to share how the everyday practice of parenting gives them chances to be attentive and self-reflexive.

I would like to use a blog to conclude my discussion on how Chinese mother bloggers are fostering a new culture of shared parenting with their husbands and a more equal friend-like relationship with their children. “I found myself changed a lot and had better understanding after I became a mother. I learned how to use my heart to think and to act. People say that parents are the teachers of their kids. But to me, parents learn a lot from rearing their kids. I have learned how to be patient with other people as I am patient with my child and how to look at and understand things from their perspective. That it is so good to have them is what I want to say from deep down in my heart.”

### *Blogging and Connection*

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, blogging is a relatively individual mode of technology of the self in that it is an individual blogger herself or himself that is engaged in the act of self-writing. However, Foucault already explicates that the act of self-writing is not necessarily done by individuals in isolation. The technologies of the self can be achieved by the individual’s reflection or by the individual with the help of others. In the case of Chinese mother bloggers, the community is formed by women who share the common experience of raising their children. The significance of forming of a community for child-rearing is that Chinese women are able to use their own language to affirm their experiences.



One of the central tenets of feminism in the twentieth-century has been the issue of voice. The classical essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), addresses the issue of dominant discursive discourses representing the “subaltern” Third World woman. The discursive practices of the dominant discourses employ the language of exploitation that is beyond the linguistic capability of the subaltern woman. The consequence of this linguistic incapability of the subaltern woman renders her subjectivity invisible in an issue that concerns her life or death (p. 288).

Alison M. Jaggar (2000) offers the remedy to this dire situation. She argues, “What the subaltern woman needs is a conceptual framework, a language capable of articulating her injuries, needs, and aspirations” (p. 6). She further indicates that it is important for the subaltern woman to create her own language because “the existing discourses or texts of exploitation do not provide such a language” (p. 6). Nevertheless, the creation of a new language is “by definition a collective project” because a single voice is not forceful enough to compete with the dominant discourses. “Only by creating a collective identity with other women in similar situations, perhaps with other daughters, wives, and mothers, can the subaltern even come to see herself as subaltern and only in this way can she break through the barriers to her speech” (pp. 6-7). It is in the connection with other women who have similar lived experiences that a subaltern woman finds strength to claim her own subjectivity and agency.

Building on this assertion, I would like to argue that blogging provides Chinese mother bloggers a medium through which they can create a language of their own so that they can take pride in their mothering experience, but at the same time, grapple with the contradictions they see in their mothering practices. At the same time, blogging offers

Chinese mother bloggers a forum to reflect on their relational self not only as mothers, but also as wives, daughters, daughters-in-law, career women, and friends. Their coming to grips with the issues such as how much pressure is appropriate for their children in education and the kind of relationship they should have with their children are just some examples of how their discursive autonomy affords them the opportunities to discuss and reflect on their everyday practices of child-rearing. In their public discussions of these issues, the dominant discourses of competition are questioned. Chinese mother bloggers desire a more relaxed educational environment for their children. They also interweave their love for their children with utterances of the hardships of motherhood. Equally important, their reflections on their relational selves are manifestations of their autonomy within their life circumstances and their social relationships.

Let us revisit one of the blogs I shared in the beginning of the chapter when “Little Moon” questions whether it is really necessary for children to be sent to five-star daycares. “Little Moon’s” blog on superstar-war-scale competition beginning at daycare generated some interesting comments. The first response writes, “Everything works together to please the rich. Exemplary privileges of the rich. Timely exposure. Praise.” This succinct response reveals the critique that the respondent shares with the blogger. Another response states, “I remember what Luxun said: Save our children.” Quite a few others agreed with “Little Moon” that children today have to live a very arduous life trapped in competition. They all thought it important to give children a happy and carefree childhood. However, they admitted, at the same time, that it is much easier for both the parents and children to have a kind of take-it-easy attitude while their children are still young. Once their children enter secondary school, there will be few parents who

can refuse to participate with their children in the cruel and vicious cycle of competition. The members in the community wrestle with this reality together. Sometimes they comfort one another. Sometimes they agree or disagree. But very importantly, they go through the trials of life together, never giving up.

The utterances of the hardships of motherhood are not in fine tune with the title of the community: Wonderful Moments of Growth. However, it is not realistic for Chinese mother bloggers only to show their happiness in their blogs. Quite a few bloggers express how tired they are as mothers. One of the bloggers wrote in her blog that she did not seem to have had time to relax since the birth of her daughter. From the time when her daughter would wake up several times a night to breastfeed to her going to day care punctuated by catching colds, having fevers, not being able to adjust to the environment at the day care, the mother blogger was the one who had always been there for her daughter on top of the normal daily housekeeping. Recently she had been persuaded to find a better day care for her daughter and she had already started consulting friends and visiting different day cares so that her daughter would have a better preschool environment. She said in her blogs that she had to shoulder about ninety-nine percent of all the responsibility for rearing her daughter. She cannot help expressing the hardships of being a “good” mother in her blogs.

Her expressing the hardships in her blogs did not incur criticism but received quite a few responses showing understanding. Expressing appreciation of the toil mothers have to go through for the sake of their children is what runs through the responses. Although none of the responses challenges the biological determinism of motherhood and women, their supportive messages themselves are comfort for the

mother blogger who signed with emotion that it was difficult to be a good mother. This particular blog is not the only one that explicitly indicates the adversity of motherhood. There are many other blogs that align along the same dimension and share the hardship of being a mother. One of the blogs talks about the strain motherhood placed on the health of women. The blogger comments on women breastfeeding or bottle feeding, remaining most of the time in one position, changing diapers several times a night, bending down to assist the learning-to-walk stage of her daughter, and carrying her daughter whenever she refused to walk even when she was old enough to walk by herself. The mother of “Little Bean Shoot” compares her daughter to “a sweet burden” that she had to “carry” no matter what. It is because of her personal experience of rearing a child by herself that she began to understand why many women in their old age suffer from backaches and poor health. It is also this lived experience of hers that she is more appreciative of the unconditional love her parents showed for her.

These are just a couple of examples showing the complexity of motherhood. On the one hand, Chinese mother bloggers are grateful that motherhood allows them to be “real women.” On the other hand, they realize that motherhood is not only filled with happiness and blessings, but also sacrifices and hardships that are a lot of times gendered. It is through the technology of blogging their everyday practices of taking care of their children and sharing their blogs with parents in similar situations that they consciously reflect on their practices, conceptualize their experiences, and find a language to describe what is unique to them in terms of their reproduction, child-rearing, and relational selves.

In terms of the relational selves of Chinese mother bloggers, what is informative here is the understanding of agency within the life circumstances and the social

relationships conceptualized by feminist thinkers. During my online observation and data collections, seldom did I find a blog space purely devoted to a particular child only.

Many blogs in one specific blog space are contextualized in terms of time, place, and relationships.

It becomes imperative to differentiate between absolute autonomy and embodied autonomy. Absolute autonomy, according to Morwenna Griffith (1995), is understood as a person exercising autonomy by “acting rationally in the pursuit of one’s own self-chosen goals. This rational action took [takes] place in the public sphere, because in order to be the result of mature reason, reason had [had] to be developed in the public space of universal principles” (p. 135). This person is almost always imagined to be “a particular kind of Western man: unencumbered by emotions or close personal relationships, and free of ties to social circumstances into which they were born” (p. 136). However, this kind of absolute autonomy defined by public sphere and rational thinking has already excluded women from its terrain because women are assumed to deal with the private and that is supposed to be part of their nature.

It is feminist theorizing of embodied autonomy that is more relevant in understanding the agency of women because it overcomes the unitary and fixed notion of the self. Many feminists (Almond, 1988; Benhabid, 1992; Flax, 1993; & Griffith, 1995) posit a more nuanced understanding of the self as a gendered being whose gendered subjectivities are constituted by historically specific contexts embedded in power relations and gender relations. Morwenna Griffiths (1995) specifically points out that many women value “both the expressive life of feelings, and the social life which is rooted in ties to their family, friends, neighbourhood, culture and family history” (p. 136).

To many women, autonomy means “deciding for oneself” (p. 136) within many constraints.

To many Chinese mother bloggers, “deciding for oneself” means doing the best they can given their family resources, their relationships with their husbands, their parents, and their in-laws, and their professional roles. Deciding for oneself is never conceptualized as an individual behavior involving only one mature mother figure for the best interest of a child. Although it is quite common to see Chinese mother bloggers taking the lion’s share in terms of housekeeping and taking the role of being the primary care-giver, it is more widespread to witness the blog space as a space to record family events, activities, and relationships. Grandparents, relatives, and friends are all integral components and backgrounds of Chinese mother bloggers’ blogging about their children’s growth. They arrange family gatherings, birthday parties, holiday celebrations, and family trips on top of the daily care of their children. The daily care of their children provides them with a lot of resources for reflecting on their child-rearing. The special occasions also give them much inspiration on the topics of family love, intergenerational love, and quality time with family members. Chinese mother bloggers love and respect for their children, whether their children are boys or girls, their emphasis on cultivating interest in their children and shared parenting, and a good balance between love and discipline, are definitely important in fostering new cultural practices of child-rearing. They exercise their agency in interaction with others and they admit that motherhood is a process of becoming. They learn to be better mothers day by day with their children and their loved ones.

*Conclusion*

Chinese mother bloggers' blogging manifests the gendered subjectivity of Chinese mother bloggers because motherhood is still essentialized and naturalized as something that is intrinsic to women in the blogosphere. Their blogging also suggests their embodied subjectivity because it is firmly grounded in their lived experiences as women with children. Concurrently, it reflects their ethical subjectivity because they are engaged in self-transformation, reflection on their practices, and the creation of a new culture of the nurturing of the next generation. The embodied subjectivity and ethical subjectivities of Chinese mother bloggers are the very instances of the autonomy of Chinese mother bloggers because their agency is embedded in a web of relationships and a conglomeration of historical, spatial, cultural, and time constraints.

Chinese mother bloggers take issue with the rigid educational practices in China, which starts from a young age. They are also eager to show the new relationship between themselves and their children so that the traditional hierarchical parent-child relationship is disputed. In addition, they acknowledge how much they benefit as parents from respecting their children and how much being a mother makes it possible for them to learn. Simultaneously, their agency in the context of child-rearing promises a prospect of shared parenting, thus destabilizing the assumption that parenting is a sphere naturally associated with a specific gender. Equally important to the issue of agency is the fact that Chinese mother bloggers have their own online community. Although blogosphere is not intended to be interactive in the first place as a discussion forum, mothers sharing similar life experiences of child-rearing carve out a space of their own where they can not only use their own language to share their care, interest, concerns, and aspirations, but also

find a place to connect with other women. Although their language may not be profound and astute enough to reveal the gendered nature of motherhood, blogging as the technology of the self equips Chinese mother bloggers with a tool so that they can use it to make sense of their lives in relation to their children, their husbands, their other social relationships, their immediate environments, and even the world at large and “to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault, 1988a, p. 18).



### Some Concluding Thoughts

I am reluctant to call this last part of my project “Conclusion” because it connotes a sense of closure. Closure suggests being finished and a done deal. However, I doubt whether any research can make such a claim. In addition, what have been investigated in this project are only some tentative interpretations based on my personal readings guided by a feminist Foucauldian approach that emphasizes the constitutive and also fluid nature of subjectivity. There are many other possible ways to conduct this research, there is so much room to improve this research, and there is indefinite promise to refresh the methodological and theoretical experiment that is only started in this research and is interdisciplinary in the first place. However, for any researcher in a given research endeavor to achieve a sense of completeness, it is necessary to reflect on what has been done and look forward to what will be done in the future to address the regrets that are left by the present research. Therefore, in this last part of my present project, I would like to interweave the gist of my arguments in the research with my personal reflections on the whole process of writing.

I started visiting the blog community of My Babies: Wonderful Moments in Growth at [www.sina.com.cn](http://www.sina.com.cn) at the beginning of 2007 driven by my interest in Chinese women’s everyday practices of child-rearing in the one-child policy context of China. Soon I became a regular visitor of the blogs posted daily there because the blogs maintained by Chinese mother bloggers are interesting to read. Even when they all talk about the same subject, the stories they told and the strategies they shared are rich and distinctive. The intensive daily online observation of the blogs in May, June, and July for the data collection brought me closer to Chinese mother bloggers because their blogs

allowed me to get more and more involved into their daily lives not only in relation to their child-rearing practices, their expectations on their children, but also their emotions, their relationships with their husbands, in-laws, and even their careers. Chinese mother bloggers use the virtual space of blogosphere as the space where they act upon themselves, their children, and their social relationships, where they share, record, and reflect on their everyday practices of mothering so that they will become better mothers, and where they foster new cultural practices of valuing their daughters with their significant others and relatives in their immediate world thus cultivating non-disciplining norms in nurturing the younger generation.

After several months of reading the blogs maintained by Chinese mother bloggers, I feel like a part of their personal lives. Many times only by reading the title of a particular blog, I could tell which Chinese mother blogger wrote that particular piece and the blog name of her daughter. “Angel from Heaven,” “Sunshine Eva,” “A Child’s Heart,” and “Super Reunion Rabbit” are no longer abstract names to me because they are lovely girls, each with a caring and nurturing mother shaping and molding their subjectivities. “Angel from Heaven” and “A Child’s Heart” must be ready to attend elementary schools by the time I finish my dissertation. “Sunshine Eva” will be four years old this year. She started learning how to roller-skate last year and I guess that she is pretty good at it now. “Super Reunion Rabbit” has been a little social worker for quite some time, caring about children who cannot afford school and handicapped people who are not financially privileged. With the mega-sporting event of the Olympic Games in Beijing only a few months away, “Super Reunion Rabbit” must have been busy with new campaign ideas to show her love for her country and her people. The daughters in the

blog community have different aptitudes, interests, and aspirations. However, one thing for certain is that they will not become “little women” when they grow up, only confined in the private sphere. They have the whole world in their heart and their dream.

In the introduction of this project, I briefly described two dominant discourses that frame the general understanding of the exigency or the “evil” nature of the one-child policy in China, the nationalist discourse of modernity in China and the liberal discourse of human rights in the West. I pointed out from the onset that neither of these two discourses take into account the subject positions of Chinese women, on whose bodies, the one-child policy is enforced, tested, and normalized. My intention of conducting this research is to explore the complexity of Chinese women’s subjectivities as played out in their embodied motherhood. The analyses in the previous chapters, when taken together, show that motherhood to Chinese mother bloggers is layered and multivalent.

The conditions under which Chinese mother bloggers are made as subjects historically, culturally, politically, and socially are demonstrated clearly when I brought out the fundamental relationships between Chinese nation, population, Chinese women, and quality child. The mothering practices that Chinese mother bloggers are engaged in now have their historical, cultural, social, and political specificities. Ever since the turn of the twentieth century when China was under the humiliating invasions and threats territorially, politically, and economically from the West, Chinese women became the epitome of the oppressed, the trope for resistance and change, and the symbol of nation building. The representational meanings of Chinese women were largely defined by the male cultural elites who could not bear with their diminished masculinity as citizens from one of the most ancient civilizations of the world. They needed their women to reproduce

physically strong and intellectually competent sons to reclaim their rightful place in the world. Against this background, Chinese women were given back their natural feet and were sent to schools.

During the formative years of new China after 1949, Chinese women were admitted into the labor force so that they could fulfill their double roles as both socialist workers and socialist wives/mothers. When class struggle of the revolutionary years began to lose its grip and appeal in the reform years, Chinese women were called upon to contribute to the dream of building a glorious China by controlling their fertility and by nurturing quality children. Instead of the rhetoric of imperialism and feudalism and the politically charged rhetoric of revolution, biopower began to operate both on the body and soul of Chinese mothers. Biopower, as one of the most defining features of power in the modern era, is aimed at the administration of all crucial dimensions of human population. It is exercised in the name of maximizing the wellbeing of both the individual and the collectivity. The potency of biopower is manifested by its capacity to elicit voluntary participation from the subjects so that they exercise self control and engage in the perpetuation of norms.

According to Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler (2005), while there is still considerable attention to “restricting population, in the 1990s and early 2000s the second issue, the enhancement of population ‘quality,’ has become increasingly central to the politics of population” in China (p. 217). The norms on population quality resonate and match parents’ aspirations for “the upward mobility” of their precious children that parents themselves become eager and willing participants in the docility-utility complex of biopower. Greenhalgh and Winckler insightfully exemplify that “in the politics of

quality, power has come to center on two new or reconfigured objects of societal investment and control: the ‘quality child’ and the ‘good mother’ responsible for cultivating that perfect youngster” (p. 217).

The norm of raising quality child has had such disciplinary power on the daily practices of Chinese mother bloggers that we see with clarity how they are willing to invest in time, money, and resources to ensure that their children, whether they are girls or boys, will be someone useful to the country, the people, and the families, or the personification of quality child. Extracurricular programs are just one example of cultivating the younger generation into more versatile people in the future. What is telling in the blogs analyzed is the craze for English learning, a language that is associated with prestige, prosperity, and promises. Recently I called my sister-in-law in China to discuss with her the schooling of my son who is now a second grader in a small elementary school in the U. S. I don’t want my son to grow up not knowing his mother tongue, Chinese. However, my homeschooling of his Chinese is not getting very far. I contemplate about the possibilities of sending him back to China for one or two years so that he would have the environment to learn Chinese by immersion. However, my contemplation was strongly objected by my sister-in-law on two reasons. First, my son will not be used to the competition starting from or even before day one in elementary schools in China. Heavy homework everyday will soon kill his interest in learning. Secondly, to my sister-in-law learning “authentic” English in the U.S. is more important because English today is directly tied with one’s socio-economic position in China. There is no need for me to detail the phone conversations between my sister-in-law and me. But the point I want to get across is that English is not simply a language people learn for fun

or for self-improvement. It is closely connected with the national dream of being an important player on the world stage when the world is still largely defined by the West and closely connected to what quality child means today in China against the background of globalization.

Another inspiring finding from the readings of the blogs in terms of quality child is that Chinese mother bloggers are interested in and concerned about the issues at large in their hearts and minds. They no longer define themselves as little women only suitable to take care of their babies and to perform domestic labor. Their broadmindedness has definitely influenced the dispositions of their children. “Super Reunion Rabbit” is only one example of a little girl dreaming big of making a difference in people’s life. “Angel from Heaven” learns how to manage money and how to treat her interracial female cousin with love and care. There are also many other blogs that I do not have space to cover and do justice to that show Chinese mother bloggers’ concerns for their country. For example, there are blogs focusing on the issue of saving water to protect natural resources. The blogs use personal everyday life as a platform to show the connection between one’s country, one’s collectivity, and one’s family.

The conditions under which Chinese women become intelligible human beings and their central place with their quality children in the politics of quality that govern the population and nation building discourses in China prepare us for the glorification of motherhood in the blogosphere by Chinese mother bloggers. Only good mothers can nurture quality children. That the bodies of Chinese mother bloggers are regulated is only a key aspect of biopower as a mechanism of control in modern societies, of which China is no exception. However, if I only rely on Foucault’s theory on how the operation of

modern power constitutes subjectivity, I will neglect the constitutive power of gender which is very pertinent to my research subjects, Chinese mother bloggers. It is for this very reason that I turned to Judith Butler for inspiration to understand why Chinese mother bloggers find great satisfaction and a strong sense of achievement in their motherhood.

Butler (2004) defines gender as “the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes” (p. 42). Like biopower, gender is also a mechanism that ensures the smooth functioning of power and the continuation of the biological and cultural differences between men and women through the repetitions of gender norms. Gender norms dictate that women are good at mothering. Gender norms have to be repeated and performed again and again on a daily basis to remain vigorous and seemingly natural. When blogosphere becomes the stage for the performance of gender norms, it is small wonder to see the glorification of motherhood staged continually by different Chinese mother bloggers to give ultimate meaning to their lives as women. Together, they rehearse and present a rosy picture of happy motherhood with a fulfilled purpose in life. If they have to balance between their duties as mothers and career women, it is always the latter that can be shelved or postponed or sacrificed because if they do otherwise, they are not good mothers whose center of the universe should be their children and their families. Chinese mother bloggers become recognizable beings because of their very performances of sacrificial love for their children.

Indeed, gender norms regulate Chinese mother bloggers in regard to their

identities, their children, and their families. Chinese women are brought into being by the gender norms that dictate women are happy and complete when they are good mothers and virtuous wives. Simultaneously they participate in censoring women who choose alternative lifestyles or who do not fulfill their expected gender roles as good mothers. However, in the very repetition of gender norms as good mothers, Chinese mother bloggers demonstrate ambivalence in choosing between motherhood and careers. Many times, although they suffer from the feelings of guilt and ready to change their habits and identities, they take their jobs seriously and make arrangement for the care of their children. In addition, the significance of their motherhood is no longer determined by the sex of their children. They are as proud to be mothers of daughters as they are of boys. This, in itself, is a very encouraging and significant shift because the very repetition of the glorious motherhood gives meanings to the lives of little girls who, for many centuries, were not the source of family joy because they would be married off and could not carry on their family names like their brothers.

If we take Butler's theory on gender regulation to understand the social practices of child-rearing by Chinese mother bloggers in China, it is not difficult to see that the social practices are undergoing some changes as far as nurturing girls are concerned. Although motherhood is cited, repeated, and honored again and again in the blogs that I collected, the citations and repetitions are slightly different each time the gender norms are reinstituted. I see girls being valued more. I also see Chinese women striving hard to balance between their identities as both mothers and professional women. In addition, I also witness more and more Chinese men keeping blogs for their daughters. The temporal, conditional, and transitioning nature of gender norms promises agency on the



part of Chinese mother bloggers when they perform and repeat the gendered norms of motherhood.

Closely related to the glorification of motherhood and the sacrificial love of Chinese mother bloggers are their relentless efforts to keep their children's sexual purity for the institution of heterosexual normativity. Calling the mothers who have daughters to pay special attention to the sex education of their daughters is a common concern among Chinese mother bloggers. It is the responsibility of these mothers to teach girls at a young age to protect themselves so that their chastity will remain intact.

Sex and sexuality play a fundamental role in the discipline of our moral and social behaviors. Sexuality in Chinese "is usually conceived of as an extension of the biological notion of sex and emphasizes manifestations of sex within actual social, cultural, psychological, behavioural, and gendered contexts" (Pan, 2006, p. 24). Although in the reform years of the economic development, China is witnessing an increase in premarital, extramarital, and commercial sex, family and hence, sex within the heterosexual husband and wife relationship, is still the norm to be followed and is consecrated legally, socially, culturally, and politically.

When the dominant discourses render heterosexual relationships within the institution of family as the only legitimate form of sexuality, it is much easier for us to understand the determination demonstrated by Chinese mother bloggers to instill a sense of biological differences and self defense in their children's hearts from a young age. Of course, their condemnations against rape are grounded in their anger towards violence against women in general. However, the concerns and the stories they shared in the blogosphere show their worries that their daughters may one day bring shame to their

families although they do wish, though not explicitly written, that their daughters should marry happily and enjoy a satisfactory sex life within marriage.

Sexual practice is never an individual matter. It cannot be merely defined by individual behavior either. In China, it is imbued with historical, cultural, and political meanings. The scientific and legal authorities are also deployed to strengthen the official discourses on sexuality so that children's sexuality is narrowly defined and homosexuality labeled as perverse and repugnant (Evans, 1992; 1995; & 1997).

Empirical research shows that "many traditional and gendered assumptions about sexual behaviour remain unchanged" (Pan, 2006, p. 35). Among them is a wife's duty to meet the sexual demands of her husband and her fidelity in the marital relationship although it is much more acceptable for the wife to expect sexual satisfaction within marriage.

Sexual pleasure, which was not discussed beyond the state sanctified discourse in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, was given considerable attention in the 1980s only for the purpose of ensuring the harmony of nuclear families embodied in married heterosexual couples (Sigley, 2001, p. 133-34). The knowledge/control nexus worked in the 1950s and continues their joint authority in the 1980s joined by commercial forces.

Associating female sexuality with morality and social stability is the very effect of the discursive practice of various discourses on female sexuality of which the discourse of heterosexual monogamy is the most salient. As a disciplining power, it is made more powerful when universal marriage for women is almost a reality. In addition, in contemporary China within the mandate of the one-child policy, good womanhood is paradoxically embodied in "monogamy [that] is associated both with sexual fidelity and with fertility control" (Evans, 1992, p. 160). Chinese women have to be good mothers

and virtuous wives to achieve ‘the cult of womanhood.’ It is also Chinese women who have to relay “governmental programs from the macro level of the population to the micro level of the family” by supporting their husbands, keeping good order of their families, and nurturing quality children (Sigley, 2001, p. 142). In the official discourses of sexuality that intersect with the dream of modernity, quality children entail children who are able to continue the normative heterosexual monogamy to maintain the basic cell of Chinese society (Sigley, 2006, p. 47). The micro level of the family as reflected in the efforts Chinese mother bloggers have made in imparting sex education reinforces and rejuvenates the moralizing and disciplinary power of monogamy, strengthening its normative status. However, the discussions on the blogosphere and the action of telling their daughters about their body parts and the importance of self-defense are breaking the spell of female passivity and submissiveness which are important steps on the way to achieving sexual autonomy.

Having mainly addressed the constitutive power of bio-politics, gender norms, and the heterosexual family, I began to focus on the transformative dimension of blogging as a technology of the self. The self is understood as relational and contextual because motherhood is gendered, embodied, and ethical. Blogging as a technology of the self provides chances for Chinese mother bloggers to reflect on their everyday practices of child-rearing. In so doing, they engage in not only perfecting themselves as good or even better mothers but also creating new norms such as better parent-child relationships and shared parenting. Concurrently, they find meanings and empowerment in their collective identity as mothers, wives, and professional women to affirm one another.

Of course, they still live under the constitutive enchantment of quality child in terms of educating their young. However, they show by blogging that education with the only purpose of being competitive may not be the best for the young. They asked questions, shared stories, and encouraged one another. Instead of following the norms defined by the present educational system that emphasizes higher degree and endless race of taking examinations, Chinese mother bloggers collectively expressed their wish that the individual talent, disposition, and growth of each child be respected and cherished. To them, success should not be only narrowly measured by academic standard of grades or performances on tests. Although they admitted that there is little they can do to change the tide of rivalry, they would rather choose happiness over competition for their children.

Also in the act of blogging, Chinese mother bloggers promote a new parent-child relationship and shared parenting. They do not regard themselves as authoritative figures in front of their children. They treat their children as their equals, ready to listen to them and learn from them. The records of the wonderful moments of their children also become moments for Chinese mother bloggers to transform themselves into more attentive, loving, and appreciative people. At the same time, their blogs are the spaces where they record the family growth together of which their husbands' contribution is greatly highlighted and affirmed. By showing their husbands' willingness to help in child-rearing, Chinese mother bloggers are starting a new trend of shared parenting that is beneficial to the children and men and women so that the gendered norm of mothering intrinsically associated with only one gender can be destabilized and changed.

Motherhood is the source of fulfillment for many Chinese mother bloggers. However, they also find the myth of perfect motherhood that only brings bliss unrealistic. In their everyday practices of bringing up their children, Chinese mother bloggers can feel tired, their health can be strained, and they also deal with different problems. Blogging offers them the forum to grapple with their troubles, help them to express, or think through them, and seek help if necessary. They use ordinary everyday language that centers on their lived experiences of being mothers, wives, and professional women to find meanings in their lives. They also encourage and affirm one another to improve and transform themselves.

I chose to use layered motherhood to capture the complexity of mothering experience of Chinese mother bloggers because they are at once the constituted and the constituting, the spoken of and the speaking, as well as the oppressed and the resisting. For China to be economically and politically as competitive as its counterparts in the West, family has to be regulated, women's bodies controlled, gender norms reconstructed. Biopower, gender norms in regard to motherhood, and the normative heterosexual monogamy are the very conditions that shape Chinese mother bloggers' subjectivities. However, their blogs collectively speak out loud about their constrained agency/autonomy.

Chinese mother bloggers' speaking out in the virtual space has many limitations and implications. The constrained agency explored in this project mainly resides in the discursive online space through the act of blogging by Chinese mother bloggers. Chinese mother bloggers have begun to create new meanings for mothering and to foster new cultural practices in terms of nurturing their children by diligently recording and

reflecting on their everyday life as relational selves playing multiple roles. The online discursive selves are indeed manifestations of both the constitutive and transformative dimensions of biopower and the technologies of the self. Yet, for the constrained agency in the discursive online space to ripple its effects into the offline world, it will take time and efforts.

Feminist thinkers have long been investigating the interaction between virtual and real, mind and body (Haraway, 1994; Hayles, 1998). They have also been paying close attention to the interconnection between the virtual and the real spaces. Radhika Gajjala (2001) points out, “Online interactions, and the human subjects produced in interaction with the new mediating technologies, cannot be discussed in isolation from the cultural, social, political and economic contexts within which emerging technologies and new forms of communication operate” (p. 113). This research has explored the materiality of Chinese mother bloggers’ existence as intelligible human beings. It makes the various contexts explicit.

Blogosphere provides Chinese mother bloggers with e-spaces to emerge as subjects wielding agency. However, as Radhika Gajjala argues (2001), “We would [also] need to open up issues for further consideration by problematizing some of the assumptions made in relation to women and the Internet” (122). She criticizes equating “women-centered e-spaces” as empowering to women. She contends, “[T]hat not only is the construction of netiquette ‘masculinist,’ it is also class-specific even in the construction of feminist netiquette based on the different styles of posting by men and women” (p. 118). In the case of my research, it is imprudent if I only claim that we should celebrate the blogging of Chinese mother bloggers as empowering. The cultural,

social, political and economic contexts for the online embodiment of Chinese mother bloggers are still largely defined by a patriarchal discourse. At the same time, Chinese mother bloggers who inhabit the e-spaces are middle-class people with middle-class concerns.

In addition, the agency demonstrated by Chinese mother bloggers cannot be simply understood as representative female voices from China. As Radhika Gajjala cautions us, “[However], the complexity of the patterns of dominance manifested in various configurations of gender, class and geographical power relations are not being ‘named’, when all we focus on is the naming of two ‘different voices’ of male and female” (p. 119). If we are only concerned with which voice is more legitimate and higher in a hierarchical ranking system, we, as researcher, will definitely reproduce essentialism and oppression in different forms. The voices we hear in this research do not include many voices that are othered and marginalized in the mainstream culture. There are no open discussions on lesbian or gay parenting. As I argued in previous chapters, motherhood and parenthood are exclusive rights only enjoyed by heterosexual couples. This in itself can be very problematic. To further complicate my research, the voices we hear are not only “female” voices, but also voices from the Third World. It, thus, becomes more imperative to avoid the uncomplicated generalization that the voices in this research are the only authentic female voices in China.

Having further explained how to understand the discursive and digital embodiments of Chinese mother bloggers, it is now time to address the limitations of the research. This project is largely a research based on the readings of the textual content of blogs collected over a limited period of time. These readings will be greatly enhanced if

in-depth interviews whether in the form of telephone, email, or personal can be conducted to supplement the blogs collected. Another imperfection lies in the fact that the focus on texts only has excluded the visual rhetoric of many photos available in the blogosphere. However, any researcher has to learn to live with the flaws in their research and remains hopeful for better and improved methodological and theoretical frameworks in their next research project. But for the time beings, I am grateful that the feminist Foucaudian approach has made it possible for me to see the interconnection between nation, population, women, and children. It also lends force to my argument that motherhood and sexuality are not only oppressive but also constitutive because we see them being practiced on the micro level of nurturing children on a daily basis. The combination of feminist thinking of the self and Foucault's explication on the technologies of the self allows me to investigate the agency of Chinese mother bloggers in fostering new cultural practices in child-rearing.

I do realize that Chinese mother bloggers in my research are privileged in many ways: socio-economic status, educational level, and access to resources, to name just a few. They are not representative of Chinese women at large. However, it is not my intention to generalize from this research about the subjectivities of all Chinese women. I would like this research to serve as a starting point for scholarly effort on the Third World woman. To put them in historically, politically, socially, and culturally specific contexts is imperative so that we will not perpetuate the myth of victimhood of the Third World woman. She has her subject positions, though many times circumscribed.

It is also my intention to show that for any research, it is difficult only to focus on one group of research subjects. When I analyze the subjectivities of Chinese mother



bloggers, it is almost impossible to tease them out from their various social relationships and their multiple identities. By choosing to focus on one segment of a whole picture, I hope that I have at least demonstrated how motherhood is intertwined with nation, sexuality, self-transformation, and their concerns and expectations for their children.

For the time being, this is what I can offer to the scholarship on Chinese women in their mothering practices and the scholarship on women and agency in terms of their everyday practices. However, as I said at the beginning of the chapter, I hesitate very much to boast that I am done with this project. Every time when I visit the forum for the wonderful moments of growth in the past several months after I stopped my data collection, Chinese mother bloggers refresh their blog spaces regularly in an effort to perform, to advance, and to renovate not only themselves, but also their children, their husbands, and people in their immediate world. The action of blogging has broken the barrier of physicality so that Chinese mother bloggers promote and disseminate their non-disciplining and “nonnormalizing modes of existence and relationships” (McLaren, 2002, p. 159).

I will visit the blog spaces of these Chinese mother bloggers who faithfully engage themselves in the technologies of the self for self perfection and for rearing quality child. Blogging needs inspiration, appreciation, and perseverance. In these respects, Chinese mother bloggers have a lot to teach me. In recording and reflecting on their mundane everyday practices, they accumulate great wealth for themselves and their children. Blogging records the process of becoming of the children; it also captures the process of becoming of Chinese mother bloggers who are constantly in search for themselves and for better mothering practices collectively.

After spending more than one year on this project, the Chinese mother bloggers whose blogs I included in this research and their children are a part of my life. When a friend of mine, who is also working on her Ph.D. degree in one university in the U.S. told me that she is pregnant, she wants to have a daughter, and she would like to name her daughter “Yiyi,” my response was that it is a beautiful name because I see it being embodied by “Sunshine Eva.” I translated her name to “Sunshine Eva” while the literal translation of her name is “Sunshine Yiyi.” Yi, in Chinese, means “beautiful she.”

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