

GENDER INEQUALITY AND FOUR GENERATIONS OF
WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN A RURAL CHINESE VILLAGE

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Doctor of Philosophy

by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

GENDER INEQUALITY AND FOUR GENERATIONS OF
WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN A RURAL CHINESE VILLAGE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to contribute to scholarly understanding of generational change and individual variation in women's educational experiences when encountering gender inequality. The guiding framework is a feminist concept—intersectionality. I adopt a phenomenological multiple case design to examine 1) how women across four different generations from the 1930s to the 1990s experienced gender inequality in their educational experiences in Shancun (pseudonym), a rural village in southern China, 2) how these women interpret their experiences, and 3) how educational reforms and policies implemented between the 1930s and the 1990s shaped their experiences. Between May and August 2013, I interviewed 12 women from Shancun across four generations. I conducted two interviews with each participant, and each interview lasted about 40 to 65 minutes. I also relied upon informal conversations to gather supplemental information about the participants. In addition, in order to know the village history I conducted multiple interviews with a senior in the village.

A focus on individuals reveals the complexity behind the macro level patterns and the agency exercised by parents and their daughters. In comparison with the previous generation, women who were born in the 1950s and 60s had better access to schooling. Little progress in increasing women's schooling was made between the second and third generation. The fourth generation witnessed a sharp increase of educational attainment over the third. The nonlinear progress of women's schooling was associated with the women's movement, government advocacy of gender equity driven by a nationalism discourse, the collective farming, and urbanization. Meanwhile, the impact of educational

policies is invisible except *Saomang* (literacy education) provided an opportunity for one of the participants to gain some basic literacy.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Introduction

I grew up in a low-income rural Chinese village. In my many years of schooling there, mainly in my Chinese language, Civics, and history classes, I became aware of the textbook argument that China has made significant progress in empowering women. The message that I received was that there was a time in China's history that women's feet were bound, their hair was kept long, and their education and role in society were limited by their place in the home, however, all these things were gradually banished in the 20th century. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, waves of women's movements occurred in China and women came into the public sphere. The present-day Chinese woman is not the woman of one hundred years ago. Instead of being constrained as mothers, housewives, or housekeepers, they have become students, teachers, educators, journalists, writers, factory workers, and leaders. These changes paralleled shifts in political power from the Qing Dynasty to the Nationalist government, and then to the Communist Party.

All of these are historical facts, but my experience in the rural community also tells me that gender inequality still persists in many aspects of people's lives. I witnessed girls who were deprived of opportunities for schooling. My aunts could not continue going to school after a few years of elementary education because my grandfather wanted them to stay home and help with housework or farm work, and many girls who were my classmates dropped out of school for similar reasons. In my last year of junior high school I didn't do well in the entrance examination to senior high, and my father told me:

If you were a daughter, I wouldn't insist that you continue schooling.

Meanwhile, recent statistics have shown that women's income is still significantly lower than men's, that there is a lack of women representatives in political affairs, and that the preference for sons continues to hold, especially in geographically isolated areas (Bauer, Wang, Riley, & Zhao, 1992). Relevant to education, many parents have lower expectations of daughters and it is less likely for girls to continue schooling after they finish compulsory education (first through ninth grade). Of the 75.7 million illiterates in mainland China, more than 74.1 percent are women (Ministry of Education, 2009). So on the one hand historical changes and government propaganda in China lead me to see progress in gender equity in education, but on the other hand research and my personal experience show that gender inequality still persists. The contradiction between my experiences and my school textbook knowledge of progress in gender equity prompted me to conduct this study of women's education in Chinese rural communities.

Purpose of the Study

As an educational researcher, I choose to investigate how women experience gender inequality in education because I believe education is one of the approaches to promoting gender equity. The purpose of this study is to explore generational change and individual variation in women's educational experiences when encountering gender inequality in a rural, patriarchal kinship village in southern China. I do not seek generalizable knowledge of women's education, although findings of the selected site might be transferable in terms of understanding women's educational experiences in other places in China.

Research Questions

The extant research provides a big picture of women's education in China (e.g. Bailey, 2007; Hannum, Wang, & Adams, 2010; Judd, 2002; Wu & Zhang, 2010). The historical change in women's education gives strong evidence of the evolving meaning of women's gender roles. In particular what rights a woman has, how many years of education she may attain, and what jobs are available to her have changed significantly over the past 150 years. In addition, identifying influential factors—such as gender bias, school performance, and family finance—shows what social aspects contribute to gender inequality in education. Nevertheless, these studies do not address how gender inequality manifests in Chinese women's education. A review of existing research revealed that studies on women's education in China are limited to quantitative methods, and individual experiences of encountering gender inequality are unexplored in spite of scholarly consensus on gender inequality and its negative impact on women's education (see literature review in Chapter Two). I focus on rural Chinese women's lived experiences in order to contribute to scholarly understanding of their educational experiences. The guiding research questions are:

- (1) How did women across four generations (from the 1930s to the 1990s) in Shancun encounter gender inequality in terms of their educational experiences?
- (2) How do these women interpret the gender inequality in education that they encountered? In other words, what do the women's experiences mean to them?
- (3) How did educational policy and reforms implemented between the

1930s and the 1990s shape their experiences?

Significance

This study contributes to the understanding of rural Chinese women's education through women's own experiences. It gives voice to Shancun women who have been silent, although they have made significant contribution to their families, communities, and the development of the nation (Bossen, 2004; Judd, 1990). Findings of generational change and individual variation due to participants' family social and economic status, school performance, etc., according to women's lived experiences will provide insight for further deconstructing gender inequality.

Also, the study contributes to application of feminist concepts to rural women's education in a country that claims to be socialist. Since the end of the 19th century when feminism was introduced to China for the first time, feminism has been applied to issues such as foot-binding (Fan, 1997), women and socialism (Croll, 2012), women's liberation (Broyelle, 1977), women's social status (Cheung, 1997), and women and Chinese modernity (Chow, 1990). However, few studies guided by feminist concepts specifically focus on women's education, especially rural women's educational experiences. Application of feminist theory to rural women's education in China might provoke new understandings of feminism in a rural community of "socialist" China.

Background: Women's Social Status, Movement, and Education

Change of Women's Status/Roles in China

Traditional Chinese society was constituted by an essentially masculine value system developed over thousands of years. Whether in the public sphere or in family

relationships, women were perceived to be subordinate to men (Leung, 2003, p. 360).

Under the Confucian ideological assumption that social stability could best be maintained by a hierarchy in which the old dominate the young, and males subjugate the females (Walstedt, 1978), strict moral constraints were imposed on women. Women were supposed to obey their fathers before marriage, their husbands during marriage, and their sons in widowhood. They also should have the virtues of morality and loyalty, proper speech, modest manner, and skill with needlework.

During the last feudal dynasty, the Qing, some liberal thoughts emerged about women's role in a society (Rong, 1983; Ho, 1995). Although there is much evidence to show that not all male scholars had literate mothers, wives, or daughters, some women in this era learned to read and write, and there was a strong emphasis on literary learning for moral refinement and the attainment of women's good 'virtue' (Ho, 1995).

During the last few decades of the 19th century and the first few decades of the 20th, many intellectuals and governmental officials, such as Guanyin Zheng, Youwei Kang, Qichao Liang, and Citong Tan, and Yixian Sun, advocated women's liberation. Under their influence and in a changing political and economic environment, foot-binding was outlawed in 1902 by the imperial edicts of the Qing Dynasty, although it took several decades before the practice was discontinued (Li, 2000). Many women in coastal areas started working as textile and factory workers. Women's journals and books were published. More schools for women were established by Western missionaries, the Qing Dynasty, and advocates of women's rights. Women played an important role in establishing the Nationalist government and the constitution of the Nationalist Government recognized women's right to vote (Kazuko, 1989).

In 1919, the May Fourth Movement marked a historical moment for the women's movement in China. Women's issues were openly discussed, including autonomy in choosing marriage partners, virginity before marriage and celibacy after the death of their husbands, right of inheritance, education and work, prostitution, and foot-binding (Li & Zhang, 1994). Women's associations, groups, and schools were established and actively advocated women's rights. As one of the consequences, a group of women and girls, mostly from social elite families, went to school (Beahan, 1975) and "entered the public arena as students who were being educated outside the home, as teachers in the newly established educational system, as writers in revolutionary newspapers and journals, as anarchists, and as soldiers in the women's army" (Walstedt, 1978, p. 382).

However, the majority of women in countryside areas were not influenced significantly. "Behind this impressive activity of a minority of Chinese women, 200 million ordinary women lived under diverse conditions that prevented them from becoming active even had they desired to do so" (Kazuko, 1989, p.91). Conflicts among the Nationalist Government, the Communist Party, and other military forces, as well as invasion by Japan interrupted the efforts to improve women's status. Although the Nationalist Government founders, including Yixian Sun and Yuanpei Cai, considered women's rights, including education, as a priority (Zarrow, 1988), their agendas were focused on warfare rather than women's issues. In 1949 when the Communist Party took over the country, 48% of the population was female, but only 7.5% of waged labor and 19% of enrolled college students were women (Wang, 1999).

Dramatic changes to gender inequality did not take place until 1949 (Li, 2000). Since then, "the power of the centralized government has had a great impact on the

execution of gender equality policies and most urban women have received education for upward social mobility, just like their male counterparts” (Liu & Carpenter, 2005, p. 279). The constitution grants women equal rights to vote and participate in state affairs. And the Marriage Law passed in 1950 defines equal rights between married couples and defines marriage as monogamous, which was not the case in traditional Chinese societies in which a man could marry multiple women but not vice versa. These changes resulted in women gaining more control over their lives and more parity with their spouses than they ever had before, and women benefitted more than men in terms of gaining literacy. Furthermore women’s standard of living was improved.

Nevertheless, women continue to be discriminated against in employment and women in rural areas are still in a disadvantaged situation, especially after the market-oriented reform began in 1978 (Beaver et al., 1995; Leung, 2003). Beaver et al. (1995) argued that economic reform and its attendant difficulties subverted the feminist voice. Relevantly, Wang (1999) also argued that the post-Mao political transition has undermined the foundations of women’s political participation which were built during the Mao era.

Women’s Movement in China

Women’s roles and social status in China did not change significantly until the end of the 19th century. “Women’s liberation in a modern sense began in 1898” (Rong, 1983, p. 161). It was also at the end of the 19th century when the women’s movement began under the influence of Western missionaries. Since then there have been four waves of women’s movements in mainland China.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, the first women's movement in a modern sense began under a larger patriotic and progressive political movement (Rong, 1983). It was considered to be a product of the response to national crisis or a solution to societal problems (Rong, 1983; Li, 2000; Beahan, 1975). Back then, the Qing government was humiliated in the wars with Japan and Western countries. Lands like Hong Kong and Macao were ceded to multiple countries; domestic protests and rebellions were everywhere. The rule of the Qing government was threatened severely and might have collapsed at any time. Reformers such as Youwei Kang and Qichao Liang who were Qing advocates sought to reform the government and Chinese society. Liberation of women was among their initiatives. In their view, women's liberation would serve the development of the nation because liberated women would bolster the work force and would lead to healthier and stronger future generations (Rong, 1983; Li, 2000; Beahan, 1975).

The second wave of the women's movement is considered to be one aspect of the May Fourth Movement around 1919. This period of the movement was even named the May Fourth Feminism, "referring to the May Fourth Movement during the 1910s and 1920s when mostly intellectuals protested against the corruption and incompetence of warlord government and against foreign invasion in China" (Li, 2000, p. 3). Similar to the first wave of the women's movement, the purpose of women's liberation was to change Chinese society and make China a stronger nation (Stacey, 1983).

The third wave of the women's movement lasted almost three decades, from the end of the 1940s to the end of the 1970s. During this third wave, the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) was established with the support of the Communist Party for the

advancement of Chinese women of all ethnic groups. Women were encouraged to participate in work outside their homes. Communist government policies toward women were based on the classical Marxist assumption that society is a struggle for power and dominance. “Chairman Mao’s ideology sought to create a country with a more equitable distribution of resources; women were expected to put production first and the needs of their families second. He emphasized the importance of women’s relationship to ‘work’, acknowledging their status in the family primarily in terms of their contribution to economic activities” (Leung, 2003, p. 363).

Yet, the Marxist ideology did not change the purpose of the women’s movement for economic and societal development of the nation (Croll, 1981). Compared to the first two waves, on the one hand the third wave of the women’s movement was more influential in terms of its range and depth, affecting women all over China, whether rural or urban, rich or poor. Unprecedented numbers of women began to participate in work outside of their homes across the nation. On the other hand, state control of the women’s movement was also strengthened through the ACWF, which organized women’s activities nationally and regionally under the leadership and sponsorship of the Communist Party. Judd (2002) argues that the women’s movement does not bear the same meaning that it does in Western countries such as the United States and Canada, where women’s movements are usually initiated by nongovernmental groups. In China the women’s movement is governmentalized by the Communist Party control of the ACWF.

The fourth wave of the women’s movement began in the early 1980s. “The conviction and activism of intellectual and professional women constitute the main

driving forces of the women's studies movement in China" (Hsiung, 2001, p. 447). The most significant event was the emergence of women's studies programs in universities (Min, 2005). Prestige universities such as Peking University, Sun Yat-sen University, and Wuhan University established their women and gender studies centers/programs. Women's websites such as the National Women's Network and National Women's Research Network and magazines such as Women of China emerged. Also the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Non- Governmental Organization Forum was hosted by Beijing in September 1995. Most of these women's studies programs, centers, networks, and magazines have a close relationship with the ACWF. They are funded and supported by the ACWF. Because of that, it is debatable to consider this fourth wave of the women's movement as separate from the third wave rather than an extension of it. It may be considered a separate wave for two reasons. First, from the end of the 1970s to today, the economic and political systems have changed significantly. Second, both Min (2005) and Hisung (2001) consider it to be a new wave of the women's movement.

Women's Education in China

The history of women's education in China is tightly linked with women's status and women's movements. In 1844, Western missionaries established the first school for girls (Lu & Zheng, 1995). However, in the last half of 19th century the Qing Dynasty did not recognize women's education until 1898. A small group of schools was established only by Western missionaries and some women's rights advocates. During the first wave of the women's movement, the first experimental female school was approved by the Qing Dynasty in 1898, fifty four years after the first women's school was established.

Afterwards more private schools were established for girls or women in some coastal cities (Suzhou, Tianjin, and Shanghai) at the beginning of the 20th century.

During the second wave of the women's movement, the Nationalist Government copied the U.S. educational system and implemented it nationally across China. Yixian Sun, the first president of the Nationalist Government, considered the development of women's education a priority and the Nationalist Government made great efforts to promote educational equity (Lee, 1995). Invasion by Japan and conflicts between the Nationalist Government and the Communist Party spread wars and battles all over China. No large-scale legislature or policies which might guarantee women's education could be implemented nationally in practice (see Chapter Two). Thus only a small group of women benefitted from the emergence of feminist movements brought from the Western world in the first half of the 20th century (Liu & Carpenter, 2005). By 1949 when the Communist Party established the People's Republic of China more than 90 percent of women were still illiterate (Wei, 1995).

From the end of the 1940s to today, during the third and fourth wave of the women's movement, due to the consistent implementation of gender equality policy by the Communist Party, girls gained the same rights and opportunities to go to school as boys, and schools of all levels became coeducational in the 1950s and 1960s (Liu & Carpenter, 2005). As a result, the percentage of girls enrolled in elementary schools increased from 28 percent in 1951 to 43.7 in 1984 (UNESCO, 1987); and the literacy rate among women increased from 10 percent in 1949 to 77.4 percent in 2000 (Liu & Carpenter, 2005). The Compulsory Education Law (CEL) passed in 1986 required parents to ensure their children would complete at least eight or nine years of compulsory

education, including elementary and junior high, no matter the gender of their children. Fifteen years later in 2001, the central government decided to exempt parents' from paying tuition and fees for their children's compulsory education. Along with the improved economy and increasing household income, the difference in access to education between boys and girls was reduced from .7% in 1995 to .04% in 2004 and the enrollment of boys and girls was 98.97% and 98.93% respectively in 2004 (Information Office of the State Council, 2005). The progress in girls' enrollment indicates advancement of gender equity but it does not capture change in how Chinese women experienced education. This study seeks to contribute to this by presenting how four generations of women from a Chinese rural community encountered gender inequality in their education.

Conceptual Framework

A feminist concept, intersectionality, serves to guide this study. Intersectionality refers to "the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations" (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). The rationale is that intersectionality captures the complexity of social dimensions' influence on gender inequality. Approaching gender inequality with a certain school of feminism allows in-depth examination of gender inequality; the limitation is that it might constrain understanding of gender inequality under the same school of feminism. For example, socialist feminists perceive social class and division of labor across genders as contributing to oppression of women (Bebel, 1910; Booth, et al., 1972; James, 1980, 1994; Walby et al., 1985; Rose & Hartmann, 2004; Haraway, 2006). This allows examination of how social and economic status of families and division of labor shape women's educational experiences. However,

this examination minimizes factors such as school quality, women's school performance, and influence of peers.

Thus, instead of perceiving gender inequality from a certain school of feminism, this study views gender inequality as a phenomenon because certain assumptions, such as recognition of gendered domination in social arrangements and a desire to change this form of domination, are shared among many feminists (Chafetz, 1997; Fraser & Naples, 2004). In other words, gender inequality is a phenomenon that feminists agree on no matter which theoretical perspective they hold.

Research Design

This study adopts a phenomenological multiple case design. Phenomenology and feminist perspectives are not necessarily irreconcilable, both of them being ways to understand women's experiences (Studlar, 1990; Langellier, 1994). Meanwhile, it allows me to draw strengths from both phenomenology and case study to investigate and compare individual participants as multiple cases while also focusing on their experiences of encountering gender inequality in education.

Phenomenological Research and the Identified Phenomenon

Phenomenology is considered to be both a philosophy and a research method. The goal of phenomenological research is to find the essential meaning of human experiences in a phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). According to Creswell (2007), Moustakas' approach is more focused on description of participants' experiences while van Manen (1990) emphasizes participants' interpretations of their experiences. Regardless, phenomenological research is expected to have an identified phenomenon

first, and experiences of participants are collected on this specific phenomenon. After the phenomenon is identified, researchers must bracket their own experiences because the purpose is to understand participants' experiences and how they perceive them. Data are collected from participants who experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

The identified phenomenon for this proposed study is gender inequality in education in Chinese patriarchal rural communities because gender inequality is a common practice, even a part of the culture in these communities. As Li and Tsang (2003, p. 225) put it:

Although the establishment of the Compulsory Education Law in China in 1986 laid the legal and structural bases for gender equality in schooling, household economic considerations, culturally related expectations regarding males and females at home and in society, the burden of private costs of schooling, and the quality of local schools all influence households' decisions regarding schooling for their children, particularly girls' school attendance.

Case Study Approach

Stake (1995) suggests that case study is a holistic approach because it allows examining educational environments as a complex social endeavor. Case study is also the most appropriate and flexible method to frame a study that allows for the examination of multiple qualitative sources (Merriam, 2009). Similar to Stake and Merriam, Yin (2003) argues that the case is an approach of integrating multiple methods to explore the situation of a complex phenomenon. Thus, case study is not limited to one specific data collection method and analysis. For the purpose of understanding a certain

problem/issue/phenomenon, researchers may conduct interviews and make observations, collect documents and artifacts, and even adopt large-scale survey data.

I embedded a phenomenological approach focusing on women's experiences into a multiple case design because it allows me to view each participant as a single case and collect data for each in multiple ways. Although interviews with participants are the main data sources, I also collected data on the context, where the participants live or lived. Therefore I also engaged in conversations with villagers.

Participants/Cases

The target population for this study is women who grew up in Shancun (Pseudonym), a small rural kinship village located in southern China. The participants are 12 women from the target population. For the purpose of the study, and also according to political, economic, and educational reforms, they are categorized into five generations: the Nationalist Government generation (born before 1949), the Mao generation (born between 1950 and 1970), the post-Mao generation (born between 1971 and 1978), the compulsory education law (CEL)¹ generation (born between 1979 and 1992), and the post-CEL generation (born after 1992). The cases of this study are 12 women from Shancun, with three from each generation except the post-CEL generation who are still under eighteen years old and in elementary or junior high school. Each participant has unique experiences in terms of their education due to their differences in generation, family background, and school performance.

¹ The law requires parents to guarantee children finish at least nine years of compulsory education—six years elementary and three years secondary.

Shancun is chosen for the study because of four considerations. First, the identified phenomenon—gender inequality—has been a common practice in the village and all participants experienced a different extent of gender inequality in education. Second, just as any other rural community in China, the village has gone through different stages of social and political change in the 20th century: collapse of the Chinese feudal society, rising power of the Nationalists, takeover of the Communist Party, the People’s Commune Movement, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and the Market Economy Reform. At each stage, people’s lives and education in the village changed accordingly. For instance, the takeover of the Communist Party led to the reorganization of production (the farming unit shifted from a family to a commune in the 1950s, 1960s, and the 1970s), change of ownership (from private property to public ownership), and educational reforms. Third, women’s gender roles and education changed at each stage of social and political change, according to stories told and retold by villagers. Fourth, I have access to and deep understanding of the community due to many years of experience living in a similar village.

Women of the Nationalist generation were born in the 1910s, 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s when China was under the Nationalists’ governance. Women of the Mao generation were born between 1950 and 1970. They went through the Great Leap Forward Movement in the late 1950s and the Cultural Revolution from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s when China was under the leadership of Mao Zedong. The post-Mao generation went to school after the Cultural Revolution but before the CEL was passed in 1986. The CEL generation started its schooling after the CEL was passed, thus a majority of them were able to complete compulsory education possibly due to the CEL

requirements, change in the economy, and changes in people's beliefs. The post-CEL generation started schooling after the Compulsory Education Tuition Waiver Bill passed in 2001 and during the ongoing national rural school consolidation.

Originally all of the women were from farmers' families in Shancun. The Nationalist generation is retired from farming and living with their families; most women of the Mao generation still do farming; in the past 15 years, all women of the post-Mao generation work in cities as migrant workers but still maintain their households in a village; and most of the women of the CEL generation work in cities as migrant workers, except a few who achieved a four-year university education. The post-CEL generation girls are still in elementary schools or junior high schools.

Data Collection

Data collection focused on individual cases through 24 formal interviews. I interviewed each of the 12 participants twice formally. Due to the villagers' culture and not being familiar with formal interviews, informal conversations with the participants were also relied upon in addition to the formal interviews. In addition, for the purpose of providing a rich description of the village in terms of its history, culture, education, economy, relationships within the village and with other villages, I interviewed a senior villager.

Limitations

First, data collected from interviews might not be an accurate reflection of what actually happened. Most participants have been out of school for decades. It was challenging for some of them to recall what they experienced in school. Second, I am not

able to do member checking due to the limitations of time and distance. Although I had time to transcribe some of the interviews and asked the participants to confirm what they described and said during those three months, I was not able to do member checking during the data analysis process.

Definitions

Education: Education is not limited to schooling but also refers to participants' learning experiences at home and in the village from their families and peers. Among the 12 participants, a couple of them did not have schooling experiences; a few of them only had two to four years of schooling. It is reasonable to argue that the education the participants received from their families and peers in the village is much more important than what they experienced in school. This broad definition of education embraces and values women's educational experiences outside schools.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on Women's Education in China

Writings over the last 100 years on the education of women in China have taken a wide variety of forms, including 1) historical narratives describing traditional gender beliefs and women's education during a given period, 2) articles weighing the impact of social movements on women's education, 3) government policies and reforms and their influence on women's education, and 4) empirical studies identifying factors associated with women's educational opportunities. Although there is a rural and urban distinction in Chinese contemporary history, literature on culture and women's education in China are limited to discussions about the relationship between traditional Chinese culture and beliefs about gender and its influence on women's education. Given the above considerations this review of literature covers 1) traditional beliefs and women's education, 2) missionary schools, women's movements and women's education, 3) government policies on women's education (see appendix 1 for an overview), and 4) factors associated with the gender gap in education.

Also, some researchers (Croll, 1981; Zhang, Brauw & Rozelle, 2004) argued that women's labor and reproduction in rural China are part of rural development. Although few studies on rural development specifically have addressed women's education, they can still aid our understanding of the rural context of the site of the proposed study. Thus, I include rural development as a separate part in the literature review. In addition, gender inequality and its impact on women's education is a global challenge (Nussbaum, 2004). In order to fully understand Chinese rural women's education in a global context, I

include an overview of research on women's education in countries around the world in addition to China.

Traditional Beliefs and Women's Education

The foundation or basis of women's gender roles and social status in Chinese feudal society was Confucian ideas on patriarchal hierarchy of gender. In Confucius' view, "women are as different from men as earth is from heaven ... Women indeed are human beings, but they are of a lower state than men and can never attain to full equality with them. The aim of female education therefore is perfect submission, not cultivation and development of the mind" (as cited in Burton, 1911, p. 19). The earliest book of women's education, *Instruction for Chinese Women and Girls*, also known as *Admonitions for Women*, presented women's roles through the Confucian lens in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-225 B.C.). This book covers the cultivation of virtue, women's work (weaving, silk, etc.), early rising (getting up in the morning), reverence for parents, instruction of children, attention to domestic duties, treatment of guests, and gentleness and harmony (Tsao, 1900). It offers specific guidelines for what women should learn and know in the Chinese feudal society.

Burton (1911) and Ko (1992) argued that women and girls' education was carried out according to these guidelines with some exceptions. Studies on women's education in Chinese feudal society are mainly historical narratives. Burton (1911) provided a general description of women's education before 1842. In her book, *Education of Women in China*, Burton outlined the content of women's education as well as texts which regulated women's roles and education. She argued that although the majority of women were educated within families only to perform their submissive gender roles, some women in

wealthy families were taught to read and write. Lewis (1919) also illustrated how traditional Chinese beliefs about women's gender roles (such as filial piety and obedience to the husband, submission to the desires of brothers and sisters-in-law, and humility of spirit) limited women's education to the development of good virtue, duty to family, and obedience. Similar to Burton, Lewis argued that it is untrue that women had no role in the public sphere in spite of being educated to fulfill their gender roles only within families. Examples they gave include Lady Tsao, the empress dowagers, and women poets in Chinese history among others.

Similarly, Ko's historical study of education and women's culture in 17th- and 18th-century China concluded that cultivating women's virtue was not the only purpose of their education. On the contrary, many daughters of high-social-status families were taught advanced literacy as well as good virtue. The same argument appeared in Ho's (1995) study on views of women's education in China during the early- and high-Qing periods. His review of the opinions of Qing commentators on women's literacy, education, and upbringing between 1650 and 1800 showed that many women during that era learned to read and write with a strong emphasis on "literary learning for moral refinement and the attainment of 'virtue'" (p. 191).

In summary, these studies show that traditional beliefs and values in women's gender roles confined women's education to the preparation of obedient and hard-working daughters, wives, and mothers (Walstedt, 1978; Mann, 1992; Lee, 1995). Thus what women should learn was mainly limited to the virtues of morality and loyalty, proper speech, modest manner, and skill with needlework. Although women were not totally denied literacy education in the old society, the number of women educated in

literacy was very small. Even when they learned how to read and write, the emphasis was still on attainment of “good virtue” and was conducted within the private family sphere.

Western Missionaries, Women’s Movement and Women’s Education

Missionary Schools

In China, women’s education in the public sphere began in schools established by Western missionaries in coastal cities in the latter half of the 19th century (Burton, 1911; Lewis, 1919; Walstedt, 1978; Rong, 1983). Literature about missionary schools is descriptive. E.g. Burton (1911) described how missionaries set up schools, overcame prejudice and suspicion against women being taught in school, and eventually gained the trust of many communities in port cities. Burton indicated that the missionary schools and graduates changed local attitudes toward women’s and girls’ education by showing women could do as well as men in school. As a result, the number of missionary schools increased gradually. Lewis (1919) provides a similar description of the development of missionary schools as well as statistics on the number of schools and student populations. The number of schools increased from three in 1849 to 308 in the year of 1896 and the student population increased from fewer than 50 in 1849 to 50,173 in 1916 (p. 24). Both Burton and Lewis stated that the purpose of the missionaries, who established these schools, was to propagate the Christian faith.

At the end of the 19th century—in 1897, 43 years after the first missionary school was established—Chinese people first established and financed their own private school for girls. Afterward private schools for girls gained popularity in many parts of China (Lewis, 1919) under a patriotism reform movement (Rong, 1983) in which women’s

education was seen as a means for the development of China. Meanwhile, the late Qing government permitted girls' schools in 1901, outlined a system of education for girls in 1903, and finally began providing schooling for girls in 1907. The subsequent Nationalist government believed that "the backwardness of our country, that has hindered China from competing with the World Powers, is not due to the stupidity or laziness of its people, but is due to lack of education" (as cited in Lewis, 1919, p. 29). Women's education was an emphasis among the government agendas under this rationale. An educational system was implemented having seven years of elementary, four years of middle school, three years of high school, and three or four years of college, and women had the same access as men. However, in practice, most women and girls were schooled in all-female schools for each level of the system except the first few years of elementary. The number of girls' schools run by the Nationalist government increased from 2,389 with a student population of 141,130 in 1912 to 3,533 with a student population of 170,789 in 1917 (as cited in Lewis, 1919, p. 34).

Both Burton (1911) and Lewis (1919) provided historical narratives of these private and government schools for girls, including enrollment, curriculum, teaching practices, and school characteristics. Bailey's (2007) historical study of gender and education in China also gave a rich narrative of women's schooling in the early 20th century in terms of how it began and what was it like. Nevertheless, Burton and Lewis do not link the development of women's education with the social movements—the patriotism reform and women's movement. Bailey's study and Rong's (1983) study of women's movements before and after 1911 considered the rise of women's education in

China in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to have taken place during the patriotism reform and women's movements.

Women's Movements and Education

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, reformers of the Qing government such as Youwei Kang, Qichao Liang, and Citong Tan advocated a progressive reform within the government by learning from Western nations and Japan. This reform is considered patriotism because one of its purposes was anti-imperialism and self-determination for China. Women's education was one of the issues on their agenda of reform (Rong, 1983). The Qing government adopted their agenda, at least partially, and eventually started a reform process. Government recognition and funding of women's schools were a result of the reform (Li, 2000). In 1907, the Qing government passed the *Charter of Women's Elementary Schools* and the *Charter of Women's Teacher Education*. Meanwhile, the first women's movement gradually gained momentum and started to challenge the patriarchal domination of women and began promoting women's independence (Zarrow, 1988). Women's newspapers (nü bao) were major publications of the movement. They advocated that education of women should:

teach women to be noble, pure, and wholly natural; teach women to throw off restraints, to be free and independent; teach women to develop an inherently masculine way of thinking; teach women to be the leaders of the women's movement; teach women to be physically strong and healthy, to give birth to healthy children; teach women to be morally pure model citizens; teach women to be enthusiastically public-minded, to care for those unfortunate people; teach

women to firmly and steadfastly advocate revolution (as cited in Rong, 1983, p. 171).

Both Rong (1983) and Bailey (2007) indicated that women's education was shaped by the Qing reformers' ideas on women's education. According to their historical narratives, women's education was more a result of the patriotism reform than the women's movement, especially before 1911 when a few men were advocating against foot binding and for women's marriage and educational rights, but women were not really involved. Yet, the first women's movement was significant in shaping women's education at least in schools under its influence.

The second wave of women's movements was part of the May Fourth Movement around 1919. As with the previous movement, advocates of women's rights during the May Fourth Movement were mostly men. Stacy (1983) argued that the advocacy of women's rights in that time was more of a manifesto of intellectuals' enthusiasm for social change and making China a stronger nation. In contrast with the previous women's movement, women gained more public influence than ever before (Curtin, 1975; Bailey, 2007). In a study of women's participation in higher education, Sheng, Zheng, Liu and Xu (1990) argued that a major contribution of the May Fourth Movement was that women gained access to higher education. Bailey's (2007) study indicated that coeducation at all levels of educational institutions was also an achievement of the May Fourth Movement.

The third wave of women's movements was associated with the Chinese Communist Party and class struggle in China (Curtin, 1975; Kristeva, 1977; Li, 2000; Judd, 2002; Xiao & Lee, 2004; Hernshatter, 2007). Xiao and Lee (2004) argued that this

movement started in areas under Communist Party control during the Nationalist time. Under the Communist Party's guiding ideology—Marxism—improving women's social status was a form of class struggle against oppression of women (Leung, 2003). Li (2000) argued that women's social status did not change significantly until the Communist Party's takeover in 1949. Liu and Carpenter's (2005) examination of the trend of women's education indicated that "parallel to the efforts to promote regular schooling, elimination of illiteracy among the rural population has been a constant goal of the Chinese government for fifty years". Lavelly, Xiao, Li and Freedman (1990) also found that the increase in women's educational attainment was a long-term trend for more than half a century, and the increase occurred mainly from the early 1950s to 1958 as well as from the late 1960s to 1970s. None of the above researchers argued the improvement in women's education changed the patriarchal nature of "socialist" China. Instead, Leung (2003) stated that the advocacy and efforts toward liberation of women advocated by the Communist Party "meant creating a fundamentally new and more democratic socialism within a male hegemony" (p. 359).

During the fourth wave of women's movements, many universities in China established women's studies programs. This is a major accomplishment beginning in the 1980s. Li and Zhang (1994), Tao (1996), and Hsiung (2001) have contributed to research literature on the development of women's studies programs. Based on analysis of the process of establishing women's programs and influential actors, Hsiung (2001) argued that "China's women's studies movement has emerged as a result of the efforts by intellectual and professional women to address unresolved issues embedded in the Chinese Communist Party's approach to gender equality," and "it is also a response to the

negative consequences for women of the state's economic reform" (p. 446). Tao's (1996) narrative history of the Peking University Women's Center and its work echoed Hsiung's argument. In addition Tao also provided a concise overview of the social context—new ideas from returned scholars from other nations, media's exposure of prejudice and discrimination against women, and the market economy placing women at a disadvantage because of their relatively lower educational attainment. Li and Zhang (1994) examined the origin of women's programs in the 1980s, their developments and efforts, and comparisons with previous women's movements in China. They claimed that:

Female scholars have created a space for women beyond the mainstream male-centered ideology; women's studies has enlarged public space beyond the control of political power; women's studies is changing the structure of the traditional humanities by challenging masculine values and standards; and, finally, women's studies is changing Chinese women, especially their psychological dependence on men and society (p. 150).

Contradicting Li and Zhang's argument, Judd's (2002) longitudinal study of the women's movement indicated that women's liberation arose more out of a consideration of the state economy rather than challenging the existing patriarchal social structure. This contradiction could be due to the focus of their analysis. Li and Zhang's conclusion was based on their examination of the development of women's programs in China while Judd based her argument on field investigation conducted in Shandong Province. As Min (2005) indicated, the women's movement in China during the 1980s was mostly dominated by scholars and activists. How much did women scholars' efforts translate to

actual change in women's education in the country? No research has answered this question.

Governmental Policy on Women's Education

Late Qing Dynasty

The earliest written government policy on women's education in China can be traced back to the late Qing Dynasty. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Qing government started a reform of its educational system as one of its approaches to maintaining control. In the *Early Childhood Schools and Family Education Law* issued in 1904, women's education was still limited to the family:

Due to the strict differences between men and women, young women shall NOT:

1) group to go to schools, 2) appear in public places, 3) be knowledgeable, 4) learn foreign customs and choose spouses by themselves, and 5) develop a manner of disrespecting parents and traditional marriage. Thus women should only be educated within their families, either by their parents or nursemaids. The purpose of their education is to 1) learn basic literacy in reading, writing, math, and management for fulfilling their duty as women, do as what women are supposed to, manage their families, and educate children. Inappropriate culture and words shall not be taught, not even mention affairs beyond family and important arguments. Therefore *corruption-free* education for women is only family education.

Nevertheless, because of missionary schools and private schools for girls, challenges to patriarchal domination by the women's movement, and criticism of the

conservative Qing government on women's issues such as foot binding and education in the patriotism movement, women's schooling seemed inevitable (Su, 2007; Zhang, 2007; Li, 2008; Zhou & Zhou, 2009). The Qing government had to yield to public opinion (Su, 2007; Zhou & Zhou 2009) and issued the first women's-school policy in Chinese history through the *Charter of Women's Elementary Schools* and *Charter of Women's Teacher Education* in March 1907. The former stated the emphasis of women's schooling was women's virtue. This is consistent with traditional women's education within families and the *Early Childhood Schools and Family Education Law*. Corresponding curriculum and coursework were also included in the *Charter of Women's Elementary Schools*. The *Charter of Women's Teacher Education* was a guideline for training women teachers for those new schools, as women were expected to be taught by women in single-gender schools.

Su (2007), Zhang (2007), and Zhou and Zhou (2009) argued that the Qing government policy was historically significant because it marked the beginning of change in women's roles and social status. Yet, Zhou and Zhou further pointed out that the significance was limited because it did not change the reality of severe gender inequality in education. Other limitations of women's education during the late Qing Dynasty were that it served the social discourse of anti-feudalism and that it led to "masculinity" of women (Yan, 1996).

The Nationalist Time (1912-1949)

The Nationalist government began in 1912, and the founders considered women's education to be an emphasis (Rong, 1983). The policy during this time included the *1912-1913 Educational System Guidelines (Ren Zi Gui Chou Xue Zhi)* and the *1922*

Educational System Guidelines (Ren Xu Xue Zhi). The 1912-1913 guidelines laid out a national educational system having 4-year junior elementary, 3-year senior elementary, 4-year middle school, and 6- or 7-year higher education preparation, with no academic year limit for higher education. Children were coed only at the junior elementary level. Otherwise men and women were educated in single-sex schools. This system, which lasted until 1922, is usually considered an imitation of Japan's system. Starting in 1922, the Nationalists began implementation of a different educational system having 6-year elementary, 6-year secondary, and 4- to 6-year higher education, with no year limit for further education. Schools at all levels were coed under this system. The 1922 system lasted until the end of the Nationalist government in mainland China. It is usually considered to be an imitation of the American system. Scholars have argued that John Dewey's educational ideas influenced the May Fourth Movement around 1919 (Li, 2006). Dewey's ideas were introduced to China and advocated by his student, Hu Shi (or Hu Shih), who was a major figure in the May Fourth Movement and was influential in the Nationalist government agendas.

These guidelines recognized women's education as equal to men's, especially the 1922 guidelines. They also played an important role in supporting civil societies' efforts to promote women's education. However, women's education mainly focused on basic literacy in reading, and in practice it was still far less valued than men's (Li, 2006). Among a school population of 5,690,591, only 16.79% were women in 1939 (as cited in Du, 1995). Statistics of Ding County in Hebei province showed that the percentage of illiteracy was 98% among women in contrast with 69% among men in 1927, 94% among

women and 56% among men in 1929, and 73% among women in contrast with 10% among men in 1934 (as cited in Li, 2008).

Meanwhile, during the Nationalist time, there were areas under Communist Party control in China. The Communist Party considered women to be proletariat, thus the Communist Party's general educational policy applied to women's education (Cheng, 2008). Cheng's (2008) master's thesis provided a detailed description of women's education in those Communist Party control areas. According to Cheng, the educational system included junior elementary, senior elementary, secondary education, and higher education (all coed). However due to the tight budget and environment of war, the system was only partially implemented (Cheng, 2008). The reality was that only elementary school was in place, mostly in night and half-day schools. Secondary and higher education were very limited. Cheng argued that women's education in Communist Party areas served as class struggle against property owners, and revolution against the Nationalists and residual feudal forces. It had a characteristic of integrating learning, production, and combat training. The significance of women's education in the Communist Party areas was to include women in class struggle and revolution (Cheng, 2008).

The People's Republic Time (1949-present)

The policies, which have been influential in women's education since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, included the PRC Constitution, Mao's idea that women "hold up half of the sky", *Guidelines of Education for Illiterates*, and the *Compulsory Education Law*. The 1949 Constitution stated:

The People's Republic of China abolishes any forms oppression of women that appeared in the old society. Women shall have equal rights as men in politics, economy, culture, education, and social life.

The Constitution was the legal foundation of women's education. In practice, Mao's advocacy of women's rights was significant during Mao's time (Liu & Carpenter, 2005). Mao said that "women's direct participation in the labor force was the only path to equality" (Yang, 2005). According to Liu and Carpenter's (2005) essay on trends and issues of women's education in China, Mao's advocacy and consistent implementation of gender equity policies contributed to women's equal opportunities to achieve education. The percentage of girls enrolled in elementary schools increased from 28 percent in 1951 to 43.7 in 1984 (UNESCO, 1987). "The literacy rate among females increased from 10 percent in 1949 to 77.4 percent in 2000" (Liu & Carpenter, 2005, p. 279).

Meanwhile, the Communist Party had been advocating that schools provide basic literacy education for illiterate teenagers and adults even before the establishment of the PRC (He, 2011). However, the policy was not well implemented and guidelines on education for illiterates did not appear until 1978 (Xing, 2007). Since then, a series of regulations have been introduced for the purpose of providing basic literacy education for illiterates. Researchers in China usually refer to these guidelines as policy for illiterates' education. The majority of illiterates lived in rural areas, thus illiterates' education was mostly implemented there. Elementary schools and secondary schools in rural areas provided flexible programs and schedules to teach basic literacy, particularly in reading and writing Chinese. In 1979 and 1980, the illiterate population was reduced by more than 5 million each year, and this population was further reduced by 17 million between

1982 and 1988 (Xing, 2007). The policy was also widely implemented in 1990s and is still being implemented in some areas.

Women encompassed the majority of the students in the illiterates' education programs. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics show that 70.2% of illiterates, 127.25 million among 181.61 million, were women in 1995 even after more than a decade of illiterates' education beginning in the 1980s (National Bureau of Statistics & National Association of Education, 1995). Nevertheless, a study coauthored by the National Bureau of Statistics and the National Association of Education (1995) stated that illiterates' education policy contributed to the economy and improvement of women's social status. This statement is based on only two indicators—1) the 12.2% decline of illiterates among the work force, and 2) 4% to 7% increase of women in the tertiary industry such as business, education, and finance. The study did not address how the decrease of illiteracy and increase of women in the tertiary industries contributed to the economy and women's social status.

The *Compulsory Education Law* was passed in 1986 and required parents to ensure their children complete at least eight or nine years of compulsory education, including elementary and junior high, no matter the gender of their children. No empirical studies have evaluated the impact of the law on women's education. Statistics showed that school-age children who were not enrolled in schools in 1993, 66.4% were still girls (Li, 2006). Fifteen years later in 2001, the central government began providing parents compensation for their children's compulsory education. Along with the improved economy and increasing household income, the difference in access to education between boys and girls was reduced from .7% in 1995 to .04% in 2004, and the

enrollment of boys and girls was 98.97% and 98.93% respectively in 2004 (Information Office of the State Council, 2005).

Gender Gap in Education and Influential Factors

After more than a hundred years of reforms and movements promoting gender equity in the 19th and 20th centuries, women's educational attainment was increased significantly in association with those reforms (Lavelly, Xiao, Li, & Freedman, 1990). However, gender inequality still persists and shapes women's education. Researchers (Bauer, et al., 1992; Zhou, Moen, & Tuma, 1998; Brown & Park, 2002; Song, Appleton, & Knight, 2006; Wu, 2010) have shown that women are still disadvantaged in terms of educational access and attainment because of traditional beliefs about women's roles and corresponding gender bias. For example, Zhou, Moen, and Tuma's (1998) analysis of a representative sample of 7,533 urban residents from six provinces (Gansu, Guangdong, Hebei, Heilongjiang, Jiangsu, and Sichuan) found that girls and young women had significantly lower probability of entering junior high, senior high, and college. Based on the results they argued "girls and young women in urban China have been disadvantaged in their educational advancement throughout most of the historical periods of Communist rule" (p. 210). Another example is a study is from Brown and Park (2002). They used survey data of 446 households collected from six Chinese provinces, and found gender bias still played an important role in girls' educational attainment. Their evidence showed that girls were much more likely to drop out of school, especially during the first three years of elementary school, despite compulsory school policies. Parents were less likely to have their girls continue to junior secondary school if they did not have good performance.

In contrast, more recent studies showed that women's disadvantage in education declined over the past few decades (Hannum, 2005; Hannum, Wang, & Adams, 2010). For example, Hannum, Kong, and Zhang (2009) found little gender disparity existed in terms of parental investment, learning environment, achievement, industriousness, academic confidence and social distance to school. Similarly, Wu and Zhang's (2010) analysis of Chinese census data suggested an increase of women's education over time. College enrollment even began to favor women in 2005. Furthermore, Zhao and Glowwe's (2010) study, based on household survey data from Gansu Province, found gender had no impact on years of schooling. However, this does not mean that progress in gender equality benefited all women regardless of their family financial situation. Cherng and Hannum (2013) showed that gender inequality in education is subject to change depending on household poverty. Note the impact of poverty on gender inequality in education varies in different stages of students' schooling. Taken together, these studies suggested that gender inequality in education might be still a social problem in low-income rural communities.

As indicated above, poverty is an important factor influencing gender inequality in education in China. Consistently, women's disadvantage in education is associated with family income and location (rural vs. urban) (Li & Tsang, 2003). Meanwhile, studies have also highlighted many other influential factors such as parental education, school performance, and parental expectation (Hannum, 2003; Shu, 2004; Wu, 2010; Song, Appleton, & Knight, 2006; Xie, Wang, & Chen, 2010). Women's disadvantage in education is related with these factors such as school performance, family income and location (rural vs. urban), parental education, etc. (Li & Tsang, 2003; Hannum, 2003;

Shu, 2004; Wu, 2010; Song, Appleton, & Knight, 2006; Xie et al., 2010).

Wu (2010) examined the trends in educational stratification during China's economic reforms in the 1990s. Analyzing the census data from 1990 to 2000 of children from 6 to 18 years old in a sample of 0.1% of the Chinese population, he found that children in rural households became more disadvantaged compared with their urban counterparts, and the rural–urban gap after the transition to senior high school is even larger. As a control variable in Wu's model, gender had a negative impact on student's educational attainment, which indicates that girls' educational attainment is significantly lower than boys', especially in rural areas. The negative influence of interaction between being a woman and having rural residency on women's education was also found in Wu and Zhang's (2010) analysis of more recent census data. Their study suggested that rural women were the most disadvantaged in the transition from junior high to senior high school. Being a woman from a rural community meant that one had a much lower possibility to access senior high school and college. Li and Tsang's (2003) analysis of survey data of 400 households from four counties, two in Hubei and two in Gansu, indicated that 1) family finance was one of the most important factors that influence girls' education, and 2) parents held higher expectations for boys than girls. Similarly, Hannum's (2003) survey of 7,550 sampled villages suggested that “village and household incomes as well as village provision of junior high schools exerted distinct net impacts on children's enrollment probabilities” (p.157).

Xie et al. (2010) surveyed 14,500 women students from 50 higher education institutions (nine top universities, 12 regular public undergraduate universities, 16 public vocational colleges, two private undergraduate colleges, six private vocational colleges,

and five independent institutions). The findings indicated that 1) there was a disparity in urban and rural women's access to higher education, 2) the disparity was smaller in public institutions than in private institutions, and 3) parental income and education were influential factors in students' selection of schools. According to these studies, boys in general were more likely than girls to attend school in rural China, as Song Appleton and Knight (2006) also indicated based on their analysis of survey data of 8,000 households. In addition, Song et al. (2006) compared the differences in effects of mothers' education and fathers' education. The study found that mothers' education had a stronger effect on elementary-school overall enrollment and educational expenditure than fathers' education. But fathers' education was more strongly associated with girls' enrollment than mothers' education. In addition, the study showed that "educating men appears to bring greater benefits in terms of household income" (p. 1649).

In terms of why parents' education influences girls' education, Shu's study pointed out that education had a positive impact on promoting an egalitarian gender attitude. Shu's analysis was based on survey data from 9,033 married couples in six provinces (Shanghai, Shandong, Guangdong, Shanxi, Jilin, and Ningxia). The survey asked to what extent the participants agree with statements about women's career, marriage rights, sexual freedom, and the importance of having sons. The findings could be summarized as: 1) the number of years of education was positively associated with a more gender-egalitarian attitude, 2) the association was stronger for women than for men, and 3) average education in a community was also significantly associated with a gender-egalitarian attitude.

Montgomery and Liu (1996) divided the above influential factors into three levels, namely individual, family, and organizational. Gender, as an individual level factor, had a great influence on students' educational and occupational aspiration and the distribution of junior high graduates enrolled into different types of high schools or joining the workforce. Montgomery and Liu did not explain the relationship between these factors and the gender difference. Additionally, Ma and Zheng's (2003) investigation of a county in Hebei found these three levels of factors played an important role in girls' dropping out. In addition, they also found that school-level factors causing girls to drop out include problematic educational purpose, low teacher and teaching quality, schools not being concerned about girls' dropout rate, and lack of communication between parents and schools. Family factors causing girls to drop out included poverty and parents' lack of understanding of higher education. Individual factors include girls' lack of interest in schooling. Ma and Zheng identified these factors but did not further explain the process in terms of how they caused problems in girls' education.

In short, existing research consistently demonstrated that women from rural areas, from communities with lower average educational attainment, from low-income families, and with parents having fewer years of schooling and lower expectations for women's education are highly disadvantaged. In addition, lower-quality schools and teaching are often found in rural and low-income areas and magnify the disadvantage. As the target community for this study is considered to be low-income and rural, these existing studies provide good background for understanding the relationship between women's education and gender inequality in the Shancun community.

Rural Development and Women's Education

In an essay on rural women's production and reproduction in four socialist societies—Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and Tanzania—Croll (1981) indicated that rural women “shoulder a double burden” because of their dual roles both in the waged labor force and in households. In Croll's view, women's production and reproduction was a part of socialist development strategies. Almost a decade later, Judd (1990) echoed Croll's argument. Based on data collected from three villages in Shandong province through interviews and household surveys, Judd found that “three major strategies for enhancing women's role in economic development in rural China are in evidence in the 1980s: replacing male labor in agriculture, employment in rural industry, and household-based commodity production” (p. 23). In her ethnographic study of Lu, a village in Yunnan province, Bossen (2004) examined women's roles in production before and after 1949. She argued that women played a greater role in agriculture than men. Also, Bossen found that young women were an important workforce in farming and have more non-farm work opportunities compared with previous generations. Bossen indicated that women's participation in production and bringing income into the family helped them gain respect and influence in families and the development of the economy, which improved women's lives in the village. Nevertheless, this did not eliminate gender inequality and women were still in a less privileged situation compared with men in Lu.

While Bossen's study is historical and focused on women's contribution in Lu (a village) before 1949 and a few decades afterwards, Zhang, Brauw, and Rozelle's (2004) study of China's rural labor market and gender implications is rooted in the context of the end of 20th century, when migration from rural to urban was a trend. In this migration

trend, many married women were left to maintain farming while their husbands labor in urban areas as migrant workers. Their analysis of survey data collected in a random sample of 1,199 households from 60 villages in six provinces of rural China found that “when women are left in charge of farm work, crop productivity does not fall” (p.230).

In summary, these studies have shown that women have contributed to rural development in China through their roles in households, reproduction, and participation in the labor market. Nevertheless, little is known in terms of what education has done to women’s participation in rural development. The proposed study seeks to understand rural women’s educational experiences which might provide insight in how their education prepared them for rural development.

Studies on Women’s Education in Other Countries

Gender inequality in women’s education is a phenomenon not only in China and some Chinese rural communities, but also exists globally. Stromquist (1992) showed that women’s literacy was lower than men’s in a majority of countries in the world. The data Stromquist used could be considered outdated, however more recent studies also indicated that global gender inequality did not change significantly over the past two decades (Buchmann, 2008). Two studies by Klasen (2002, 2009) supported Stromquist. Unterhalter’s (2006) gender equality in education index showed that there is a long way to go for countries including Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, in order to achieve gender equity in education.

One argument about the impact of gender inequality in education is that it hinders economic development. Klasen’s (2002) analysis of cross-country panel data found that gender inequality negatively affected economic growth both directly and indirectly.

Gender gaps in schooling accounted for 0.4 to 0.9 percent of annual GDP per capita growth in East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East. Klasen and Lamanna's (2009) study with more recent data produced similar findings. The findings of these two studies are not surprising considering that much previous research (Benavot, 1989; Jejeebhoy, 1995; Schultz, 1993) indicated that an increase of women's education might lead to an increase of economic growth, and that investment in women's education yielded not just social but also financial benefits. Generally, these studies assumed that gender inequality influences economic development instead of vice versa.

These studies also provided strong evidence of the importance of women's education, so what policies and characteristics of institutions and culture could improve women's education effectively? Cooray and Potrafke (2011) drew data from 157 countries and showed that political structure was not related to women's education. In other words, whether a nation is democratic or autocratic is not associated with women's educational opportunities. Because certain religions and regions were negatively associated with these opportunities, Cooray and Potrafke argued that culture and religion were the primary influence on gender inequality in education.

The existing research on women's education—based on large-scale data collected from different countries—showed that gender inequality in education is a global concern. A primary focus of these studies was on gender inequality in developing countries. Although these studies did not specifically address gender inequality in education in China, they showed how gender inequality is located globally and cautioned that there is still a long way to go to achieve gender equity in education. Meanwhile, voices of women who experienced gender inequality in education are still missing in existing research.

Contribution of Existing Literature

The existing literature on women's education in China has mainly focused on historical changes in educational access and attainment at a macro level. First, it described the social backgrounds, movements, driving forces, and related policies of women's education. As indicated above, the change in beliefs about gender roles, the patriotism movement at the end of the Qing Dynasty, the four waves of women's movements, and policies on women's education from the Qing government to the Communist government all played significant roles in shaping women's education in China. Second, existing literature identified possible factors such as paternal and maternal education, family income, household location, teaching quality of a school, and school performance of girls as being associated with women's/girls' education. Nevertheless, how was women's education shaped and what was it like in terms of women's individual experiences? What did changes in Chinese society mean to individual women? In particular, how did educational policies in China in the 20th century shape women's educational experiences? These questions remain unanswered in the existing research.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

Conceptual Framework

This section gives a brief overview of feminist theories, intersectionality (guiding conceptual framework) and application in educational research, and the rationale of using both intersectionality and phenomenology. The intention of using both phenomenology and intersectionality is not to reconcile these two theoretical stances. Instead, I hope to understand the participants' experiences from different angles.

Feminist Theories

Over the past few centuries, interest in feminism generated a large body of complex literature concerning and advocating the wellbeing of women. This literature addressed gender oppression, power domination, and problematic social structure based on problematic gender division. It shaped the way we see the world by presenting how our societies have been constituted to make women “the second sex” (e. g. de Beauvoir, 2011). Women’s experiences in patriarchal societies are one of the focuses of feminist theories. Johnson (1987) even argued that feminist analysis had its origin in experiences more than any other type of analysis. Many writings by feminists were based on women’s life experiences. Mary Wollstonecraft’s “A Vindication of the Rights of Women” was influenced by the author’s and her mother’s and sister’s tragic experiences in London. Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman”, which strongly questioned the deprivation of African American women’s rights, was based on her life experience during the time of slavery in the U.S. (Schneir, 1994).

In the 20th century, one of the most notable feminist works is Simone de Beauvoir’s “The Second Sex”. The second volume of this piece provided rich

description of women's lived experiences from childhood to being a mother. As children, girls experienced envy of boys' way of urination; as teenagers girls oftentimes experienced difficulty accepting their femininity; as married women they easily found themselves disadvantaged by the division of labor and inequality between a husband and wife. Based on what she described, de Beauvoir (2011) argued that women were not born to be women; instead their experiences make them become women. This distinction between being born as a woman and becoming a woman distinguishes sex and gender (Butler, 1986), which is a major contribution to feminist theory.

Examination of women's lives and experiences from different ideological perspectives even led to the development of multiple schools of feminist theories such as liberal, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, poststructuralist/postmodern, and transnational/post-colonial. Liberal feminist theorists are concerned with inequality between men and women and socialization of gender roles; radical feminists focus on problems with valuing men's experiences over women's; psychoanalytic feminists emphasize experiences acquired in early developmental relationships with parents; socialist feminists consider gender as a process embedded in power relations and historical material conditions; poststructuralist and transnational feminists question the stability of "sex" and "gender" categories and view gender as a term "in the making" (Calas & Smircich, 2006, p. 287). Although there are diverse approaches to feminist theories, a fundamental goal of feminist theories is to analyze gender relations—how gender relations are constituted and experienced and how we think or, equally important, do not think about them (Flax, 1987).

Different schools of feminists do not necessarily agree on what gender inequality

means, what produced it, and how it is reproduced. Nevertheless, recognition of gendered domination in social arrangements and a desire to change this form of domination is shared among many feminists (Chafetz, 1997; Fraser & Naples, 2004). “Regardless of how many statistical contortions are made or sociological and economic explanations are marshaled, to date no single indicator shows that the economic conditions of women in the world, as a whole, are at parity with the conditions of men” (Calas & Smircich, 2006, p. 284). Women are generally paid less (Blau & Kahn, 1994) and doing more work than men (Fuwa, 2004). In education, “the social construction of private sphere as women’s domain and the public as men’s domain continues to influence the nature of women’s and men’s participation in schooling today” (Bradley, 2002, p. 295). In the case of China, there were efforts and movements in the name of women’s liberation in China since the end of 19th century, but most served the purpose of economic development (Judd, 2002).

I do not limit my understanding of gender inequality to a particular school of feminist theory because “gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (Butler, 2002, p. 6), making gender inequality a complicated issue. My focus is to understand the complexity of women’s educational experiences, and this led me to adopt intersectionality as guiding conceptual framework. The rationale is that intersectionality captures the complexity of social dimensions’ influence on women’s experiences.

Intersectionality

“Intersectionality has been used by feminists to address (problems of) essentialist models of social theory by acknowledging that not all women’s experiences are the same” (Bhopal & Preston, 2012, p. 2). It refers to “the relationships among multiple dimensions

and modalities of social relations and subject formations” (McCall, 2005, p.1771). When it is applied to women’s studies, many feminist theorists argue that gender oppression and biases in patriarchal societies are due to a variety of social dimensions such as gender, class, race/ethnicity, etc., and interactions among them (Crenshaw, 1991). Since Crenshaw introduced the concept in 1989, intersectional analysis has prevailed in social sciences (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The strength of intersectional analysis is that it acknowledges how women’s experiences are shaped by multiple layers of identities related to their gender, race, socioeconomic status, sexuality, nationality, etc. Its flexibility allows exploration of new social categories that might be critical in understanding women’s experiences in different cultural contexts.

Intersectionality and Women’s Experiences in Educational Research

“Recognition that ‘race’, social class and sexuality differentiated women’s experiences has disrupted notions of a homogeneous category ‘woman’ with its attendant assumptions of universality that served to maintain the status quo in relation to ‘race’, social class and sexuality, while challenging gendered assumptions” (Brah and Phoenix 2004, p. 82). Intersectionality is widely applied to understand experiences of women of color. Black feminists have contributed accounts of the complexity of Black women’s lived experiences under the assumption that “race, class, and gender are markers of power creating intersecting lines or axes used to reinforce power relations and forms of oppression” (Collins, 2000; Alston, 2005 p. 677).

Jean-Marie, Williams and Sherman’s (2009) study of 12 Black women’s leadership experiences examined the intersection of race and gender. They found that 1) the participants’ “background was closely tied to the struggle for equality during the Civil

Rights Movement” (p. 568), and 2) the participants encountered racial and gender discrimination “in pursuit of educational goals and professional careers” (p. 571). They also found that “the participants’ transcendence of racial and gender stereotypes became the impetus for developing a leadership style that is inclusive, builds consensus, and collaborative” (p. 573).

Carlone and Johnson (2007) analyzed science experiences of 15 successful women of color. The science experiences include their undergraduate and graduate studies in science and experiences during their careers. One of the findings indicated that women with “disrupted scientist identities” had difficult trajectories “because, in part, their bids for recognition were disrupted by the interaction with gendered, ethnic, and racial factors” (p. 1187). Women of color’s experiences in academia are shaped both by their gender and racial identities (Turner, 2002). Turner’s own experiences as a faculty member in a major research university and her interviews with many women of color showed that these women often experience multiple marginality. Padilla and Chavez (1995) presented a collection of narratives about how Latina women survive as faculty in American universities. These narratives offer insights into the question—“can I be both Latina and professor without compromise” (Aleman, 1995, p. 75).

Rationale of Embracing Phenomenology

These empirical studies successfully employed intersectionality to examine women’s lived experiences. They demonstrated the potential of using intersectionality to understand rural women’s educational experiences in China. However, given that my study is situated in a Chinese community, far from the society where the theoretical lens was developed, this flexibility is critical because women’s lived experiences in rural

China do not necessarily fall into the intersection between race and gender, race and socioeconomic status, and race and religion, which was essential for intersectional analysis of education in the U.S. Feminist literature has shown that not all women's experiences are the same. Could this Western theoretical stance really reveal the complexity of women's lives related to education in Chinese rural communities? Will I confront the danger of imposing a feminist stance that my participants might not agree with instead of understanding Chinese rural women's experiences from their perspectives? I embrace phenomenology to avoid limiting my understanding of the participants' experiences with a presumed theoretical lens.

“Quilting” intersectionality and phenomenology is not easy though, due to the tension between feminist theory and phenomenology (Langellier, 1994; Studlar, 1990). Phenomenology calls for suspension of researchers' preconceptions and understanding the essence of lived experiences, while feminist theories hold the strong stance of women being disprivileged in patriarchal societies. In Langellier's (1994, p. 72) words, “Feminism encourages the situation of phenomenological analysis of women's lived experiences within the social differences unavoidable in a society built upon inequalities. Phenomenology cautions against merely imposing feminist interpretations on women's lived experience”. By using both to guide this study I do not seek to reconcile feminist theories and phenomenology. Instead, I hope to understand the twelve participants' educational experiences from a phenomenological perspective and a feminist stance respectively. Therefore, I conducted the interviews under a phenomenological design and presented the findings (Chapter Four) in such a way that I could maximize the participants' depiction of their experiences. Then in Chapter Five I interpreted their

experiences using the concept intersectionality.

Method

This study adopts a phenomenological multiple case design for two reasons. This design allows me to draw strengths from both approaches to investigate and compare individual participants as multiple cases while also focusing on their experiences of encountering gender inequality in education.

Phenomenology and Identified Phenomenon

Phenomenology is considered to be both a philosophy and a research method. As a research method, a phenomenological design calls for embracing lived experiences of a phenomenon, or in other words, “investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it” (van Manen, 1990, p.30). The goal is to find the essential meaning or essence of human experiences in a phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). The essence of lived experiences does not mean “some ultimate core or residue of meaning” (van Manen, 1990). Rather, as van Manen further indicated, it is a presentation or articulation of lived experiences in a “hitherto unseen way” (p. 39). According to Creswell (2007), Moustakas’ approach is focused on description of participants’ experiences while van Manen (1990) emphasizes participants’ interpretations of their experiences. Regardless, phenomenological research is expected to have an identified phenomenon first, and experiences of participants are collected on this specific phenomenon. After the phenomenon is identified, researchers must bracket their own experiences because the purpose is to understand participants’ experiences and how they

perceive them. Data are collected from participants who experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

The identified phenomenon for this proposed study is gender inequality in education in patriarchal rural communities in China because this inequality is common there, even as a part of the culture in these communities. As Li and Tsang (2003, p. 225) put it:

Although the establishment of the Compulsory Education Law in China in 1986 laid the legal and structural bases for gender equality in schooling, household economic considerations, culturally related expectations regarding males and females at home and in society, the burden of private costs of schooling, and the quality of local schools all influence households' decisions regarding schooling for their children, particularly girls' school attendance.

This study is not pioneering in application of phenomenology to women's experiences. Phenomenological design has been applied to women-related issues such as feminine body motility (Young, 1980; Chisholm, 2008), domination and oppression (Bartky, 1990), sexual harassment (Tuerkheimer, 1997), women's experiences of battering by men (Garko, 1999), postnatal depression and health professional intervention (Williamson, 2005), and experiences with miscarriage (Adolfsson, 2010). Nevertheless, this study is pioneering in understanding Chinese rural women's educational experiences from a phenomenological perspective. To approach the identified phenomena, I consider each participant as a case.

Case Study

Stake (1995) suggests that case study is a holistic approach that it allows examining education environments as a complex social endeavor. Case study is also the most appropriate and flexible method to frame a study that allows for the examination of multiple qualitative sources (Merriam, 2009). Similar to Stake and Merriam, Yin (2003) argues that the case is an approach of integrating multiple methods to explore a complex phenomenon. Thus, case study is not limited to one specific data collection or analysis method. For the purpose of understanding a certain problem, issue, or phenomenon, researchers may conduct interviews and make observations, collect documents and artifacts, even adopt large-scale survey data. I propose to embed a phenomenological research approach focused on women's experiences into a multiple case design because it allows me to view each participant as a single case, collect data for each in multiple ways, and gain in-depth understanding of their educational experiences.

Context

Shancun is a small rural kinship village located in southern China. It is located in subtropical, hilly terrain where rice paddies and villages are scattered on flat lands among the hills. Most of the hills are covered with evergreen plants. The village encompasses three sites close to each other with rice paddies, roads, and a man-made creek in between. Houses sit in rows at each site with hills at their backs and rice paddies in front. Most of the adobe houses—each a single story with a roof covered by a special type of gray southern-China tile—were built before the 1980s, and some wear the faded slogan “Long

Live Chairman Mao” on their walls. The brick houses, usually two stories high with a flat concrete roof, were built after the 1980s.

The current population of the village is approximately 500, about forty percent of whom work as migrant workers in cities but are still counted as Shancun people. The Chinese *Hukou* policy does not allow migrant workers to move into cities as residents, so they still maintain their rural household and return there once or twice a year for the Spring Festival and other holidays. Some parents brought their children with them to the cities, but most of them left their children to be cared for by their grandparents. Men in the village have the same family name. Women who grow up in the village must move away upon marrying men from other nearby villages because people in the village believe only men belong to the village. Married couples have a strong preference for sons. To some extent, one of the goals of a marriage is to have a son. Couples without at least one son are considered to be unhappy. Since the implementation of the one-child policy, many couples have managed to use abortion as a way to have a son. Although today there is not much gender differentiation in work outside the home, women usually still do most of the work of taking care of children and housekeeping.

All people in Shancun are Han, the majority ethnic group in China. They hold certain Confucian values such as *Ren* (the obligation of altruism and humanity toward other individuals within a community), loyalty, and filial piety (respect and obedience to elders and authorities). Before the Cultural Revolution, Taoism and Buddhism were practiced. Today, villagers don’t identify themselves as religious but both Taoism and Buddhism have had deep influence, especially for the generation who were born before

the 1960s. Many people still follow the principles of *Fengshui* (a system believed to employ the laws of Heaven and Earth for improving peoples' lives).

Originally everyone in the village was a rice farmer—the main agriculture product is rice. The current annual income of the village ranges from \$1,100 to \$2,300 U.S. dollars per person. In the past twenty years, people began working at shoe factories, clothing and textile factories, and construction in coastal cities as migrant workers. Today more than sixty percent of people between 16 and 50 years old work as migrant workers in cities. Due to the strict household policy in China, they cannot become residents of cities. Thus they still maintain their houses and families in the village even if they go back to the village only during the spring festival break.

Until the middle of the 20th century, due to the small number of school-age children and the lack of funding, the village had to join with other nearby villages to hire a teacher. School-age children, mostly boys, were taught by the shared teacher. The cost of hiring the teacher was shared among villagers who have children going to school. After the Communist Party takeover in 1949, the biggest change was that most parents began sending girls to school, although most of them dropped out of elementary school. Although the funding largely depended on tuition from parents, the local government increased its control over schools tremendously in the latter half of 20th century.

The relationship between Shancun and other villages developed mostly because of their common ancestors. Thus, people from Shancun have a close relationship with many nearby villages where people have the same family name. The relationship with villages having different family names has been hostile, including armed conflicts over disputed lands and resources before the local government could bring it under control in the 1950s.

Although there are no armed conflicts anymore, people from Shancun perceive villagers having different family names as “others”.

The target population for this study is women who grew up in Shancun. For the purpose of the study, and also according to political, economic, and educational reforms, they are categorized into five generations: the Nationalist Government generation (born before 1949), the Mao generation (born between 1950 and 1970), the post-Mao generation (born between 1971 and 1978), the compulsory education law (CEL) generation (born between 1979 and 1992), and the post-CEL generation (born after 1992).

Women of the Nationalist generation were born in the 1910s, 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s when China was under the Nationalists’ governance (The last dynasty, the Qing, collapsed and was replaced by the Nationalist government, the Republic of China, in 1911). Women of Mao’s generation were born between 1950 and 1970. They went through the Great Leap Forward Movement in the late 1950s and the Cultural Revolution from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s when China was under the leadership of Mao Zedong. The post-Mao generation went to school after the Cultural Revolution but before the CEL was passed in 1986. The CEL generation started its schooling after the CEL was passed; thus a majority of them were able to complete compulsory education possibly due to the CEL requirements, change in the economy, and changes in people’s beliefs. The post-CEL generation mostly started schooling after the Compulsory Education Tuition Waiver Bill passed in 2001 and during the ongoing national rural school consolidation.

Originally all of the women were from farmers’ families in Shancun. The Nationalist generation is retired from farming and living with their families; most women of Mao’s generation still do farming; in the past 15 years, all women of the post-Mao

generation work in cities as migrant workers but still maintain their households in a village; and some of the women of the CEL generation work in cities as migrant workers, except a few who achieved a four-year university education. The post-CEL generation girls are still in elementary schools or junior high schools.

Shancun is the choice for this study because of four considerations. First, the identified phenomenon—gender inequality in education—has been a common practice in the village and all participants experienced a different degree of gender inequality in education. Second, as with any other rural community in China, the village has gone through different stages of social and political change in the 20th century: collapse of the Chinese feudal society, rising power of the Nationalists, takeover of the Communist Party, the People’s Commune Movement, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and the Market Economy Reform. At each stage, people’s lives and education in the village changed accordingly. For instance, the takeover of the Communist Party led to the reorganization of production (the farming unit shifted from a family to a commune in the 1950s, 1960s, and the 1970s), change of ownership (from private property to public ownership), and educational reforms. Third, women’s work and gender roles changed at each stage of social and political change according to stories told and retold by villagers. Fourth, I have access to and deep understanding of the community due to many years of experience living in a similar rural village.

Cases/Participants

Both Merriam (2009) and Stake (1995) define a case as a bounded system. The defined cases of this study are 12 women from Shancun—three from each generation except the post-CEL generation, who are still younger than 18 years old and in

elementary or junior high school. Each participant had unique experiences in terms of her education due to differences in generation and family background. Among the three women of the Nationalist generation, Mei (all names are pseudonyms) was brought up in Shancun as a child-bride and married her elder step-brother later in the same village; Lan is from a landlord family; and Ju grew up in a typical peasant family. Among the Mao generation, Yin had experienced many more years of schooling than Jia and Xiu. Among the post-Mao generation, Yan and Hong chose to drop out of school while Hua was asked not to go to school by her family. Among the CEL generation, Ni is one of the few women of her generation who managed to go to college. Wen's parents stayed in the rural community while Ni's and Dai's parents moved to a city when they were small children (see appendix 2).

Data Collection

Phenomenological design calls for open-ended and in-depth dialogical interviews for data collection on participants' experiences. The purpose is to obtain enough information to provide comprehensive description on a studied phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). For this study, I interviewed each of the 12 participants twice from May to August 2013. Each interview lasted 40 to 65 minutes. In addition, because the villagers were not familiar with formal interviews, I had many supplemental informal conversations with the participants, which turned out to be about 80 pages of handwriting notes. For the purpose of providing a rich description of the village in terms of its history, culture, education, economy, and relationships within the village and with other villages, I also conducted five interviews with a senior in the village—each about 35 minutes. Data from these five interviews were used in the background introduction of the first three

generations, experiences relating to the land reform, collective farming, and the Cultural Revolution. When I summarized the participants' experiences (in part five of Chapter Four), I also drew information from these five interviews.

Interview questions were open-ended in order to engage the participants in discussion and description of their educational experiences in schooling and family education. For the first interview with each participant, I began with the question: "Could you tell me about your life experiences when you were a child or teenager?" I kept the conversation going by nodding, agreeing, and asking questions such as: "Could you tell me more about this?" "What do you mean or could you explain a little more?" "What happened next?" "Why?" "How did you feel about that?" For the second interview with each participant, I asked them to tell me more details of their experiences related to their education, or specifically to tell me something that they did not mention the first time. For example, two of the first generation participants did not say anything about their schooling after revealing much about their families and what their lives were like. I said to them, "You didn't mention your schooling. Why?" One of them stared at me expecting me to understand why. I had assumptions in my mind, but I waited for their responses because it was important for me to have their explanations. The first generation participants were very interested in talking about their lives in the village, and schooling was only briefly mentioned. Considering that schooling was only a small part of their life experience (Mei and Ju did not go to school at all), I asked them to explain why they couldn't go to school and to describe their siblings' education. Later when I was transcribing their interviews I felt overwhelmed by what they experienced, while I had just focused narrowly on their schooling and family education for this dissertation.

Most of the interviews were conducted in the participants' houses, with two exceptions—two of the third generation participants invited me to talk with them at the factory where they both worked. I was reluctant and worried that it might interfere with their work, but I agreed knowing that this could be the most convenient option for them. The moment I showed up at the factory I heard a strange and loud voice:

“Why are you here? I heard you are getting a doctoral degree in the U.S.!”

Obviously, most women in the factory heard about me visiting the factory before I arrived. All of a sudden, I felt that I was such an intruding outsider. Glancing around the room I saw a few rows of sewing machines taking up almost the entire space, and blue plastic baskets with piles of black leather up to two feet high against each machine. They were busy doing their work while also chatting over the noise that the machines made. Not knowing where I should sit, I smiled and stood wondering what I should do. Before I could feel embarrassed, everyone laughed out loud while the voice still echoed in the small factory room that was no more than a couple hundred square feet. They were apparently joking with me. Yan moved a stool to her machine and invited me to sit there, and we started talking. I conducted the interviews with Yan and Hong in their factory while they and their coworkers did their work.

Data Analysis

I transcribed the interviews with the 12 participants, listened again to the interviews and read over the transcriptions a few times before I started coding. It was important for me to listen to the recordings multiple times because this improves my understanding of them and might help my later interpretation of the data. Listening to the recorded interviews and reading the transcribed data helped me gain an overall sense of

the participants' experiences. In this process I tried to link what they said to my knowledge of the village—including the daily routine of a village woman, social changes in the last century, and the gender roles of each generation. At this point, I did not reach judgmental conclusions. The focus was to understand how participants thought and felt about their education.

After I fully absorbed the interviews, I highlighted those parts of the transcriptions which are related to the research questions. According to my understanding of the excerpts, with the assistance of the software program Dedoose, I categorized and labeled the excerpts into categories such as family financial situation and family education, women's role and family education, learning from an adult or peers, siblings' education, family support of schooling, night school, and truancy etc. Note that there was some overlap among the excerpts. The total number of excerpts is 322 from the interview transcripts, discounting those excerpts which share one label or code. The excerpts are approximately 31,000 Chinese characters, which would be about 20,000 words in English when translated. Under each category, I focused on participants' descriptions of related experiences and the corresponding comments. In so doing, I seek to address the first and second research questions regarding what the participants' experiences were like and their interpretations of them.

Lastly, I chose the excerpts representing the participants' educational experiences in order to align the findings (Chapter Four) with the first two research questions. Considering the significant generational difference in their experiences, I structured Chapter Four by generation first. After presenting the participants' experiences generation-by-generation, I examined the experiences of four generations altogether to 1)

reduce the twelve participants' experiences to three essential themes—or essence of lived experiences (part five of Chapter Four), and 2) address the third research question (part six of Chapter Four, how policies shaped the participants' experiences). As a continuation of the discussion of cross-generational similarities, in Chapter Five I used theoretical concepts to interpret the participants' stories from the perspective of a researcher.

Positionality or Bracketing

As van Manen (1990) and Moustakas (1994) both pointed out, researchers need to bracket their own positions in a phenomenological study. This section serves to identify my roles in the research and related experiences. As noted in the introductory chapter, I grew up in a rural Chinese village. I left my parents' village for college when I was 18. I consider myself an insider of Shancun because I am familiar with its rural settings and historical background. My identity as an insider of the culture helped me gain access to the village and the participants. The participants were comfortable talking with me either in their homes or at their workplaces. They treated me as a guest that they used to know. Note also that we could communicate using the same dialect. One disadvantage of being an insider is that many assumptions come to shape the conversations—the participants tend to assume that I understood and knew the places and people that they were talking about. For example, when Yan and Hong described their school teachers, they used nicknames that students secretly used to identify them. Yan and Hong were very surprised that I did not know these names.

However, I am an outsider among the 12 women participants because of my gender as a man and also as someone who went to school for so many more years than they did. The question that a woman raised in a joking way when I first went into the

factory room demonstrates how they distinguished themselves from me. However, my experience growing up in a similar rural setting and my ability to speak their dialect created an emotional common space in which I felt comfortable during the interviews and they felt comfortable revealing what they experienced. In a different case, Ni's parents were suspicious of my motivation to talk with her because they knew I was a single man. Because her parents might misunderstand, Ni and I actually clarified to her mother that we were just doing interviews about her schooling and education.

I am a researcher in terms of the study, a believer in gender equity, and I perceive that gender inequality exists in the patriarchal rural community. Being aware that my interpretations of the participants' stories would differ from their own, I decided to separate the excerpts of the transcripts from my interpretations of their experiences in presenting the results. In Chapter Four, quotes of the participants are italicized while my interpretation and introduction of background information is not. In addition, being aware that the conceptual framework might mislead me not to see certain aspects of the participants' experiences, I presented the participants' stories in a way that can maximize their voices and intentionally avoided the guiding concept in writing up Chapter Four. I focused on their telling of what they went through. However, the non-italicized interpretation and researchers' notes at the end of each section were influenced by my presumption of gender oppression in Shancun. I assumed that gender inequality persists through multiple categories of social dimensions such as gender, social class, race and ethnicity, and interactions among them.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested five techniques to address credibility. They

include activities helping to produce credible findings and interpretations, external checks on the inquiry process, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checking. While member checking might not work for this study, I address credibility through the following procedures:

- (1) Prolonged engagement. I grew up in a Chinese rural village until age 18; I am familiar with the community and its culture. I have some knowledge about each potential participant. In addition, I did a pilot study in March 2012. I interviewed eight women of four generations by phone, which gave me an overview of what their education was like.
- (2) Peer review. The study was subject to the doctoral dissertation committee's peer review. Also, my colleague Yangyong Ye, who grew up in a rural setting in China, read through the findings in case I misinterpreted anything the participants said.
- (3) Maximizing case selection. The study proposes 12 individual cases with three from each generation (see appendix 2). In selecting cases, I follow the principle of maximum variation. Although the village is culturally homogeneous, women are generally differentiated by years of education. Thus I include individual cases that have different years of schooling (see the previous participants/cases section).
- (4) Referential adequacy. Referential adequacy is the use of audio recording and transcribing the interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
“The storage of some portion of the raw data in archives for later recall

and comparison provides a rare opportunity for demonstrating the credibility of naturalistic data” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). The interviews are recorded, transcribed, and stored on my personal laptop.

Transferability

In the view of a naturalist, “the degree of transferability is a direct function of the similarity of the two contexts” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 124). Therefore rich description of the context of a study is critical for readers to judge if the findings of the study are applicable in another context. In order to increase the degree of transferability, I provided rich descriptions of Shancun, where all the participants live or lived. The description included villagers’ values and beliefs, houses and surroundings, relationships within and across families, farming and economic structure, relationships between the village and other villages, and historical changes of all those aspects since the beginning of the 20th century. Also, before presenting the participants experiences in Chapter Four, I provided a brief background introduction and information about the participants. This addressed transferability of this study but also created a problem—the presentation of the participants’ experiences might not be well-related to the social background. For example, the warfare in the 1930s was an important social background for rural communities and had a significant impact on the women’s lives, such as relocation of their families. However, it may not seem directly relevant in determining what kind of education the first generation of women had. That does not mean the warfare did not have any impact on women’s education in Shancun, but my study is limited in the discussion of this.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings in answering the three research questions: 1) how did women across four generations (from the 1930s to the 1990s) in Shancun encounter gender inequality in terms of their educational experiences? 2) How do these women interpret the gender inequality in education that they encountered? In other words, what do the women's experiences mean to them? And 3) how did educational policy and reforms implemented between the 1930s and the 1990s shape their experiences? The first five sections address research question one and two and the last section answers research question three.

Part One Generation One

Background Introduction

Shancun in the 1930s and 40s

In the decades before 1949, Shancun was under the jurisdiction of the Nationalist government — or in Lan's words, in the hands of the Nationalists. It was one of the villages under the governance of a district inspector who was in charge of taxes and the military draft. Mei, Lan, and Ju lived their entire childhoods and teenage years during times of warfare in China. The Manchurian Incident² occurred before Mei and Lan were born, gradually drawing China into a war with Japan that began in 1937. When it was over in 1945, a civil war between the Nationalists and Communists ensued. Many young men in Shancun and nearby villages were drafted in the 1930s and 40s. Although the

² The Manchurian Incident, occurred on September 18th, 1931, was the beginning of the Japanese military takeover of the three provinces (Heilongjiang, Liaoning, and Jilin) in northeast China.

village did not witness any battles in the war with Japan or the Civil War between 1945 and 1949, there were deserters passing through and robbing villagers for food. In 1947 and 1948 a major event that impacted the village was a fight between Shancun and Bi'an, a village across the river. The fight lasted almost two years due to land dispute between these two villages, with truces along the way. Many houses in Shancun were burned down, leading to a relocation of the village to a place about half a mile away.

About the Participants

Mei, Lan, and Ju were born in the 1930s, and they came to Shancun in different ways. Mei was adopted as a child bride by her husband's family in Shanchun at the age of six and grew up in the same house with her future husband and two brothers-in-law. Mei told me that her biological parents were not able to provide enough food for their two sons and two daughters, so they decided to "give her away."

Lan also came to Shancun when she was 11 for an arranged marriage with her husband. Lan's parents were wealthy landlords who lived five miles from Shancun. The two families arranged her marriage when she was about three years old. In the 1930s, arranged marriage was still a common practice in Chinese rural villages. When Lan was ten, her husband's landlord family was going downhill financially. They were afraid that Lan's parents might break the commitment, so they persuaded Lan's parents to marry her earlier than usual. This led to her marriage at the age of 11 instead of 15 or older.

Ju was born in a village 20 miles from Shancun, but her father was a Shancun native. After the young man and his wife had their first daughter in Shancun, he was drafted. He spent a few months in the military, but he managed to escape and made his way back to the village. He could not stay because the local inspector would report him,

so he and his wife left the village with their first daughter. The couple made their living selling firewood and helping landlords to harvest crops. After World War II and the Civil War, the family moved back to Shancun with two more children, including Ju. Ju identifies herself as a Shancun villager because her father was a village native and because she spent her teenage years there.

The following narrative tells the story of Mei's, Lan's, and Ju's educational experiences in a broad sense that includes schooling and what they learned from their families.

The School Door

Mei: *I never entered the school door. [It was] shut for me.*

For Mei and Ju, the “school door” was “shut.” What they meant was that they never had any schooling, or in Ju's words:

Ju: *I never knew what a school looked like.*

I could not ask them further to describe their schools. When I questioned why they did not enter the “school door,” Mei seemed surprised and annoyed, expecting that I would know the reason.

Mei: *Dushu (schooling)? Don't even mention it! [We] were so poor, how could I go to school? When I came here six years old, I didn't [have the opportunity to] go to school, to say nothing of later! Every day, I was doing housework if it wasn't time to eat. [...] Some landlords have their girls go to school. You can ask Lan — she went to school. We girls from poor families did not go to school.*

Dushu doesn't fill our stomachs.

Ju was more calm:

Ju: *Couldn't afford it. We would think that life was good when we were not starving. No money to go to school, not at all. People [who] had money could go to Baoxue [a type of elementary school in a village in the 1930s and 40s].*

Schooling was a financial decision: Mei and Ju could not go to school because their families could not afford it. At the same time, their families needed their help to do housework. The school door was shut for Mei and Ju not only because their families could not afford to open it, but also because girls were expected to perform certain roles. Mei said:

Mei: *Girls back then stayed at home, learning to cook, wash clothes, do needle work, make shoes ... [Almost] nobody went to school.*

However, the same “poor” family gave their sons the opportunity of schooling. Mei’s husband and one of his brothers about the same age as Mei went to school, and her brother-in-law was whipped for truancy.

Mei: *He [Mei's brother-in-law] was in the village school. He went to the school for a few days, [and then] stayed at home saying he did not want to go. [My father-in-law] whipped him and told him, “I don't ask you to do anything else. I ask you to go to school, not to a battlefield!” He was whipped multiple times for not wanting to go to school.*

Mei’s family sent their sons to school but not her, because as a girl she was expected to stay at home doing housework. Ju’s family also considered sons before daughters for the opportunity to go to school:

Ju: *My younger brother did not go to school. How would I as a girl go to school? Where would we get the money to pay?*

Lan's story as well tells of a family giving sons the priority for schooling:

Lan: *They [Lan's two brothers] did not have to babysit. They did not have to do housework, like cleaning the house and washing clothes. They were sons — surely they should be in school to learn and to understand the Li. [Li is a Confucian philosophy of rituals, customs, and rules of proper behavior].*

Lan's family could afford to send her to *Baoxue*, but Lan had to drop out after a few semesters. She said her mother wanted her to stay at home to care for her younger sisters:

Lan: *Among the four daughters, I was the eldest. [She] asked me stay at home to babysit, didn't want me to go to school. That teacher, Mr. Shu, came over angrily and said, "You let your kid wander around the house, you do harm to your kid! She does well in school!"*

Whenever the teacher came over to persuade, I would go to school for a while, then stopped going, and he came to persuade again. After a few semesters, I stopped going.

It didn't seem that Lan's mother argued with the teacher according to what Lan told me.

However, Lan remembers an argument between her parents:

Lan: *He [Lan's father] said I should go to school: "It is not good for her if she doesn't go to school." My mother said, "You play the role of a good person; I play the role of the tough one. You stay at home to do the housework; I can't deal with it by myself... [If] she is not at home, I can't even have my meals ready... all these kids are tearing at me!"*

Lan's father yielded to her mother's argument:

Lan: *[My] father would not ask me not to go to school. He was a Dushuren [an intellectual]. How could he not allow me to go to school? Girls in the village — I was the only one [who] went to school. [There was] so much housework, I had to help. He did not insist to persuade my mother.*

Previously, Lan indicated that her two older brothers did not have to help with the housework because they were boys, and they should go to school to understand *Li*.

“Blind to Words”

None of the three challenged their lost opportunity of schooling. They interpreted it as the way it was, or in their words, “back then was like that,” and compared their situation with other women of their age:

Ju: *Girls of your [the author’s] age all went to school just as boys did. Many years ago girls of my generation — you ask them, [they] didn’t go to school. Everybody was like that.*

Mei: *Not just I who did not go to school — it was long time ago. You know even much later, Hua [a woman who is 43 years younger than Mei] didn’t go to school. It was all that the same.*

Lan: *In the same village, the lady who married Qinlong, the lady who married a man from Luyuan — they were all about my age. They didn’t go to school. The lady who married a man from Shanshe [didn’t go either]. Girls then were staying at home, not going to school. Back then was just like that.*

They did not expect that schooling was something they should have, as Mei said when comparing herself to her brothers-in-law:

Mei: *I didn't envy my brothers-in-law being in schools. I didn't think about going to school. All girls were like me, all the same. I didn't think about it.*

These women did not say it was a problem for them that they didn't have schooling. Nevertheless, during my conversations with them I could sense that when they look back they wish they did. Ju said that she should have gone to school because:

Ju: *Dushu makes people's eyes brightened.*

This metaphor — that schooling “brightens” the eyes — shows that Ju believes learning to read helps a person to function better in a society that requires literacy. Mei used the same metaphor during the last month of my visit to Shancun, when she approached me for a favor. She wanted me to write the name of her granddaughter on a schoolbag that she had just bought for her. She thanked me, saying:

Mei: *You see we are blind to words, even don't know how to write a name. Not like today when all kids go to school. Dushu makes peoples' eyes brightened.*

Lan was more self-deprecating while talking about her illiteracy:

Lan: *Give me a book, [I] can't tell if it's upside down ... even if each character is as big as a Dou [a Chinese measurement for grains, about 10 pounds], I can't recognize a basket of characters.*

She related dropping out of school to her whole life trajectory, being one of many events that made her life hard. As she puts it:

Lan: *I said I had a hard life — Dushu [schooling], talking about schooling — my mother did not want me to go ... [I was] little. I didn't know to demand it. As long as mother asked me not to go, I would not go.*

In Lan's view, the events that made her life hard include not experiencing school, being overworked at home, living through Shancun's armed conflicts with Bi'an, and encountering deserters. All these events make up her hard life, and dropping out of school is just one of them.

“Putting Things on My Shoulders”

Mei, Lan, and Ju did not have much more to say about what they experienced in schools. They either did not go to school or went to school very briefly. In comparison, they offer rich descriptions about what they learned and did within their families.

Mei: *Cooking was the first priority. A family with seven or eight people, three meals, washing clothes. [I had to wash their clothes]. Not making clothes often — before traditional holidays we would make new shoes. I helped with my mother-in-law when (I was) a kid, learning from her. Later I could do these by myself.*

While talking about her childhood, Mei mentioned learning how to hatch chickens.

Mei: *You capture a hen at hatching time, put it in a basket, put some straw under it, put about 20 eggs on the straw, put the hen on it. Every day, you take the hen out, feed it with water and grains then put it back. When it's the right time, around 20 days, you use a bowl of warm water; [put] all the eggs in the water, making a sound of a hen. If an egg quivers, there must be a chicken inside. If it doesn't, there might be problem. Pick those not moving ones out; examine them under an oil lamp...*

I: *How did you learn it?*

Mei: *From my mother-in-law, [when I] just came here, she brings me to do these things, [I] learned by watching her and helping her.*

Lan told of a similar experience:

Lan: *After I got married, in the following year [my mother-in-law] did not ask me to do much. Whenever she was busy she would ask me to help, train me to do things. A year later, when I was thirteen, she put everything on my shoulders. She knew I could do it. Like cooking, cleaning... [They] didn't take much time to learn.*

These two mothers-in-law gave practical training to Mei and Lan for the family. Later when they were teenagers, they took over the housework. Lan said:

Lan: *At the beginning, [my mother-in-law] pushed me to get used to working. [Later] when we built the house [when Lan was about 15], I took over the cooking and housework, many tables of people a day, a few rounds of snacks [for them], and three meals. She was not at home most of the time. She went out for shopping and hiring people [for harvesting]. It [the work at home] was all on me.*

Ju did not have a mother-in-law to train her how to do the housework. But her older sister taught her to do embroidery when she was a child:

Ju: *She was five years older than me — she taught me. My hands were not smart, not good at it like her. Didn't like doing embroidery — she asked me to do it. She said my mother had to sell firewood — if we didn't do it, we'll be starving. I was afraid to be starved. After doing it for a while, I might stop and get lazy again, and then she would push me — I would continue.*

Ju said that she and her sister would sell their embroidery in a nearby market in exchange for food.

Something in common between the home educations of Mei, Lan, and Ju is that they learned things to contribute economically to their families. What they learned was

limited to what their families needed. Lan learned practical housework so her mother-in-law would have time do something else for the family, like hiring people to do farm work. Ju learned embroidery to make a little contribution to the family so they would have enough food. What they learned and did — cleaning, cooking — did not require literacy, and this is why Ju and Mei never learned to read. Lan acquired some basic literacy but then lost it when she was older:

Lan: *A few semesters in school, I could read a little ... [Back during the] the three-year commune time [from 1959 to 1962 in Shancun], I could read the slogans in the village. But I don't recognize words any more.*

All three women do have basic numeracy; they can perform calculations in their minds quickly for buying and selling. When I was in Shancun (during the summer of 2013), I witnessed Mei selling red peppers to a dealer who had come to the village. She sold 46.7 *Jin* (a measurement of weight about the same as pounds), each *Jin* being 1.5 *Yuan* (about 16 cents), and she did the calculation in her mind using just a few minutes without a calculator. I asked her where she had learned it. Mei explained that she had learned the multiplication rules from her husband and his brothers. When she was a teenager, she became proficient in helping to sell their grains and other products. Lan did not learn math from her family. Instead she learned it in her *Baoxue*, but she too became proficient through buying and selling things for the family. All three women of this generation learned basic numeracy, but only while serving the needs of their families.

“Camel” and “Servant”

Mei and Lan had strong complaints about what they learned and did for their families. Mei described herself as a camel:

Mei: *As a child bride, I had to do what others were not willing to — trained me like a camel.*

A camel is considered to be a hardworking animal in Shancun. What's more is that comparing herself with an animal shows that Mei disliked what she did and proposes that her work was something the other members of the family were not willing to do. Lan made similar comments:

Lan: *She [Lan's mother-in-law] pushed me to work, trained me, [I was] like a servant ... did not sleep much, especially when harvesting.*

During my interviews with Mei and Lan, each went on describing how much work she had to do. Their complaints about what they learned at home are just a small part of what they related about what they had to do for their families. Ju did not complain, but she was reluctant to learn needlework or do housework:

Ju: *Staying at home, kind of dark, I did not like needlework — [I'd] rather graze water buffaloes. I was not patient enough [for needlework], didn't like work in the house. If nobody was doing it, I would do it, though unwilling.*

From the way Mei, Lan, and Ju described what they learned to do for their families and their attitudes during my interviews with them, I came to understand that they wished their lives had been different. At the same time, they tried to understand their upbringing as something that every girl was supposed to have. Mei said that “girls back then stayed at home, learning to cook, wash clothes, do needle work, make shoes,” and, “We were supposed to do those things.” As this chapter addresses how the participants make sense of their family education, I will address how I, as a researcher, interpret both

their schooling and family education later at the *Researcher's Notes* section, and also in the discussion (Chapter Five).

As a summary of the first generation of women's education in Shancun, I offer this:

The school door, the school door,
A way leading to brightened eyes,
A way to the wisdom shore.

We girls learned to adore
But should not approach to explore.

Some girls went in but had to withdraw.
Housework, babysitting, embroidery
Day after day is what we were for.

Not until later when we saw
Our daughters and granddaughters all entered the door —
We did not know that we could expect more.

The school door, the school door —
It was shut ... it was shut because it was not for all.

Researcher's Notes One

According to the interviews all three participants were limited by their gender roles as women, whether in schooling or in family education. Serving their families as a girl or woman came first before anything else. This is shown by how Lan's mother insisted that she should babysit and help with housework instead of going to school like her brothers. It can also be seen by what the three women learned as girls, each of them confined to working at home. As a person who grew up in a similar rural setting, I understand that cooking, needlework, and housework are commonly women's responsibilities. The two mothers-in-law and Ju's sister helped Mei, Ju, and Lan to learn and perform their responsibilities to serve the family as a woman.

Meanwhile, their opportunities to attend school were linked to their families' financial situation according to Mei's and Ju's explanations for why they could not go to school, and why Lan could go to school for a couple years. However, Lan's relatively wealthy family did not support further schooling because Lan's mother had a practical excuse to keep her daughter at home — that is, to help with housework and babysitting. This reason shows how women's gender role and social class shape their education. Lan's family was wealthy but not wealthy enough to hire someone for housework so Lan could go to school. And as a woman, Lan, instead of her elder brothers, was asked to stay home. This is the sacrifice that Lan was asked to make for her family.

Part Two Generation Two

Background Introduction

Shancun in the 1950s and 60s

Like most rural communities in China, Shancun endured a “Land Reform” after the Communist Party takeover in 1949. Between 1949 and 1952, the village formed a peasant association/committee. The committee took over land owned by landlords and redistributed it to peasants. Meanwhile, all of the families were classified as landlords, wealthy peasants, middle-class peasants, or poor peasants according to the property they had owned prior to the Land Reform. In 1956, small-scale family farming was replaced by collective farming. Later in 1958, the collective farming was replaced by the “people’s commune” during the Great Leap Forward movement.

In 1966 the Communist Party initiated the Cultural Revolution, not long after the Great Leap Forward (from 1958 to 1961). “The fundamental goal of the Cultural Revolution in the sphere of education was to reduce the barrier between mental and manual labor and thus strive towards socialist democracy” (Chandra, 1987, p. 127). As a result, many universities were shut down and intellectuals such as college faculty were sent to the countryside for teaching, farming, or factory work. Yin’s junior high school included teachers from Shanghai, Nanchang, and other cities. They had been university faculty before they were asked to serve the rural communities, including Shancun. The schools that served Shancun implemented a curriculum that included *Laodong* (labor) education and quotations from Chairman Mao.

About the Participants

Yin, Jia, and Xiu were born between 1954 and 1959. They grew up in Shancun prior to their marriages, when each of them was about 20 years old. Their families were all farmers. Throughout their childhoods, their families worked in the commune doing collective farming. For each day's work, a person earned a *Gongfen* (a score ranging from one to ten points), and each family could get a quota of food measured by the *Gongfen* that they had earned.

To “Demand” or Not to “Demand *Dushu*”

In the 1960s, whether or not a girl demanded schooling might and worked harder to pay for it make a difference for her.

Yin: *I demanded to go to school ... I argued with my father ... I was willing to work harder for the family during school breaks. My family was poor. During school breaks – like weekends, summer break – I worked hard, doing a lot of farm work. When I was in junior high school, I cut reeds to sell so I could pay for the tuition.*

Yin was determined to go to school. In order to continue, she was willing to work harder. She even found ways to pay the junior high school tuition by herself. However, her insistence could not guarantee her schooling without support from her grandfather and the school teacher.

Yin: *I should be thankful to my grandfather. He supported me – if it were not for him, I couldn't have gone to school. When I was a small child my parents divorced. [The mother moved out of the village]. My father was never willing to*

send me to school. My grandfather said I should go, but otherwise my father would stop me. He [the grandfather] did not have any daughters. He brought me up, and he loved me. My girl classmates, most of them stopped going after third or fourth grade. Not many girls went further.

In Shancun, a grandfather usually has the most power to make decisions in a family. Even though she had her grandfather's support, Yin was pulled out of school sometimes by her father. Nevertheless, each time the teacher stepped in:

Yin: *A couple of times, after I finished one semester, my father would ask me to stay at home, but I really wanted to go to school. Once the teacher came over to persuade, I would follow the teacher walking to the school. He said if you couldn't afford, you could pay later when you have it. The tuition was not much – it was just the family hardly had any money ... I did well in school. Once I stopped going, teachers would come to my village to persuade [my father].*

Meanwhile, her grandfather would pay the tuition. Later when Yin was old enough, she could pay her own tuition. When tuition was not a problem, Yin and her grandfather still faced pressure from neighbors in the village. According to her, many neighbors said they “*don't understand why this family supported the girl to go to school. No matter what, girls belong to other families.*”

As both Yin and Jia explained, “girls belong to other families” means that women would eventually get married and move out of the village. Their children would have their husbands' family name and would not be considered as a part of the families where these women originally come from. Adding to the pressure from neighbors, Yin's family

financial situation was getting worse and the supportive grandfather began to experience health problems:

Yin: *Later, my father married my stepmother and had more children. The family became even poorer. After I graduated from junior high, my father insisted that I shouldn't go to senior high ... My grandfather started having some serious health problems. He also hoped I could be around when he was not feeling well. I told myself, "Okay, it is good enough for a girl to complete junior high school."*

Yin eventually gave up.

Unlike Yin, Jia was not interested in schooling. She dropped out after two years:

Jia: *I didn't want to demand go to school. If I did, my parents would let me go. My uncle had a daughter about the same age as me, in the same school – we were getting along very well. We fought with other kids in school, couldn't get along with them. I stopped going after a fight with a classmate.*

That fight with a classmate was Jia's excuse not to go to school. In addition, her brother wanted her to do more work for the family:

Jia: *My first older brother graduated from junior high. He was at home. He wanted me to stay home for farm work as well. Many times, [he] stepped on my feet and told me I should stay at home, when my parents were not around.*

Jia's parents did not react to her dropping out at all:

Jia: *My parents didn't say anything. People just didn't care if girls went to school or not. People then thought girls were others' family people. I could help them. When I was a teenager, I could earn a bit of Gongfen for the family. If I were in*

school, I had to rely on them for food. Every family was poor in the village – one more person to work, more Gongfen [we have].

However, her two older brothers both completed junior high school. One of them even completed senior high school. When commenting on her brothers' schooling, Jia said:

Jia: *They were boys – should be in school. [My parents] would ask them to continue if they dropped out. My oldest brother got a disease [and] became disabled. [Otherwise] he would have gone to senior high school as well.*

It seems that giving sons the priority to access schooling was acceptable to Jia. During the interview, she rationalized that when the family needed people to work, she was supposed to take the responsibility:

Jia: *If I went to school like my brothers, [my parents] could not earn enough Gongfen for the family. My brothers should go to school; it was not a big deal if girls didn't go to school. We can stay at home to earn Gongfen for the family.*

Xiu's parents also considered their son's education before their daughters'. When her father decided that Xiu should not go to school anymore, he argued there was no use for her to go:

Xiu: *When I said I wanted to continue school, my father said, "Without schooling people still [would] have the same type of life. Look at Lingling and Fangfang – they didn't go to school. There is nothing different in their lives. What's the use of going to school?" [After that] I was afraid to demand Dushu [schooling].*

Although Xiu did not argue with her father, she was emotional and reluctant to drop out.

Her mother was worried:

Xiu: *My mother was persuading me: “Your elder brother is going to high school, better for you not to continue, doesn’t matter much that we don’t have enough people to work for the family, I could work harder. [I am] afraid that your father would argue and fight with me every day. If you don’t go, he will be okay. He’s afraid that I would support all the girls to go to school.” I said, “When [I was] reciting Chairman Mao’s quotes [in school], he said we should study hard. Neither father nor you allow me to study.” She said, “We don’t even have enough food. It is a type of study when you do things for the family, learn how to work. Chairman Mao also said working is the most honorable.” She said so — I did not say anything more, save her from arguing with my father.*

Xiu dropped out after third grade, but her older brother started senior high school with her mother’s support. Xiu’s mother even stepped in and argued with her husband when he considered pulling Xiu’s brother out of school. According to Xiu, her father wanted her brother at home, saying to her mother:

Xiu: *“You argue to let the kids to go to school ... you are destined to have a life of a beggar. If nobody is working for the family, you will go out to beg for food, see where you would show your face.” My mother said, “I am not shameless, I am not stealing, stealing is shameless, I want my son go to school.”*

The three participants’ experiences dropping out of school were different, but they faced similar obstacles. Poverty was one of them. They attributed their families’ unwillingness to support their education to poverty. Under the collective commune system, food and resources were distributed to each family according to how much farm work the family did for the commune, as measured by *Gongfen*. The system gave no

leniency to families with many children who could not earn much *Gongfen*. Under that system everybody — including children — would contribute to the work.

Another obstacle was otherness of daughters. They were seen as belonging to “other families.” This view legitimated the practice of keeping daughters home to work instead of supporting their education. In other words, people in the village thought there was nothing wrong with families keeping their daughters out of school. Under the umbrella of this belief, the indifference of Jia’s parents toward her dropping out and the resistance of Xiu’s parents toward supporting her were not considered problematic. Xiu challenged the fairness of her parents’ treatment of her and her brother, which led only to resentment toward her father and envy toward her peers who continued school. Even when a daughter like Yin gained support from a teacher or a family member, she still came under pressure from her rural community. Her persistence in schooling challenged her community’s belief that daughters were children of “other families” and should not be given the opportunity.

“Things Could be Better”

Jia and Xiu were deprived of the opportunity to continue school after only a few years. By comparison, Yin was luckier. She made it all the way to the end of junior high school. However this was a *Ku* (hard) process for Yin:

Yin: *Many dropped out because it was so Ku to go to school for girls. No matter what, I got up early — I had to arrive at the school before 6 a.m. In order to go to school, I had to work harder at home. If I wasn't doing much work, my father wouldn't let me go.*

In retrospect, they all wished they could have gone to school longer than they had. Now in their 50s, they have an understanding of what more schooling might have meant to them. To Yin, it might have meant a better rank in teaching, the potential to go to college:

Yin: *Things could have been better — I wish I could have gone to senior high school. Those men who went to senior high all got their highest rank in teaching. I wasn't qualified because I only had a junior high school certificate, nothing better to show, not qualified for the highest rank in teaching ... I could have gone to college [after the Cultural Revolution] if I had gone to senior high school.*

Jia only wishes she could read better, and she blames herself for not knowing to demand to go to school, and not understanding the importance of schooling:

Jia: *At the beginning [in the 1980s], we bought a TV. I couldn't even understand the mandarin, not much. But after watching it for so many years, I understand the conversations [mostly], just can't read the subtitles well. Sometimes I ask my husband. Occasionally he behaves badly. He might say you also have eyes. Well, I do, but I can't read the words well ... I didn't want to go to school. It was my own fault. I did not know to demand Dushu, didn't understand the importance.*

Xiu had a similar thought:

Xiu: *I wish I had completed elementary school. I would have had brightened eyes. If I could read better, wouldn't be afraid to travel. It takes me such a long time to type a short message with a cell phone. There are many words I don't recognize.*

However instead of blaming herself like Jia, after more than forty years she still resents that her father did not allow her to continue schooling:

Xiu: *I heard people in the village saying women were half of the sky [holding up half of the sky]. I doubted it, thinking if we were half of the sky my parents would have supported me for schooling, like [they did for] my brother. I thought it was unfair — I blame the poverty, and my father. There were poor families which supported their daughters to go to school. He only understood [the importance of] farm work.*

Xiu felt it was unfair that her parents asked her to drop out after third grade while supporting their son for senior high school. In a sense, she challenged the fairness of her parents giving priority to their son in schooling. Xiu remembered that she envied the girls who could continue elementary school, and she compared herself with girls who dropped out:

Xiu: *Juhua — during summer breaks, we sometimes would wash clothes at the pond about the same time in the morning. She told me things in her school, telling me teachers punish students — scary. [I was] thinking, if you were a good student you wouldn't be afraid. I didn't say that out loud. She was just showing off that she knew what was going on in fifth grade. Not many girls were like her. Her father was a village leader — she didn't have to earn Gongfen for the family. Well, most girls were like me...*

Xiu mentioned that her peer, Juhua, did not have to earn *Gongfen* because her father was a leader. Yin also briefly said:

Yin: *Daughters of those who have power had an easier time for schooling. They didn't have to work as hard as I did.*

Neither Xiu nor Yin provided further information about why those who have power could support their children to go to school, and I did not ask them to explain because of the sensitivity of the issue among the villagers. My knowledge of Shancun's history told me that the commune leaders had the power to give their families more materials without doing much farm work.

“Reciting Mao’s Quotes” and “Laodong”

After reading these stories, one might wonder what was going in the participants' schools. What was taught, and what was schooling like? Both Jia and Xiu remember:

Jia: *We didn't learn much at school, nothing much to learn other than the Chairman Mao's Quotes. I remember there was a Ya. He was famous in the town because he could recite hundreds of the quotes. And he was in [a local] radio program, he was praised on the village radio. I wasn't a good student, nothing I can remember from the quotes now.*

Xiu: *There were slogans saying “Chairman Mao lives ten thousand years” on a lot of houses. The schoolhouse [had] the slogan on the adobe wall. When we had Zaocao [students standing in rows and columns doing body exercise in the morning, usually after the first two classes], sometimes we had to yell out that slogan. Let me think if I could still remember ... “should listen to the Party, should listen to Chairman Mao, be a good child of him” ... things like that ... reciting the Quotes every day, I could recite very well.*

During the Cultural Revolution, schools serving Shancun became places for political indoctrination. Schooling was overtaken by teaching children to recite quotes from

Chairman Mao, practicing rituals to show respect for him. Junior high school taught similar rituals as well.

Yin: *We had morning ritual before breakfast, learning how to sing [red songs praising the leadership of the Communist Party]. Lin Biao [a Communist Party leader in central government] created that. If you hadn't practiced the morning ritual, you wouldn't be allowed to eat breakfast. Holding a Chairman Mao's Quotes, yelling out loud, "Read Chairman's Mao's book, listen to what Chairman Mao says, we are good soldiers of Chairman Mao." [...] Three years of junior high school, we only had a few [other] books, for mathematics, Chinese language, and introduction to natural science, these subjects. We even didn't even have to read them.*

Xiu and Jia do not recall anything but reciting quotes and practicing rituals in elementary schools. They did not go on to junior high school. But for Yin, junior high school was more than just reciting Quotes and practicing rituals. Her experience also included *Laodong* — organizing students to perform physical labor.

Yin: *We didn't have many classes in junior high school. [Teachers] brought us to different places to work. The town's Grain Management Station had their grains shipped by boats — we went to help. No trucks. We used carts to carry bags of grains to the ships. We didn't have to study much, mostly work like that. The grains of this town [about 20 thousand people] [...] The teachers were working with us. Nobody dared not to go — it was the policy from above [i.e., the government]. Someone who did not go to work might be labeled and criticized.*

We had three classes in the same grade, about 80 students. We had more than 20 Mu of rice paddies near Jiangbian, and more than ten Mu of land for planting vegetables not far from the school. When the town was building the dam for the power station, we collected rocks. We were assigned to do that — each class had a quota of rocks we were supposed to collect.

“We Learned Little in School”

Considering the curriculum and what was going on school, it’s not surprising that Yin, Xiu and Jia felt they did not learn much when they were there.

Yin: *I didn’t learn much in junior high school, like kids today when they graduate from elementary school — they know thousands of Chinese characters. They know how to do complicated math calculations. We learned a lot of quotes, not that useful. It did nothing to help me teach elementary school later.*

Here Yin expected that she could learn to read better and learn more advanced mathematics. She was disappointed that her schooling was mostly teaching her to remember quotes that she thought were not useful to her later teaching career. In addition, the problem of not equipping students with practical skills was one of the reasons that girls dropped out of school:

Yin: *Just Laodong. Many people, especially girls, dropped out because of that. You stay at home, you Laodong — you earn Gongfen for the family, or help the family. You go to school, you Laodong — you don’t earn anything for the family. I wanted to go to senior high school. I heard senior high students could learn more.*

In Yin's view, girls in school gained no practical skills to contribute to their families. Schools were organizing students to *Laodong*, similar to the way families did. This problem also arose in Xiu's experience:

Xiu: *Just reciting what Chairman Mao said — didn't learn anything after the Cultural Revolution. I didn't go to school for long, heard it was aimless.*

Because their school experiences were brief, Xiu and Jia did not comment on their schooling as much as Yin did, but both of them agreed that what they were learning in school was pointless.

Jia: *I didn't like schooling. I wasn't a good student — the teacher was scary. I heard he was a good teacher, but I never liked him. He was just telling us to recite and recite all those Quotes. I remember none of them. Well, guess I learned to read some Chinese characters that way. I didn't even learn the multiplication rules — my father taught me.*

Although schooling was pointless to them, they still hoped they could be in school longer. They believed schooling would help them gain better literacy. Yin could have had a better ranking in teaching, Jia wouldn't need to rely on her husband to understand TV programs, and Xiu would be able to use her cell phone more efficiently. In addition to these practical benefits, schooling was considered to be something honorable to pursue in the Confucian culture. Although during the Cultural Revolution the Chinese government took an anti-Confucian stance, the impact of the Confucian emphasis on honor in schooling was still influential in Shancun.

“Grownups Would Correct Me”

Women of this generation were not confined to working inside the home anymore. Correspondingly their family education provided them training for work on the farms.

Jia: *When I was a kid, I went to do work with grownups ... following whatever they do ... If I didn't know how to do something they would tell me, you can't do it this way, you do it that way ... Grownups would correct me if I wasn't doing it right. We planted rice. I went to the rice paddies with grownups. They asked me to get the rows straight. Sometimes, they would make grids on the mud — I just needed to insert young rice plants in each grid. It wasn't easy though. You might mess up the grid they made. They would tell me how to avoid stepping on the lines of the grids.*

Both Yin and Xiu related similar experiences learning to do farm work, like planting rice. Meanwhile, similar to the previous generation, they were also doing housework, making clothes, and doing embroidery, oftentimes at night.

Xiu: *Learning how to knit sweaters, making shoe mats and embroidering them were different. It took a while, one needle after another. It took me a while to learn from older girls in the village — it took many days. My mother sometimes would teach me how to mend clothes. At night ... didn't have time during the day — had to earn Gongfen. Sitting in front of a lamp, doing the needle work.*

Jia: *Many girls learned how to make linen threads — I didn't learn it. Like other girls, I learned how to make shoe mats and putting embroideries on them.*

Meanwhile, when they were children they could help their families by doing simple farm work like grazing water buffaloes.

Jia: *Grazing one water buffalo, I could earn some Gongfen every year. [A young girl could earn] one and a half points of Gongfen a day or two — it was only that much for us. [A man] could only earn ten at most. Women could only earn five or five and five and half at most [each day].*

In Shancun, women's labor was not considered as valuable as men's. A man could earn ten points of *Gongfen* in a day if he did a good job. Women could get only five points at most. Under this gender-based *Gongfen* scale, women would earn only half as much as men for the same work. However, the three participants' families wanted their daughters to work for the family. When they went to school, "they earned nothing" for their families. Furthermore, when Yin, Jia, and Xiu worked for their families, they gained practical training for farming that prepared them to earn more *Gongfen* when they were older. Both Xiu and Jia told me that when they were about 14 or 15 years old, they could earn five points of *Gongfen* almost every day. By the time they married when they were about 20 years old, they had worked for their families for about five or six years.

"I Was Happy to" Help

Reflecting on their family education, the three participants had felt happy to do some work for their families. However, closely related to what they said about their schooling, they wished it could have been different.

Jia: *Childhood and adolescence — [when] I think about [my childhood], [I] remember the scenarios of cutting firewood in the hills, remember planting rice with grownups, remember ... seems a long time ago, but I wouldn't forget the intense work. I was happy to do the work for the family ... I regret not arguing to go to school. Now parents would also push their girls to go to school.*

Although schooling was “aimless” during the Cultural Revolution, Jia still sees it as a better alternative compared to her work for her family. Yin also showed preference for schooling rather than what she learned in her family.

Yin: *If I were just doing farming like my girl peers in the village, I wouldn't be able to become a teacher. Every kid could do the farming. You grow up with it, watching others doing it and you know how [learn things by doing them]. That way, people just remain farmers one generation after another — face toward the brown soil, back toward the sky.*

The above quote, “face toward the brown soil, back toward the sky” is a description of farmers’ work. It simplifies farm work as keeping the same body posture. With this saying Yin meant to express her negative attitude toward farm work. Yin persistently chose to pursue her interest in schooling until graduating from junior high school, but in Xiu’s case there wasn’t a choice.

Xiu: *I felt accomplished by what I could do. But my brother went to senior high. Two women of my age [in Shancun] went to junior high. I went only to third grade. All my daughters went to junior high, [but] earning Gongfen wasn't a choice I had.*

Researcher’s Notes Two

For this generation, women were not limited to doing housework. As a part of the women’s movement they started working on their farms as men did. However, similar to the first generation, their work did not require any literacy. Although it became common for women to have a few years’ schooling, the commune economy and farming system did not support them in pursuing further education. As a practical matter, collective

farming needed women's manual labor. When girls were old enough, they were expected to do more farm work rather than pursue schooling like their male peers. The women's movement promoted women's liberation so women would do as much work as men did. However, as to pursuing schooling, it was not as important because schooling did not provide women any better practical skills than their families and communities. If a girl like Yin was determined to go to school, she had to do as much work for the family as anyone else her age while maintaining a good school performance.

Schooling did not provide men with practical skills either. However, men were expected to be in school for other purposes. For the previous generation, men were learning Confucian *Li*. During the Cultural Revolution the Chinese government was anti-Confucius, but the Confucian view of schooling as men's domain was still influential in Shancun. The curriculum was gender-neutral during the Cultural Revolution when schools became places for political indoctrination, according to the three participants' stories. Nevertheless, when considering the obstacles they faced to gain access to schooling, and their family education, I find this generation of women not only had to perform their gender roles as women, but had to participate in the work force as men. As women gained freedom to work, they also acquired more to carry on their shoulders. This phenomenon seemed to further exploit women rather than liberate them, as indicated by their doubt in the notion of holding up half of the sky:

Holding up half of the sky?

Seemed we were asked to aim high.

Not only to attend family chore

But also work outdoor,
Outside of our homes, outside of our traditional roles.

This outcry
To object to who we used to be
From the village leaders, from the commune radio,
and from Chairman Mao at *Zhongnanhai*³,

An outcry
Calling us to hold up half of the sky.

Some of us determined to try
Albeit most of family chose to shy,
To shy from our schooling.
We were girls.
Our families struggled even to have needed supply.
Schooling was far from our real life.

To hold up half of the sky?
A notion we couldn't demystify
Our pursuit of schooling even faced not much more than deny.

³ Zhongnanhai is a park near Beijing Tiananmen square, also used as a metonym for the Chinese central government leadership.

These words, this outcry,
Maybe it is just a symbol marking a time
A slogan on a tombstone, half-hidden in the tall bushes nearby.

Part Three: Generation Three

Background Introduction

Shancun in the 1980s

In the early 1980s, Shancun experienced a significant change. About 30 years of collective commune farming ended with the implementation of the national economic reform. In 1978 the Chinese central government decided to change the planned economy to a market economy system. Four years later, the Commission for Restructuring the Economic System (CRES) began to implement the economic reform nationally, under which the commune land in Shancun was redistributed to individual families according to the number of people in a family (1.3 *Mu* per person). Since then, farming has been organized by individual families. Each family can decide what they grow and how much work they want to do with their land. This change gives farmers more control over their own work and farming products. They do not have to earn *Gongfen* for their food anymore as they did under the commune system. Note that farming in Shancun has not been mechanized much at all. Families still rely on manual labor for planting and harvesting, a more traditional way of farming. The abolishment of collective farming also led to Shancun villagers traveling to cities as rural-urban migrant workers. When villagers realized they could have a better income working in factories or construction, many of them gradually moved to cities and abandoned their farm land. Some of the farm land even became deserted in the past fifteen years.

About the Participants

Hua, Yan, and Hong — the three participants who are women of this generation — grew up in Shancun. They began their schooling in the early 1980s. None of them completed elementary school. A few years before they came of age in the 1990s, young villagers in Shancun began leaving for coastal cities to *Dagong* (doing factory work as a migrant worker), for example working in shoe factories or umbrella factories. All three participants followed this trend and became migrant workers. Now in their early 40s, they make their living by doing the same kind of factory work. The following stories tell how these women dropped out of school, why, and what their education was like both in their schools and in their families.

Intimidating Schooling and Truancy

Yan and Hong chose not to continue school after four or four and half years in elementary. Yan decided not to go to school because her close friends dropped out while Hong gave up because of her low school performance.

Yan: *My best friends Xiuxin and Xiangwan both decided not to go to school. They were in the village just playing ... I had no friends in school any more. So I stopped going in the last few weeks of the first semester in fourth grade.*

However her truancy was soon discovered by her parents and school teachers.

Yan: *I did well in school. I remember during some of the semesters I had awards. They [teachers] even came to persuade me to go to school.*

Yan went to school for one more semester but then insisted on leaving. Yan remembers that her mother said she would regret it later in her life, but she did not listen.

Yan: *The teacher came over — she was nice, asking me to go to school. My father [was] grabbing one of my hands, annoyed, and said the teacher is here and I*

should listen to her. I said nothing ... when he was getting a cup of water for the teacher, I ran out and hid in the hills.

Yan never went back to school. What made Yan so insistent was that she didn't like school. She felt that schooling was just "forcing" children to sit still.

Yan: *Forced to sit through classes — I didn't like it. I had friends to play games in the village. [So] I didn't want to go to school anymore.*

She also felt intimidated by one of her teachers.

Yan: *The two women teachers were nice and friendly. I had a male teacher — I always felt scared of him.*

I: *Why scared?*

Yan: *You know, he looked scary, and he is a man. It made him have more Weifeng [similar to power and authority].*

Some teachers also intimidated Hong.

Hong: *Scared of teachers ... not like children today who could ask teachers questions if they don't understand. [I was] afraid to do so.*

When asked why she was afraid or scared, Hong explained:

Hong: *Lee was nicer. [The other teacher] stared at me in an angry way.*

Whenever I didn't do well [he] stared at me. Whenever I entered the classroom, he would do that.

I: *Afraid?*

Hong: *[My desk was] in the first row, [when he] lashed the podium desk with the blackboard pointer [a bamboo stick], I felt scared to jump up.*

I: *He even lashed the podium desk.*

Hong: *Yes, whenever [he] got angry while teaching. [I was sitting] next to the podium. The first row was next to the podium.*

However, Hong said she dropped out because of her not so good performance. She was afraid she might not be able to pass the junior high school entrance tests and people might laugh at her.

Hong: *At the end [the fifth grade, or the last year of elementary school], need to have a score to get into junior high. In fifth grade I said I didn't want to go to school. After the fall semester I stopped going. I said I would feel ashamed if I cannot pass the test. If like this [in the case of her giving up schooling], people might say that I gave up [and not assume that she didn't have the ability to pass the test]. Others [other students] might not think that way, but I did.*

So after the first semester of fifth grade, she dropped out. No teachers went to persuade her. But her parents tried to make her to go to school.

Hong: *I'd rather give up the last semester. [I knew that] for sure I wouldn't be able to pass the test. This way, people wouldn't say I didn't have the ability. No matter how much they [her parents] scolded me, I didn't want to go. I decided. My father [gave up arguing and] said, "[Since] you really don't want to go, stay at home to work!"*

Both Yan and Hong explained that it was their own choice to pull themselves out of school, against the wishes of their parents who tried to persuade them to go back. However, should they really take the blame? They think they do, but as a researcher I see it as more of the school's problem. Their schooling made both Yan and Hong feel uncomfortable, intimidated, scared, and afraid to be shamed. They were afraid of their

male teachers who looked “scary,” both perceiving their male teachers as having more *Weifeng* (compared to the two women teachers in the same school). Also, Hong associated low school performance with shame. She was afraid to be a student who did not perform well enough to pass the junior high school entrance test.

Their parents gave them some support but not as much as they gave to their sons. Hong had a younger brother who repeated almost every grade from first to fifth. But her parents never allowed him drop out of school until he could not continue because he couldn't pass the junior high school entrance test. They had different ways of preventing him from dropping out through multiple incidents of truancy.

Hong: *They had their ways to persuade my brother to go [to school]. Buy him new toys, that [kind of] stuff.*

I: *How did you feel about that?*

Hong: *Nothing unusual — they wanted me to go to school, I gave up. You know that, that parents Zhongnan qingnü [favor boys disfavor girls], a tradition — nothing unusual about my parents.*

With the same couple (Hong's parents), scolding was their way to “persuade” their daughter to go to school. When it came to the son, they used different ways to “persuade” such as “buying toys.” In Hong's view, her parents' “*Zhongnan qingnü*” attitude and practice in terms of children's education was something ordinary that many parents might share.

“He Tore my Textbooks”

Unlike Yan and Hong, Hua really wanted to continue schooling. She had her textbooks ready and washed her schoolbag and hung it up to be dried. Before she could put the books in the bag the father tore her textbooks.

Hua: *Had the third grade textbooks [students buy their textbooks from the school at the beginning of each semester], about my daughter’s age [about nine or ten], [I had] good performance like her. Had the third grade textbooks ready, [but] torn [by the father]. I washed the schoolbag, hanging it up there on a hook.*

Given how this father reacted to his daughter’s schooling and Hua’s strong willingness for schooling, the experience of dropping out afterward became traumatic in her childhood.

Hua: *Didn’t go to school, was asked to graze a water buffalo. [I] tied it at the meadow where Ziai had a vegetable garden nearby. There was a meadow there, now buried under long grass. Tied the water buffalo there — I was crying.*

I: *Sad...*

Hua: *Yes, lying on the meadow. That Shengliang was there watching a water buffalo as well. He said, “You cry — I would smile if I could stop going to school.” He didn’t know shit, he didn’t do well.*

A couple of school teachers tried to persuade the father, but he did not listen to them. Hua still remembers one of these scenarios:

Hua: *Did not allow me to go, the school had people trying to persuade. He [her father] was cleaning the cattle pen. He asked them to go away.*

There was nothing more the school teachers could do in Hua's case. Parents had no legal responsibility to support children to go to school. In other words, children's schooling was a family decision, like the previous generations. Sons get more support because it is considered to be an honor for the family to have educated sons. In terms of daughters' schooling, most parents in Shancun used to think it was unnecessary.

Regret and Resentment

Yan: *My mother said I would regret. Thinking about it now, I do. No use to regret though ... nowadays open world, without much schooling, I feel afraid to go anywhere. I could have done something else rather than sewing shoes.*

Given that Yan and Hong consider themselves to have given up the opportunity, it is not surprising that they express regret rather than challenge the lack of support from their families and the problematic schooling practices. In their view, parents and schools were good enough to have them access schooling; they didn't do anything to make either participant drop out. On the contrary, they even made some effort to persuade Yan and Hong to go back to school. Yan and Hong blame themselves when they feel the regret. Hong even went further to justify why she is making shoes for a living.

Hong: *Should have studied hard, don't know if that might change anything, I should have tried. Maybe I am not Dushu material. That's why I am making shoes.*

While Hong expresses a similar regret that she should have studied hard in school, her performance has made her think that she was schooling material. As a result, she thinks that she is supposed to do labor work, like making shoes, for a living. Hua's case is

different in that she resents that her father did not give her the opportunity to continue schooling.

Hua: *It was about my daughter's age that I dropped out. Don't blame me that I am angry about this — I have always felt angry, as long as I think about it. I think, heaven [like saying "God"], made me half-illiterate for a life time. I don't even mind that much that he [her father] slapped me. It was that not allowing me going to school makes angry.*

About thirty years had passed, but Hua still felt emotional talking about her dropping out. Hua said that she only wished she could have completed elementary school when she was a child.

Saomang (A Basic Literacy Training Program)

Even after she dropped out, Hua sought opportunities to learn how to read. She went to the *Saomang* (a basic literacy training program), and tried to learn words by herself with a dictionary. During the interview, she showed me what she learned during the *Saomang*.

Hua: *One, Two, Three, Four, Five ... is this "four" right? Doesn't seem right?*

I: *It looks about right, there is one more horizontal stroke needed.*

She was writing the traditional version of the ten numbers in Chinese, asking me to confirm if she wrote them correctly. From what Hua described, *Saomang* seems more like a program to teach teenagers who were completely illiterate:

Hua: *It was in the village hall, at night. He was writing characters on the blackboard — I read aloud what he wrote. The instructor asked me, "You are here*

too? You seem to know many characters.” Well, I finished the second grade, learned a lot of them already.

Saomang was a brief experience; Hua didn't have more to say other than the following:

Hua: *Learned a few more words, can't think of anything more to say. It was only a few weeks.*

Hua was considered not illiterate enough to be in *Saomang*. But she stayed through the program which lasted a few weeks. Usually it was one or two hours at night because people had to do farm work during the day. Yan and Hong were considered not qualified by the program instructor because they went to school for more than four years. They did not participate in any of the sessions.

Hong: *Saomang? Let me try to remember ... I went to fifth grade, I was not supposed to participate in [Saomang].*

Work for Family and Learning to Tailor

As with previous generations, Yan, Hong, and Hua were taught to do farm work for their families. Yan provided an outline summary of her work before she came of age. Adults trained her in planting vegetables and transplanting rice.

Yan: *In the 80s, just working for the family, until the beginning of the 90s, I went to Dagong [doing factory work as a migrant worker]. Not long after the land went to individual families [in 1982], [there was] a lot of work to do, no Dagong opportunities, doing farm work every day, [when] younger grazing buffaloes, older following grownups to learn planting vegetables and transplanting rice. Didn't know how to bind the young rice plants, mom was showing me how to do it. I gave the rice plants I pulled out to my [mother when] I wasn't patient enough.*

Yan's summary of her experience could also serve as a good summary of both Hong's and Hua's experience. They were childhood friends — they even did a lot of farm work together, learned to knit sweaters together, and later started working for the same shoe factory. Besides planting, they were also doing other kinds of work for their families. Hua provided a glimpse of what she was doing and learning to do.

Hua: *Carrying sand, he [her older brother] saw me continuously using one shoulder; he told me how to switch the pole from one shoulder to the other while walking. Whenever I switched, the sand baskets fell on the ground — a lot were shaken off.*

In addition to their farm work, they also had experiences in learning how to do other kinds of work such as learning to use a sewing machine and making linen threads — types of work that are mostly related to their gender roles as women.

Yan: *Chuchu was teaching a group of girls in Dongcun. She was older. I learned for a month or so. I was learning how to use a sewing machine. Who knew that I would use it for sewing shoes later? I was learning how to make clothes with it.*

Hua did not participate in Chuchu's training program for girls. Instead, she learned from her sister-in-law who is 16 years older than her.

Hua: *The sewing machine was hers. [At the beginning] I would mess with it, stepping the paddle just for fun. She didn't complain that I might break the machine. She even started teaching me. "When you step on the paddle, you should also move the hand wheel." Later, I could use it to mend clothes, put patches on.*

In addition, all three participants know how to make linen threads. When I was younger, I encountered them doing that. It did not come up during the interviews with Yan and Hua, but Hong mentioned that her mother was trying to teach her to make linen threads.

Hong: *When I was older [a teenager], she wanted to teach me to make linen threads. I wanted to take care of the vegetables — I said I wanted to take care of the vegetables. [If it was making linen threads I would be] sitting there, couldn't move much. I argued to do more planting.*

“Prepared Me for this Sewing Machine”

Yan, Hong, and Hua consider their family education as something they were supposed to do. They compare themselves to women of their age in the same shoe factory where they work. They rationalize what they had in terms of family education as being what everybody was expected to have. Now in comparison with their children's experience, they noticed that their experiences were “not like today,” as Hong phrased it.

Hong: *It was not like today — schooling is schooling [and] farming is farming. We had to do a lot of farm work after school, isn't that the same for everybody? Kids were expected to help their parents with something, not something that I enjoyed ... making linen threads, I always found excuses to do something else.*

From this excerpt, it is obvious Hong's interpretation of her experience was shaped by what she saw later in her life. Similarly, Hua thinks that her family education—specifically her sister-in-law — prepared her to use a sewing machine, and this is most useful in her life now because she makes a living with it.

Hua: *It was that sewing machine — I got used to using it, similar to using an electric sewing machine. Now I make a living with an electric one. [I was] a teenager, my sister-in-law had a good temper.*

Researcher's Notes Three

For this generation, going to school or not was not a problem anymore. Women of Yan, Hong, and Hua's age all had a few years of schooling in Shancun. Parents and the school provided some support. Both Yan's and Hong's parents tried to push them back to school after they stopped going. In Yan's and Hua's case, teachers even tried to persuade her back to school because of their good performance. At the same time, the Shancun School made students like Yan and Hong uncomfortable going to school for learning. Their perception of male teachers having more *Weifeng* as well as the problematic teaching of these teachers made schooling "no fun".

My interviews are limited in terms of providing information about what gender bias or discrimination the participants experienced within their schools. However, their families' support for their schooling very much showed how girls were discriminated against or less favored in schooling. Hua's father deprived her of the opportunity of schooling in a controlling and harsh way. Although Yan and Hong and their girl peers did not experience what Hua did, their parents still provided more support for their brothers' schooling. When Hong's brother dropped out multiple times, her parents even persuaded him in a different way, which Hong perceived as showing favoritism toward the son. Brothers of Yan and Hua all completed junior high school or senior high school until they could not pass the entrance tests for a higher level of schooling.

Although gender roles did not limit women to housework anymore for this generation, their family education did serve to fulfill women's traditional roles for the three participants and thus impacts the larger discourse of gender division of labor. While they were taught to do farm work such as planting and carrying sand, they also had to learn how to sew, knit, and do housework. They were taught by their mothers, peers, or older sisters-in-law. When they became grownups, they started using these skills — in particular, using a sewing machine — for making a living. In the three participants' factory of about 20 or 30 workers, I didn't see a single man working there. All of them were women in their 20s to mid-40s. The three participants' families provided the training, perhaps unintentionally, to prepare them for this type of factory work.

Under the influence of the national policy of *Saomang*, girls who dropped out after one or two years of schooling were given literacy training. However, this type of program in Shancun was usually very brief and only served to help these early dropouts to learn a few more words. In my conversations with teachers who organized the *Saomang* sessions, they consider it to be more *pro forma* than practically useful. The illiterate remain illiterate after a few years of the program; they forget the limited number of words that they learned during *Saomang*. When opportunities to work as rural-urban migrant workers opened up in the early 1990s, they began to leave their village to make a living in a city far away:

The village is far

By distance, and by who we are.

We migrated to live in the urban victoire

To make shoes, hats, and umbrella...

Schooling is far
By time, and by who we are.
The days before we set for afar
We spent our younger years in the village au revoir.
Schooling wasn't a necessary part.

We each belong to some other family.
Our schooling had no moral legitimacy.
No-fun schooling is tiny in our life story.

We chose to drop out, mostly
(Except Hua).

We learned to work on a rice paddy
To use a sewing machine.
These things, nothing asked for literacy.
This is our education, well prepared us for the
"Made in China" industry.

Part Four: Generation Four

Background Introduction

In the late 1980s, the Chinese central government decided that elementary school and junior high school should be *Yiwu Jiaoyu* (compulsory education). Under the *Yiwu Jiaoyu Law*, parents have the legal responsibility to support their children until they graduate from junior high school. However, in Shancun and nearby villages, parents could still escape it. Parents still had to pay their children's tuition, at least until 2001 when the Central Government eventually offered financial support for *Yiwu Jiaoyu* in areas like Shancun.

Also, China underwent urbanization beginning in the 1980s and early 1990s. As noted previously in the discussion of the third generation's education, in the early 1990s villagers began moving out of Shancun to make a living in cities on the coast or nearby. Mostly, they worked in factories or as construction workers. Some of them would bring their children with them.

About the Participants

Dai, Wen, and Ni were born in the 1980s. When they were still in elementary school, some families started to move out of the village. Dai's parents moved to Jang when she was nine years old. She stayed two more years in Shancun for schooling before her father decided to transfer her to an elementary school in Jang. Ni's parents also moved to Jang when she was six years old, and Ni attended both elementary school and secondary school in that city. There were multiple elementary and secondary schools in Jang. Dai and Ni went to different schools because of their parents' choices and because

of where their apartments were located. Wen's parents were still in Shancun during her school-age years. Thus Wen attended the Shancun elementary school and then a nearby junior high. Wen and Dai were in the same elementary school but in different grades for a few years before Dai transferred to a school in Jang.

“If You are a Good Student I’ll Support”

Most women of Dai, Wen, and Ni's age from Shancun completed junior high school. Wen is among the two who decided to drop out a few months before the eighth grade, the last year of junior high school. Unlike those of previous generations, parents of this generation in Shancun did not pull any of their daughters out of school. However, that doesn't mean that the girls' schooling was supported and valued as much as that of their male peers.

Dai: *“If you are a good student I’ll support [you]!” my father said.*

This is what Dai's father said when she was in elementary school. It seemed to be a way for the father to encourage Dai to do well in school, but what was meant by “support” and what degree of support was this father willing to give? How did Dai feel about his support?

Dai: *I remember when I graduated from elementary school, two of my friends invited me to learn English together [through a tutor agent]. I didn't learn English in elementary school, afraid I couldn't catch up in junior high, wanted to participate in a summer class. I told my father that I wanted to attend a summer English class, to get ready for the first year in junior high school. He did not let me go. It was just a few hundred RMB.*

After Dai completed junior high school, she didn't pass the high school entrance examination. She thought about having one year *Buxi*, repeating the last year of junior high or senior high in order to take the entrance exam a second time to advance to senior high or college. However, she was afraid to raise the issue. Her mother suggested that Dai could go to a vocational school, but her father did not support the idea.

Dai: *Buxi — my parents have many children. You know my father's values. He didn't ask me to take Buxi. After [I] graduated from junior high, my mother said I could go to a vocational school. He didn't say anything, [so] I didn't go.*

Dai expected me to understand without clarifying what values her father had in terms of her education. When she was describing her brother's education Dai said that her father had the *Zhongnan qingnü* (favor boys disfavor girls) value. She explained that when her older brother failed to pass the college entrance exam in the last year of senior high, her father asked him to have *Buxi*. After the son failed the second time, the father paid extra tuition to get him into college⁴. In explaining why her father did it, she added:

Dai: *He is a son — he is supposed to Yanglao [provide financial support to parents when they are old].*

In comparison, Wen did not talk as much about her parents' support for her schooling as Dai did. She focused on her school performance. She said she felt no interest in schooling because she did poorly in physics and math. Under the influence of some of her classmates, she wanted to drop out and go to *Dagong* (doing factory work as a

⁴ Some universities in China run special programs to admit senior high graduates who could not meet their required admission scores for their regular programs. The tuition for these students is usually more expensive.

migrant worker). Her junior high school was a boarding school. Wen had been truant for a week before being discovered by her parents, but she did not go back to school even after her parents tried to persuade her.

Wen: *I told my mother, [it would be] useless go to back. I couldn't get in senior high anyway — that was sure.*

By “useless,” Wen meant to say that if even if she had not dropped out she would not have been able to do better and then go to senior high school. Wen’s school did not do anything to persuade her back to school. She left the school at the age of 14 or 15 and went to Guangdong province to work in an umbrella factory. No one from the school talked to her parents. Wen blames herself for not being able to continue schooling because in her view it was her own decision.

Ni had a different situation. She performed well and went to a four-year college after senior high school. When Ni recalled her parents’ support for schooling, her father scolding her younger brother was the most unforgettable moment.

Ni: *A long time ago, my father told him [my younger brother], “You can't even do as well as your sister, truly useless!” My mother argued with him, “[Why] should the son always do better? [Can't] you tell many boys are not as good as girls?” My father laughed, didn't say anything more.*

However, Ni added that her father wasn't non-supportive of her schooling, only that by comparison he cared more about his son's performance.

Ni: *When my brother was in school, he cared so much about my brother's schooling, cared about mine as well, [but] by comparison, he didn't ask me about my grades, not as much as he did to my brother.*

After school, would ask if my brother finished homework, telling him that he should finish homework, but never asked me about that, [especially] the first year of junior high and last year of elementary. [Later] in the second and third year of junior high, senior high, I got many awards, best students, exemplary student, he started to care more, started to encourage me to go to college. Before, [he] only told my brother he should go to college.

To a certain extent, Ni felt lucky that her younger brother did not perform well in school. She perceived her father's greater support of his son's schooling as a potential problem for her ability to go to college. In her view, her parents' financial situation wasn't good enough to support two college students, and they might ask her to sacrifice the opportunity for her brother.

Ni: My parents didn't have a high income, hardly could afford two kids to go to college. If, if he [the younger brother] would be able to be admitted to a college like me, my parents would have to borrow money. If they couldn't get a loan, perhaps might ask me not to go. You know, they don't seem to have that much gender preference. If my younger brother is doing as well as I do, they would probably be more supportive to my younger brother. It was good to me that he wasn't doing well. They could afford to have one child to go to college.

“Hoped the Son Would be a Dragon”

In terms of family support of their schooling, Dai did not provide many comments. She embedded her opinions, attitudes, and feelings in descriptions of family support with the use of speaking tones. For example, when Dai was talking about her father's disapproval of her participating in summer English training, she said:

Dai: *He did not let me go. It was just a few hundred bucks [in RMB].*

Dai emphasized the “just a few hundred bucks” by raising her voice. She meant to indicate that her father was being stingy toward her, considering he spent thousands on his son’s college education. She even sounded still irritated recalling this. When Dai was describing how she wanted to have *Buxi* she sounded helpless, indicating there was nothing she could do to get back to school because her father did not support her for *Buxi*.

Dai: *My father is more feudal [conservative] than most people, not open-minded at all.*

I: *How so?*

Dai: *When you have daughters, it’s not just to feed them. [You] should [also] think about their future. After graduation [from junior high], he never said or asked me to have further schooling, or learn some skills.*

This is a combination of using both words and tone of speaking. Dai described her father as feudal or conservative because he did not provide further education for her. She disagreed with her father by proposing how things should have been in her opinion. Meanwhile, she raised up her voice to emphasize that her father was conservative. When she said “not just to feed them”, she paused briefly and looked away.

Ni’s use of tones in her speaking was less emphatic compared to Dai. She seemed to try to understand what she experienced in a calm way. However when Dai said, “When my younger brother was in junior high school, they cared so much [about his schooling],” she slowed down while saying “cared so much.” Dai explained her father was showing more support to his son at the beginning because her father “*hoped the son would be a dragon.*” This is a Chinese saying indicating that parents hope their sons will become

successful. In Dai's case her father did not have the same high expectations for her. The word dragon is symbolically male in the Chinese culture. Dai's quoting of this saying indicates that she was excluded from becoming a "dragon" because of her gender.

"Girls Are Not as Smart as Boys"

In Wen's view, teachers just liked good students. She felt that teachers were not friendly to her mostly because she didn't perform well. Meanwhile although she encountered gender discrimination by her classmates, she felt powerless because of her "bad grades."

Wen: *They usually think that girls could not have good grades in math and physics.*

[My] grades were bad in math and physics, didn't learn how to learn them.

Teachers didn't like bad students. Only one or two girls had good grades — girls, [teachers] were friendly to them. A few classmates joked to me, said girls couldn't learn physics. I couldn't argue with them. My grades were bad, couldn't improve.

They were afraid to talk [in the same way] to the two girls who did well.

It seems that Wen thought that girls might escape from gender bias if they had good grades or good school performance. However, Dai's and Ni's experiences indicate that high-performing girls also encountered gender discrimination in schools.

Dai: *Both elementary and junior had this phenomenon. I was a good student, as good as some of the boys, ranked among the top five. But some teachers liked the boys better.*

Dai considered herself a good student before the last year of junior high school. In Dai's school, the rankings of test scores were publicly announced twice each semester based on

the midterm tests and finals. She knew that she was performing well, but she felt some of her teachers still did not like her as much as the high-performing boys. She did not recall any specific scenarios in elementary school, but in junior high school her teachers said something that made her angry.

Dai: *[I] had two teachers saying that girls were not as smart as boys. I was angry when the geography teacher said it. Originally I wasn't interested in learning geography. Later few students in my class did better than me. I wanted to prove to her, I still dislike her. She said it not only once!*

Dai was still emotional when she was describing this experience. In this quote, Dai slowed her speaking for “not only,” showing her annoyance at the teachers’ repetition of discriminating language. It seemed she was about to say, “If they said that only once, I would forgive them — it would have been just a mistake they made.”

Ni did not encounter teachers’ discrimination against girls to the extent that Dai did. However, she recalled that her teachers described girls as being not as persistent (*Jingao*) and able to withstand stress as boys.

Ni: *Some of my senior high school teachers said that boys were Geng Jingao [more persistent]. You know what this means? It was that boys will eventually outperform girls, especially right before the college entrance exam. [They] said that those who got into Qinghua [Qinghua University] and Beida [Beijing University] were mostly boys in recent years. Girls were good in the beginning but turned out to be not as good in the end. [They also] said that girls were not as good as boys under stress. The college entrance exam was very stressful. [Girls] could not withstand the stress.*

From my point of view, perceiving girls as less persistent and not able to withstand stress well is related to traditional beliefs in gender roles in the patriarchal culture — in which women were considered to have less strength, were less powerful, and were more vulnerable in facing challenges. This bias could also be seen in Ni’s experiences with some of her classmates.

Ni: Everybody knew about the sports meeting records in the school, especially the 100-meter competition, remember boys had a record one second faster than girls’ — everybody knew that, also the jumping. Some I know would show off to me saying that boys were more able.

Ni’s classmates even tried to demonstrate the gender bias by providing evidence from the sports meeting. Relevantly, Ni described a myth I also heard when I was in high school.

Ni: I don’t [know if] you know or not, I heard they said girls would not perform well once they started dating in high school. A homeroom teacher told my mother that I would do very well, as long as I don’t date any boys, I would get into a good college. My mom said she worried, if I date a boy, it would make my school performance go down.

In this myth, girls were perceived as more relationship-focused. Once they started a romantic relationship, they wouldn’t be able to concentrate on their studies. From my experience, I knew that boys were free from the limitation of this myth perhaps because they were considered to be more “persistent.”

“Don’t Want to Be a Non-persistent Girl”

Wen felt there was nothing she could do in response to discrimination in schools.

Wen: *It wasn't that bad, couldn't do anything, some kept saying that. I didn't know how to persuade them. I couldn't show them good grades.*

Dai's response was the quite opposite. She was "angry." She was trying to prove to her teachers that she could do as well as boys. She tried to challenge the gender bias that girls were not as smart as boys by showing the teacher that she could do well in geography.

Ni's strategy of reacting to gender bias was different from Dai's. Ni's strategy was to ignore her teachers' and her mother's bias, although she disliked their perception of girls.

Ni: *I pretended that I didn't hear it. I didn't like them saying that and how they see girls.*

On her classmates' saying that "boys were more able" in sports, Ni felt that she couldn't do anything to stop them saying it mostly. She looked toward a heroine — *Mulan* — to comfort herself. (The old story of *Mulan*, which was made into a Hollywood cartoon movie in 1998, describes a woman pretending to be a man to fulfill her father's military duty and receiving honors.)

Ni: *It was okay, I couldn't do anything when they said that. I was a good student. I told myself I was an exception. I liked *Mulan*. That story encouraged me a lot.*

"Who said girls were not as good as boys!" I comforted myself by telling myself that.

Meanwhile she tried as much as she could to ignore gender bias, which was embedded in her school experiences. Nevertheless, she would argue with her classmates sometimes when she was too annoyed.

Ni: I ignored them [mostly], let them say whatever they wanted. When bothered too much, I would argue, “You can’t do as well as me in English and mathematics, don’t be that proud.” Then they would not say anything.

Also, during senior high the college entrance examination occupied most of her time, and being aware that girls were considered less persistent gave her a strong motivation to work harder. She did not want to be perceived as a “non-persistent girl.”

Ni: It was nothing interesting, it was [being] about to take the entrance exam. That was the most important. I didn’t know if it was true. I worked much harder. [I] didn’t want to be the non-persistent girl they described.

Researcher’s Notes Four

From Dai, Wen, and Ni’s experiences, gender bias against girls shaped their family support and how parents, classmates, and teachers perceived them. They knew that support of their schooling from parents was not as much as the support of their brothers’. They perceived their parents’ bias in favor of sons as “old feudal values” (i.e., extremely conservative). It did not appear that they attempted to challenge these values within their families. However, they had the attitude, emotion, and opinion of disapproving of parental favoritism toward boys. They did not want to be treated unfairly compared to their brothers. This could also be seen in the second and third generation’s experiences. A possible explanation is that the third wave of the women’s movement—associated with the Communist Party’s ideology of class struggle—empowered women to see themselves as equal to men (Leung, 2003). As women became less limited in their roles for work, they began to challenge the fairness of being treated unequally to their male peers. In schools both Dai and Ni challenged gender discrimination. Neither of them was unhappy

that they were described as being inferior to boys. Dai tried to improve her performance in geography and Ni studied harder in order to avoid being perceived as a “non-persistent girl.”

Good school performance was a way to fight this discrimination against girls. In Wen’s case, not performing well made her feel powerless to argue against gender discrimination from her classmates. Not bothering to work harder was Wen’s way of responding to her classmates’ gender stereotype. For Dai and Ni, being high-achievers would show that they were just “as good as boys”, and maybe serve to help them “ignore” that they felt and were perceived as inferior. When girls like Dai and Ni were performing well, they were considered “as good as boys.” In other words, they were not high achievers themselves as their own gender. Also, as high achievers, girls could gain parental support and encouragement that is taken for granted by boys. As a summary of this generation of participants’ experience, I created the following short poem:

Schooling and education,
Whatever we do, we can’t be a “dragon”.
They predicted our lives with affirmation.
Girls aren’t persistent for continuation.
Girls too often indulged in relation.
Girls cannot do physics and computation.

These derisive vaticination,
Parents’ lowered expectation,
Teachers’ discrimination,

And classmates' biased predisposition,
Were our real life condition.

Some of us relinquished
Before a new day could dawn.

Some were resistant
To make the way to college town.

At every step we move on.

We hoped
Disfavoring of girls would be gone.
Yet we can't eradicate the cornerstone
Which the belief rests upon.

Part Five: The “Essence” of Participants’ Experience

Poverty and Survival

Before the early 1980s, people of Shancun mostly lived in poverty. They lived in shabby adobe houses, and some of them even lived in temporary thatched cottages. They struggled to have enough food. A senior that I interviewed said:

Have you eaten sweet potato rice mixed as food? I bet you didn't. You were lucky to be at your age. [She meant that I was lucky to be born in the 80s instead of earlier.] We had to eat that often. There wasn't enough rice.

Rice has always been the main food in Shancun. For a meal, a person used to have one or two bowls of rice with only a little vegetable and rarely any meat. Generally speaking, when a family of four had three or four dishes of vegetables cooked in the morning, they kept them for the entire day. Mixing sweet potatoes with rice was a solution to the shortage of rice. They are easy to grow and productive. Later in the 1980s and 90s, people still grew some sweet potatoes but mostly to feed farm animals. Today people there still eat sweet potatoes but they usually pick a very small portion of the best ones instead of keeping them all.

Survival in poverty was more important than anything else. Not surprisingly, the participants' education was to equip them with skills for their and their families' survival. What Mei and Ju learned (such as cooking, sewing, and family chores) was to promote survival. For example as Ju noted, her motivation to learn embroidery was fear of hunger. A major part of the second generation participants' lives was to earn *Gongfen* so their families would be allocated enough food. In the rural setting where survival depended on

physical work, it did not seem to matter if the participants had “brightened eyes” (that is, had acquired literacy). However the participants had acquired proficiency with numeracy—which was a survival skill—even without going to school. In this case, numeracy had a higher economic and practical value than literacy.

Beginning in the early 1980s, people in Shancun significantly improved their lives materially and economically. They no longer worried about having enough food, they built new brick houses, and they worked shorter days on their farms. Some began traveling to cities as migrant workers (e.g., Dai’s and Ni’s parents). Migrant work gave them a limited income, however it was better than traditional farming⁵ from their perspective—they had a monthly income and could save most of it because of their frugal lifestyles. Children no longer had to work for their families’ survival, and parents began to encourage their daughters to go to school. For example, Yan’s and Hong’s parents showed some support and encouragement for their daughters’ schooling. This support can also be seen in the experiences of the fourth generation, although it was not unconditional compared to the support their brothers had (see Chapter Five). Girls began to have a choice in schooling. Both Yan and Hong chose not to go because they disliked the disciplinary practices in school while perceiving their lives in the village as having more freedom—freedom from being required to recite and sit still, and from being scared by some of the teachers. At the same time, there was still an extreme case in that Hua was pulled out of school by her father. A possible explanation for this case is that people live both contemporarily and in their past experiences. Although Shancun and Hua’s family

⁵ A type of natural economy in which farmers rely on very limited pieces of land growing farm products mostly for their families, rather than for selling.

changed economically, Hua's father still believed that a daughter's schooling would not contribute financially to the family.

Use of Schooling

When survival was the essential theme, the participants and their families perceived education as having no value, or “no use” in the words of Xiu's father. By “no use”, he meant that schooling did not “fill people stomachs”—it did not provide any material or non-material benefits for the participants' families. When daughters stayed home, they could babysit, do part of family chores, and work on the farms—which were all important and practical work in their lives. This was obvious in the first two generations of participants' experiences. Lan's mother insisted that Lan should stay at home instead of going to school because Lan could babysit, otherwise all the kids would “tear at” her. Mei and Ju spent their entire childhoods and teenage years working for the family without “entering the school door”. For the second generation, as noted above, earning *Gongfen* was considered to be more important than schooling. To a certain extent, going to school was in conflict with the work of making more *Gongfen* for their families.

Improvement in the financial situation of the last two generations' families gave them relatively more opportunities. They did not have to do as much intense housework or farm work as their previous generations, and children in the village had much more time to play with their peers. Nevertheless, whether there was value in going to school still shaped how they interpreted their experiences. For example, Yan perceived her limited schooling as having limited her opportunities: “I could have done something else rather than sewing shoes.” Perceiving that there might be options was a big step in Shancun. In the past, especially before the 1980s, farming was the only option, and there

was no such thing as “doing something else”. The market economy reform beginning in the late 1970s opened up opportunities for rural populations to migrate to cities. (The rural-urban migration started in the early 1990s in Shancun rather than in the 1980s compared to other places nationwide.) They worked mostly in factories, but this migration also exposed them to the possibility other opportunities, such as going to college and having a white-collar job. When Yan and Hong looked back they regretted that they did not try harder in schools to help them gain better opportunities, which was also the case for the three participants of the fourth generation. One of Ni’s motivations to go to college was to have an office job instead of being a migrant worker like her parents and peers. Wen gave up because she felt that her grades were not good enough for her to get into senior high school—a path that might have led to college, even though Wen didn’t think about college at the time.

Being a Girl and Some Change

Being a girl used to mean not going to school, because going to school was only for wealthy landlords’ daughters. It also used to mean girls should sacrifice their own interests for their parents’ families, and being limited to skills that fulfill their gender roles as women. Both Mei and Ju were confined to learning women’s work from a woman (Mei from her mother-in-law and Ju from her sister and mother). Lan was lucky enough to have a couple years of schooling, but her childhood and teenage years were also spent serving her parents’ family and her husband’s family. Her mother-in-law purposefully trained her to take over the housework.

Following the promotion of women working outside their homes by the Communist Party (the second wave of women’s movements), the gender division of labor

did not persist further. Younger women like Yin, Xiu, and Jia even started to acquire a few years of schooling, possibly influenced by the third wave of women's movements as well. Thus being a girl for the second generation did not mean that they were limited to their houses anymore. Accordingly, their education—including both schooling and family education—kept pace with the change in gender division of labor. For example, all three participants followed adults to learn rice planting and harvesting, which was traditionally men's work. The second generation participants' view that their parents' neglect of their schooling was unfair perhaps is related to the progress toward breaking gender-based strict division of labor. They perceived themselves doing as much work as men did, so why couldn't they go to school as their brothers did?

There wasn't much progress from the second to the third generation toward further disintegrating gender division of labor. However, the economic improvement of the participants' families gave the third generation more time and space for themselves. For Hua, Yan, and Hong, their parents still needed them to do some housework and farm work, but much less than the work previous generations were asked to do. Their parents began to expect them to have good school performance. When they decided to drop out, parents even tried to encourage them to go back to school. Being a girl in Shancun began to mean having parental support for schooling (with some exceptions, such as Hua's case).

For the fourth generation participants, some of their parents started making a living as migrant workers in cities when the participants were children. This change separated Dai and Ni from any skills that the second and third generations learned from their families' agriculture work. Schooling became a major part of the three participants'

lives, perhaps due to improvement in their parents' financial situation and because there was no need for children to contribute to labor such as agriculture. At the same time, some of them even achieved better school performance than their male classmates, which made them challenge gender stereotypes and discrimination in schools (Dai's and Ni's case).

Part Six: Generational Changes and Social Context

From the four generations of participants' experiences, I find that each generation has a different theme and focus in their narratives. The first generation emphasized what they learned from their families; the second generation concerned themselves about collective farming and the Cultural Revolution; the third generation witnessed the shift from collective farming to individual family farming in the early 1980s, and experienced the *Dagongchao*—the large-scale movement of rural populations into cities as migrant workers beginning in the early 1990s; and the last generation's experiences were shaped by its parents following the rising tide of urbanization. The different focuses of the four generations' narratives are aligned with the social context, social change and policies that existed before their coming of age. In the 1930s and 40s, women were still confined to their familial roles in Shancun. In the 1910s the nationalist government began promoting women's rights in education with the purpose of building up a stronger nation (Rong, 1983; Beahan, 1975). Under its influence, foot binding was banned nationwide. In Shancun and nearby communities, Mei, Lan, and Ju are the first generation who do not have bound feet. Also, as documented in existing literature (Beahan, 1975; Walstedt, 1978), some young women had opportunities to go to school. However, women's access to formal education was still limited to a very small group of privileged families (Liu &

Carpenter, 2005). Benefiting from government advocacy of women's education and from the privilege of her family's wealth, Lan had brief school experience. Other women of the same generation in Shancun did not have the opportunity of schooling because of their community's beliefs about women's gender roles and because of the poverty of their families. Overall, government advocacy made little difference in terms of schooling opportunities in rural communities in China, similar to the bigger picture of women's education during the time in China that Kazuko (1989) and Li (2000) described. The nationalist government had yet to take a critical role in intervening in women's schooling with regulations and laws in rural communities like Shancun. Families were the decision makers in their daughters' education.

After the Communist Party takeover in 1949, the government began promoting women's roles as soldiers, teachers, and leaders under the influence of the third wave of the women's movement. In Shancun, women were mobilized to do farm work by the village leaders. Mei and Lan described these village leaders going from door to door asking women to step out of their roles within their houses to contribute to collective farming. Villagers did not challenge this because they understood that collective farm work determined how food would be allocated. It was most likely under the influence of this social context that the awareness that women should have formal education began to take root in Shancun. Most families started to send their girls to school for a few years, and women of the second generation began to challenge the fairness of denying girls the opportunity of formal education. This could be seen in both Yin and Xiu's experiences. Note that one reason Yin persistently pursued her schooling was that she felt she deserved the same formal education as her male peers did. Xiu mentioned "*women*

holding up half of the sky” while arguing with her mother after being asked to stop going to school. Meanwhile, the Cultural Revolution to a certain degree determined the curriculum for students of Yin, Jia, and Xiu’s age. Two important aspects of schooling were memorization of Mao’s quotes and *Laodong*. Also, the collective farming system hindered girls’ opportunity to go to school. Their families worried about having enough *Gongfen* in order to have enough food, and this motivated parents to encourage or even force their daughters to work at home instead of going to school to earn “nothing” practical.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the shift from collective farming to individual family farming in Shancun gave parents more options in deciding their daughter’s education. Parents did not have to worry about asking daughters to earn *Gongfen* for the purpose of being allocated enough food. They could choose, as Hua’s father did, to ask their daughters to work for the family instead of going to school; they could also instead support daughters’ schooling, as Yan’s and Hong’s parents did. It’s a family decision, without the legal responsibilities just like the previous two generations’ situation. The *Saomang* campaign, initiated by the state congress’ *1978 Guidelines of Education for Illiterates* and sponsored by the local governments nationally, provided Hua with an opportunity to gain basic literacy. However, based on Hua’s experience in *Saomang* it had a very limited impact on her literacy. The program was short and taught only how to write a few hundred Chinese characters. In conversations with teachers who worked for *Saomang* in Shancun, I found they didn’t seem to be serious in implementing the program. Their participation in *Saomang* was more of a way to cope with government policy than to help illiterates learn. These teachers also pointed out that basic literacy

wasn't meaningful to women because their lives in the community rarely depend on literacy. In addition, the women's interpretations of their education — including both family education and schooling — were shaped by their later experiences as migrant workers. For example, Hua saw learning from her sister-in-law to use a sewing machine as preparation for making shoes at a factory. Hong rationalized that her work in a shoe factory was a consequence of not doing well in school.

Schooling of the fourth generation was also significantly influenced by urbanization, but in a different way compared with the previous generation. Two of the three participants' families had moved to nearby cities, so the two participants experienced most of their elementary and secondary education in those cities. Because their families left agriculture to make a living in nearby cities, Dai and Ni did not acquire knowledge or skills in farming, needlework, or making clothes, which previous generations learned in the rural community, mostly from their families. By the time they started elementary school, it was after the Compulsory Education Law (CEL) was passed in 1986. It is likely that the CEL facilitated the increase in educational attainment of women from Shancun, however the interview data do not support this assumption. The situation was that most parents provided some support to their daughters for schooling, although the degree of support was relatively lower than what they provided to their sons.

In summary, the increase of women's educational attainment in Shancun occurred mainly in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. This is consistent with what Lavelly et al. (1990) pointed out, that women's formal education made progress in the two time periods— 1950s to 1958, and the late 1960s to mid-1970s. Note that the limited number of participants and qualitative nature of my study does not allow me to track the enrollment

of girls in schools year by year during those three decades. The purpose of my study is to gain an understanding of how girls experienced their education. A focus on individuals reveals the complexity behind the macro level patterns and the agency exercised by parents and their daughters. Nevertheless, it is clear that, in comparison with the previous generation, women who were born in the 1950s and 60s had better access to schooling. Little progress in increase of women's schooling was made between the second and third generation. The fourth generation witnessed a sharp increase of educational attainment over the third (see Figure 1). The nonlinear progress of women's schooling is associated with the women's movement, government advocacy of gender equity driven by a nationalism discourse (Lewis, 1919; Rong, 1983; Bailey, 2007), the collective farming, and urbanization. Meanwhile, the impact of educational policies is invisible except *Saomang* provided an opportunity for Hua to gain some basic literacy.

--Insert Figure 1 Here--

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

In Chapter Four, I presented the participants' experiences with the purpose of capturing their stories in their own voices, and in fulfillment of answering three research questions: how women of four generations in Shancun—born between the 1930s and 1990s—encountered gender inequality in terms of their educational experiences; how they interpret the gender inequality in education that they encountered; and what educational policies shaped their experiences.

Here in Chapter Five I focus on interpretation of the participants' experiences, guided by the conceptual framework proposed in Chapter Three, and how the findings of this study speak to existing studies of women's education in China. In addition, I address the limitations of this study and conclude with policy and research implications to promote gender equity in education in rural China.

As delineated in Chapter Three, the concept of intersectionality adopted for this study addresses the impact of different social divisions and their interaction on women's experiences (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005). The divisions vary in different cultures and societies (Yuval-Davis, 2006). In Shancun's context, the 12 participants' educational experiences were shaped not only by their gender as women, but also Confucian belief about education, power structure within their families built upon a Confucian view of family ethics, the rurality of their families and community, and family socioeconomic status (social class). These dimensions act dependently on each other, serving to disprivilege women and girls. As time advances (from the 1930s to 1990s) and space changes (from rural to urban settings), these social categories change accordingly and take different forms in marginalizing women. The following will illustrate how they

shaped the participants' educational experiences. Note that each participant might not be influenced by all of these dimensions according to her own situation.

Part One: Gender and Women's Education

As noted in the background section of Chapter One, women were considered subordinate to men in traditional Chinese societies (Leung, 2003; Walstedt, 1978), so they were limited to the major roles of wife and housekeeper within their homes. The 20th century witnessed significant changes in the women's movement in China; however the hangover of traditional beliefs about women's gender roles still guided people's lives in Shancun. In their homes, the first generation (Mei, Lan, and Ju) was mostly limited to learning things that helped them fulfill their future roles as mothers and wives. Lan's mother-in-law "trained" her to take care of the housework, including cooking for their hired employees and cleaning. Mei described herself with a dehumanizing term—"like a camel"—when relating how she had been expected to do everything her parents-in-law had asked her to do. Nevertheless, what she described in terms of learning from her family was similar to what Lan had learned, such as cooking, raising chickens, and making clothes. Mei's experience was a little different, learning embroidery and helping out the family financially. Not surprisingly, they all learned from women in their families—Mei and Lan from their mothers-in-Law, and Ju from her older sister and mother—indicating a strict gender division of labor and reproduction of labor within families.

Schooling, which would not have prepared the three participants for their gender roles, was mostly out of their families' consideration. Schools in the 1930s and 40s in

Shancun and nearby communities focused on basic literacy and taught students to read and write Chinese characters using the *Thousand Character Classics*⁶. Given women's gender roles being limited within their families, schooling did not have a place in women's education, especially for families struggling to make ends meet (see *Part Three: Rurality and Social Class*). As a consequence, it was taken for granted that the families of Mei and Ju would not support them to go to school. Lan's story shows this further: Originally she had access to schooling, but her mother presented a strong argument that she was needed at home to take care of her younger sisters and help with the housework. The village school's teaching of *Thousand Character Classics* was irrelevant to what Lan was expected to do. Her father was influenced by the Nationalist Government's advocacy for women's education, but he ultimately yielded to her mother's argument.

The second generation participants did not encounter the same strict gender division in labor as the previous one did. They began working outside of the house—planting, harvesting, and grazing—which used to be considered by the rural community to be men's work. They learned mostly by following what grownups did. For example, Jia learned rice planting by working alongside adults and following their instructions. Yin and Xiu did not provide specific examples illustrating how they learned farming, but from what Yin said—“*You grow up with it, watching others doing it and you know how*”—and from my own life experience in a Chinese rural community for 18 years, I can infer that they had experiences similar to Jia's. In addition to farming, this generation also managed to learn to knit sweaters, embroider shoe mats, and mend clothes. Similar

⁶ As recalled by seniors in Shancun, the *Thousand Character Classics* (*Qianziwen* in Chinese) was a textbook used to teach children Chinese characters.

to the previous generation, they learned these skills from women—a mother, or a peer in the village. Thus women’s participation in outdoor farming in Shancun broke the strict gender division of labor only to a certain extent. In my view, the breaking-down of the gender division in farming did not serve to liberate women, considering that liberation was the key term of the second women’s movement between the 1950s and 1970s. Instead it made women do more work—not only were they asked to do housework, but now they had to do farming as well. Note also that their labor in farming was not valued as much as men’s. For each day’s farm work, a woman could earn at most only five points of *Gongfen*, while a man could earn as much as ten. While this standard discriminated against women, it did not discourage women’s participation in collective farming when families struggled to earn enough *Gongfen*.

Compared with the previous generation, the second generation participants had access to school for at least a few years. At the same time, they faced tremendous obstacles in pursuing more years of schooling. Instead of being motivated or encouraged to attend school by their families, they had to learn how to demand and work harder in order to go to school. Otherwise, their opportunity would be lost. Their gender as women was not the only reason for the lack of support from their family (see *Parts Two, Three, and Four* in the same chapter). Nevertheless, being girls stood in the way of pursuing further schooling. Otherness of daughters—viewing daughters as belonging to other families—disenfranchised many women from opportunities they might have had. This belief made Yin’s neighbors’ challenge her grandfather’s support for her schooling, and it was with the same belief that Jia’s parents, from her perspective, ignored her dropping out while supporting their son to attend senior high school. In Xiu’s case, the otherness of

daughters justified her father's peremptory termination of his daughter's schooling. Xiu's mother, being a woman herself, had the motivation to support her daughter, but facing her husband's opposition and the reality of poverty (*Chapter Five—Parts Two and Three*), she decided to ask Xiu to give up school.

The shift away from collective farming, as part of the transformation from a planned economy to a market economy, was a significant change in Chinese contemporary history. One might expect that rural communities would have made much progress in gender equity; however the third generation of participants' stories proves otherwise. This corresponds with Beaver et al. (1995) and Wang (1999) noting that the post-Mao economic transition weakened the foundation of the third wave of the women's movement (Zheng, 2005) under the leadership of the Communist Party. The third generation of women in Shancun did not have significantly better opportunities for education, whether family education or formal schooling. Indeed, their family education was similar to that of the second generation: Learning how to do farm work as well as what girls were expected to learn inside the home, such as Hua's learning to use a sewing machine. As with the previous generation, they learned sewing and making clothes from a woman—a sister-in-law, a mother, or a girl peer—and girls and women were asked to learn and do outdoor farming, which had been considered to be men's work. The converse did not happen: Men were not expected to learn skills traditionally considered to be women's.

Yan and Hong were encouraged to go to school by their families. However, family support for their schooling was less than for their brothers', as the participants pointed out. Both Hong's and Yan's parents pushed their sons to pursue more years of schooling

than they supported their daughters to do. Hong's parents gave up easily after trying persuading her to return to school after she had dropped out. The father literally said, "*You really don't want to go, stay at home to work.*" In the case of their son's truancy, they showed more patience and were more tactical in persuading him, for example by rewarding him for going back to school with toys that he liked. Although being of the same generation and same age, Hua had a different and more difficult situation. Her father cruelly deprived her of the opportunity of schooling, just as Xiu's father did to her. According to Hua and villagers I spoke with in the summer, he reached his decision mostly out of the consideration that "daughters belong to other families." The otherness of daughters purely because of their gender still haunted Shancun for the third generation.

The first three generations of participants did not leave their rural communities before the early 1990s, when the third generation was about to reach adulthood. Unlike those of their predecessors, the experiences of the fourth and last generation of participants were different both in time and in place. Two of them left the rural setting with their parents when they were still small children. One consequence of leaving the rural setting was the absence of acquiring the kind of home knowledge that the previous generation had learned. Based on what I observed, none of the three participants in their 20s learned anything like making clothes or embroidery within their families. Note that in this study I define education broadly, including both schooling and the family education the participants had. In rural communities like Shancun, children and teenagers usually gained necessary skills and knowledge, such as farming and housekeeping, before adulthood from their families. In Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti's (2005) view, these skills are considered to be "funds of knowledge" that are "historically developed and

accumulated.” They serve to maintain a household’s function and well-being (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). Nevertheless urbanization and the disappearance of traditional home knowledge do not mean that daughters were free from gender discrimination.

As Dai, Ni, and Wen had more years of schooling compared with the previous generations, gender discrimination against women within schools started to unfold. To a certain extent, teachers and classmates seemed to perceive the three participants to be less capable compared with their male peers. Some of Wen’s classmates for example believed that girls couldn’t do well in mathematics and physics. Dai’s geography teachers went to the extreme point of commenting that girls were less intelligent. Ni did not experience this type of harsh attitude in her schools, but her awareness that girls were considered less persistent in academic performance motivated her to work hard on her classwork. This resilience in response to gender discrimination could also be seen in Dai’s hard work to improve her grade in geography class following her teachers’ comment about girls’ intelligence. Wen had a somewhat different situation. Her unsatisfactory school performance made her think that high-achieving girls might be able to get away from gender stereotypes and discrimination. She wasn’t aware that even high achievers like Ni experienced similar discrimination.

Within the three participants’ families, parents showed less support and had lower expectations for their daughters’ schooling due to their bias in favor of sons. In Dai’s, Wen’s, and Ni’s description of this bias, “*Zhongnan qingnü*” was another version of “*daughters belonging to other families.*” It explains Dai’s father withholding his support for her seeking summer English classes, and paying his son’s expensive college tuition

while ignoring his daughter's further schooling after junior high. His statement, "*If you are a good student I'll support,*" indicates that his support of Dai's schooling was on the condition of her good performance, but it was unconditional to the son. Another term showing the exclusion of daughters from families' high expectations in their children's education is "*hoping the son would be a dragon.*" This is a dated phrase which had existed for centuries in the Chinese language. It did not appear in the narratives of the previous generations, perhaps because when girls were struggling for a few more years of basic education—elementary or secondary school—they did not even consider being successful enough to go to college. Similar to Dai, Ni's father's support was also based on the condition of outstanding performance. Being aware of that, she made it to high school and then a well-known university while experiencing a sense of lack of support from her father.

In short, being a daughter from Shancun means not being valued as much as a son by one's family. The gender-based favoritism for men and against women (Bauer et al., 1992; Stromquist, 1990, 1992) undergirded family expectation, support, and decisions in women's formal education. It manifested in different ways over generations. It appeared as strict gender division of labor within families, control or ignorance of women's access to schooling, participants' emotional trauma, internalized gender bias, lower expectations of daughters' schoolwork, gender-discriminating language in schools, and participants' resilience in fighting against gender discrimination. Consistent with previous research (Zhou, Moen, & Tuma, 1998; Brown & Park, 2002; Song, Appleton, & Knight, 2006; Wu, 2010), the experiences of the 12 participants indicated the persistence of gender discrimination in education in communities like Shancun. Unlike existing studies, this

study shows the process in terms of how gender-based discrimination shaped women's educational experiences and placed them in a disprivileged situation. At the same time, the participants' family power structure, socioeconomic situation, and Confucian beliefs about education all come into play, to either alleviate or mostly reinforce women's disadvantaged situation in acquiring education.

Part Two: Family Power Structure

In Shancun and nearby rural communities, patriarchal family power relations guided by the *three cardinal guides*—ruler guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife (Su & Littlefield, 2001)—slowly changed over time, although they remained mostly patriarchal in the 20th century. In other words the family hierarchy ranked elders above younger members and men above women. In an extended family, which is the most common, a senior man has the greatest control over decision-making and finance, for example Yin's grandfather. Meanwhile, there is a gender-based belief that men are in charge of issues outside the house while the women's domain encompasses issues within the house—a gender division of responsibilities and power relations in families. The participants as young girls had the lowest status in their families, and their mothers usually would follow their husbands' decisions. The daughters' education was totally up to their parents, or sometimes seniors members of their families. As shown previously, the parents' lack of support for their daughters' schooling arose largely from their belief in women's gender roles. At the same time, the power relation among adults in the participants' families also influenced their schooling opportunities.

According to Lan, her father being a wealthy landlord was able to pay her tuition and was willing to be supportive of her schooling. She also pointed out that her father could have insisted and made the decision to guarantee Lan's schooling, but he didn't. Her father was liberal enough to show some support for his daughter's schooling by telling his wife that "*it is not good for her if she doesn't go to school.*" Nevertheless her mother argued that as a daughter Lan should stay within in her mother's domain. Lan's father—the liberal "*Dushuren*"—ceding the argument to his wife suggested his agreement that she should be in charge of within-home issues, including their daughter's education. Here, gender division in the responsibilities of this couple endowed the mother with power to decide what Lan should do.

In the 1950s, the gender division in responsibilities within homes—men being in charge of issues outside the home and women taking care of issues within the home—was fading. As a consequence, fathers acquired more control than mothers over their daughter's education. Yin's and Xiu's fathers both did not want to support their daughter's schooling for more than a few years. Xiu's mother was willing to support her daughter for schooling, but was afraid to argue with her husband on the daughter's behalf. Her role as a woman and wife in the family (and favoritism for sons over daughters) made her powerless to argue with her husband, especially under the circumstance of struggling for more food. Instead, she tried to persuade her daughter to give up. Fortunately for Yin, the support of her grandfather—the most senior man, in charge of family finance—made the difference in her pursuit of schooling. Yin's father wasn't able to pull Yin out of elementary or junior high school because of his own father's support for her education. Similar to Xiu's story, Dai's mother wanted to support

her daughter for vocational school after she finished junior high, but her husband stood in the way. She suggested that Dai could go to a vocational school to learn some computer skills and become a secretary. The father responded with ignorance and silence—“*He didn't say anything.*” Afterward, the mother did not make any more suggestions.

Part Three: Rurality and Social Class

In rural sociology, the term rurality is still not clearly defined or debatable (Friedland, 2002; Halfacree, 2004). The concept could have multiple layers of meaning including ecological, occupational, and cultural—respectively equivalent to population density, agriculture, and values and norms (Bealer, Willits, & Kuvlesky, 1965). It is beyond the scope of this study to contribute to the discussion of a clear definition. For this study, I approach rurality focused mainly on Shancun people’s agricultural occupation, and corresponding socioeconomic status. In China, rurality became well clarified by the home registry (*Hukou*) system in the 1950s; a person could be either rural or urban based on his or her family registry record. The *Hukou* policy limited the mobility of the population by controlling their movement from one area to another, especially from rural to urban. Schooling was a way to upgrade a rural *Hukou* to be an urban one if someone was able to obtain a higher education degree. The population in Shancun all had a rural *Hukou* in the 20th century, and they made their living on farming and agriculture before young people began moving to cities in the 1990s. Associated with farming, they had very low income and could hardly make ends meet (with the exception of Lan’s parents in the 1930s and 40s, and the last generation due to the overall improvement of their family financial situation during the last two decades of the 20th

century). Note also that families in Shancun grew everything they needed without any facilitation of modern farming machinery.

I consider rurality and social class together with the rationale that, in Chinese rural communities like Shancun, being rural usually was associated with low income and therefore considered to be an indicator of lower socioeconomic status or social class, especially in the 20th century. The participants' stories showed that their family financial situations limited their opportunities for schooling. For the first generation, family financial situation influenced access to schooling, or in the participants' words, decided whether the school door was open or closed. Both Mei and Ju explained that their families could not afford their schooling, while Lan could go to school for a couple of years at least in part because of her parents' relative wealth. Yin's, Xiu's, and Jia's experiences also indicated the constraint that family income was on their schooling. Yin had to do extra work—cutting reeds to sell in the market—to earn her own tuition. Jia's and Hua's fathers prevented their daughters from going to school because they were not willing to pay the tuition. However, these families were willing to support their sons. It is obvious that interaction between their financial situation and the disfavor of daughters played an important role in deciding the participants' schooling. This also could explain the unwillingness of Dai's father to invest in her schooling—not supporting Dai's summer English class and later her vocational school. Ni's worry that her parents might ask her to sacrifice schooling opportunities for her brother, supposing he demonstrated good performance, also implies how both otherness of daughters and family financial situation could influence her schooling. Therefore, I come to the conclusion that the

combination of low socioeconomic status and gender preference is likely to further solidify the practice of taking away women's schooling opportunities.

At the same time, the families' agricultural occupation demanded every family member's contribution. Before women were asked to do outdoor farming they bore responsibility for work within their homes, such as cooking and housekeeping, so their male family members could focus on their outdoor farm work. This is what Mei, Lan, and Ju learned with occasional guidance from a mother, mother-in-law, or an older sister. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, young women started learning how to do outdoor farm work. The policy of collective farming, from *Huzhuzu* (mutual aid teams among families) up to large-scale commune farming (Johnson, 1988; Yao & Colman, 1990), established a system under which both men and women were expected to contribute to agriculture. As seen in their experiences, the second generation of women were required to earn *Gongfen* in order to reach their food quota. Every year, points of *Gongfen* were tallied for each family and food was allocated accordingly. The labor of agriculture—in addition to disfavor of daughters, traditional beliefs about women, and family financial situation—pushed parents to ask their daughters to serve their families' needs rather than pursue their own intellectual development in schools. All of the participants except Dai and Ni of the last generation were asked to take responsibility for some of their families' farm work. Meanwhile, the knowledge and skills students learned in schools were not related to agricultural work they were expected to do in the rural community. It was a practical decision for parents to keep their daughters home to contribute labor to their families. Parents still supported their sons' schooling due the Confucian belief in education (see Part Four below), but families placed their agricultural needs before school for their

daughters—demonstrating the impact of interaction between gender, rurality or socioeconomic status on parents’ decisions about their daughter’s education.

Part Four: Challenging the Confucian Belief in Education

In the Confucian view, one of the purposes of formal education is to understand the moral order *Li*, a Confucian philosophy of rituals, customs, and rules of proper behavior (Yang, 1999). *Li* was considered the most fundamental basis of society. This Confucian belief in education was manifested by Lan’s comment on her brothers’ education that “*they were sons—surely they should be in school to learn and to understand the Li.*” Accordingly, *Dushu* (schooling) has always been considered a noble and honorable opportunity in Shancun. This honorable opportunity was not provided easily to women, who were in a less favored position and were required to perform rural familial chores. Influenced by this belief, Mei, Lan, and Ju consider their being denied access schooling or being asked to drop out as the way it should be. They were not aware that women should deserve formal education and development of intellect.

The later generations started to challenge the fairness of denying their schooling opportunity during the time of women’s rights advocacy that was supported by the government’s interests in women’s contribution to society. When women were doing the same farm work as men while taking responsibility for family chores, the second generation of participants was aware that women could be as intellectual as men, could do work as well as men did, and were “holding up half of the sky.” This empowered some young women to demand their education like Yin did. They felt that it was unfair, as Xiu felt, for their families not to support their schooling. Their argument with members of

their family challenged the traditional belief in formal education as a man's domain, and also challenged the practice of keeping the honorable opportunity of being educated in schools reserved only for men. Yin's insistence, resilience, and hard work—along with her grandfather's support—enabled her to overcome many obstacles (including the lack of support from her father, her family's poverty, and neighbors' disapproval) and graduate from junior high school. Unfortunately, although Xiu tried to challenge her parents by demanding schooling, her parents insisted on giving that opportunity to their son instead. The same thing happened to Hua in the 1980s. These participants' experiences reveal that the community's Confucian belief in the importance of education made schooling so noble that families usually reserved it for sons who would carry on the family name, particularly when financial resources were limited. If schooling could "*make people's eyes brightened*," families wanted to have their sons' eyes brightened first before they would consider their daughters'.

Part Five: Situating the Study

The first generation's education—including both schooling and family education—is consistent with what Kazuko (1989) found: that the Nationalist Government's advocacy of women's education did not lead to much increase in women's schooling in rural communities like Shancun. The overall increase in Shancun women's schooling also follows a pattern similar to what Lavelly, Xiao, Li, and Freedman (1990) suggested. At the same time, this study confirms researchers' (Bauer, et al., 1992; Zhou, Moen, & Tuma, 1998; Brown & Park, 2002; Song, Appleton, & Knight, 2006; Wu, 2010; Wu & Zhang, 2010) argument about the persisting gender inequality in education particularly in low-income rural communities like Shancun. In addition, I illuminate the

impact of gender bias, family rurality or socioeconomic status on women's education, factors which were shown to be influential to education in many researchers' statistical analysis (Li & Tsang, 2003; Hannum, 2003; Wu, 2010; Xie et al., 2010). Stories from the participants' early lives vividly illustrated how these factors shaped their educational experiences. Unlike these studies showing that parental education was an important factor in determining women's educational attainment, the 12 participants' stories provide little evidence to support this argument.

Further unlike the existing research, this study focuses on participants' own telling of their educational experiences, giving a voice to their stories and their own understanding of their experience. Due to an obligation to reframe the stories for research purposes, I am not able to put all of their stories on paper. However, at least in Chapter Four I present their experiences with their own words being translated into English. Moreover, I explore how different social categories such as gender, family power relations, rurality, and Confucian belief in the importance of education influenced the participants' experiences, and more importantly, demonstrate how they are intertwined and shape women's schooling and family education in Shancun.

Although intersectionality was developed in Western culture and has been applied mainly to the understanding of women's experiences in Western societies, this study shows that it is also a useful approach toward understanding women's experiences in some Chinese rural communities. Truly not all women's experiences are the same as noted by Bhopal and Preston (2012). Their experiences are each unique in that the families in which they grew up, the people they met, the schools they attended, the places in which they lived, and the emotions they felt may all differ. Crenshaw's (1991)

definition of intersectionality—gender oppression and biases in patriarchal societies are due to a variety of social dimensions such as gender, class, race, etc., and interactions among them—provides a lens through which to explore the complexity of gender inequality in women’s educational experiences arising from these socially constructed categories. In the case of this study, race wasn’t an issue due to the racial homogeneity of the rural community, but gender and social class are shown having a significant impact on the participants’ education.

One difference from women's experiences in Western societies is that those of women in Shancun showed that Confucian ideas about schooling and education played an important role in their education. This resonates with existing research (Tsao, 1990; Walstedt, 1978; Mann, 1992; Lee, 1995) showing that Confucian belief about women’s gender roles restricted the education they were expected to have. Thus intersectional analysis of women’s educational experiences in Chinese rural communities should take into account Confucian belief about schooling and education as well as women’s gender roles. Lastly, Yin’s case indicated that family power structure among adults could also play an important role in shaping young women’s education. This opens up another social category for intersectional analysis to consider.

Intersectional analysis of the twelve participants’ educational experiences is not free from limitations. One of the limitations is that it required me to discover what social dimensions were influential in the participants’ stories and how these dimensions shaped their stories. Accordingly, my interpretation comes from these identified dimensions. The constraint of doing this is that I was not able to understand the participants’ experiences from their perspectives. Had I done member check, I doubt that they would agree with

much of part one to four of Chapter Five. Nevertheless, it is not likely that they would disagree with much of the first five parts of Chapter Four, which comes from embracing phenomenology.

Part Six: Limitations

One limitation of this study is that I cannot provide good in-depth cross-generational comparisons of school practices that discriminate against women because the first three generations had only very brief or no school experience (except Yin, who completed junior high school). The fourth generation's narratives showed that schools were not a gender-neutral place. These participants encountered discriminating language in schools and unfair stereotypes toward girls. The first three generations of participants did not recall any school practices which discriminated against them as girls; however this does not mean that schools in the past were more gender-neutral before the 1990s. It could be because they were too young to be aware of what was going on, considering that two participants had no schooling, three of them dropped out before they were ten years old, and one ended schooling at 12. One might ask how women of previous generations experienced gender discrimination in schools, but because the nine participants have no recollection this study can't provide an answer to that question. In particular, Dai's experiences showed that women students of the fourth generation were perceived to be less competent in mathematics and physics, while the experiences of previous generations did not provide any evidence. This does not mean that schooling of previous generations was free from this gender stereotype. Students in elementary school might not have picked up this gender stereotype, considering all participants except Yin were able to make it to junior high. Note that the discriminating perception of girls as being less smart

or less capable in mathematics and physics appeared in Wen's and Dai's junior high school experiences. Another possible explanation is that the curriculum covered more mathematics and sciences during the fourth generation while previous generations' schooling emphasized literacy.

A second limitation, related to my positionality, is that the interpretation of women's experience is limited to a male researcher's perspective. I try to embrace the participants' voices and how they make sense of their experiences. I could try to imagine what they experienced according what they said with an emphatic stance. My marginalized identities (having lived as a rural person in China, as an immigrant in the U.S., and as a gay man in heterosexual-dominated societies) created an emotional connection between the participants and me, but I never experienced what they did as women and girls. I grew up as a man in a Chinese rural community, I took my family's support for my schooling for granted, and I don't think I encountered gender discrimination against males in my schools. Also, as a researcher I have an obligation to frame the participants' experiences to fit theoretical concepts. I can't be sure that my participants would agree with what I see in their stories. Related to this, a third limitation is that due to the long distance between Columbia and Shancun, the inconvenience of international phone calls, and the fact that some of the participants don't or can't use phone services, I am not able to do member-check.

A fourth limitation is that as a person who grew up in a Chinese rural community similar to the community my participants came from, I might have had the tendency to assume that I understood what they were telling me without asking for detailed descriptions during the interviews. For example when Dai told me, "*You know my father's*

values,” I did not ask what kinds of values her father had. I assumed that she meant to say her father favored sons over daughters. I tried to ask the participants to describe certain things which I was aware of, but I am sure that my identity as a cultural insider made me fail to capture details an outsider might have recorded.

Part Seven: Implications

Today, daughters have access to elementary and junior high school due to changes in Chinese society and in Shancun. First, beginning in the 1980s families started to have more income and fewer children; most became financially capable of supporting their children’s schooling. Second, at the beginning of the 21st century elementary and junior high school became tuition-free nationally. This means that parents do not need to pay for their children’s first nine years of schooling—from first to ninth grade. Third, most young people, including young married couples, do not make their living by farming any more. They work in cities as migrant workers. Some of them even moved to cities permanently. In these cases, children are not asked to do any farm work. Nevertheless, the last generation’s stories indicated that gender inequality still persists in different forms, and women from Shancun were disprivileged in schooling. In schools, gender discriminating practices might be ongoing. Within families, parents’ might still have lower expectation of their daughters in schooling, given the persistent preference for sons (see Figure 2 and Figure 3).

—Insert Figure 2 Here—

—Insert Figure 3 Here—

Therefore, first, policies to address discrimination against girls in schools should focus on creating a non-discriminating school environment. Teachers and administrators must have necessary knowledge to understand the disprivileged position of being a girl student, and skills to deal with gender discriminating disputes and arguments among students. Given that current teacher education in China does not include gender issues and discrimination against women in schools (X. Zhu, personal communication, June, 2013), courses on gender issues should be added as a part of teacher education. Second, schools might create partnership programs with parents for the purpose of improving students' learning while also increasing parental support and expectations for their daughters' schooling. Third, in the circumstance of girls being discriminated against due to their gender, counseling should be provided in schools to help them manage their emotions related to inferiority and internalized marginalization.

Nowadays in Chinese rural communities, gender inequality in education usually does not manifest as a way of depriving women's educational opportunities. Yet women students might be disprivileged in a more nuanced way through verbal and non-verbal expression of gender bias, through diminished parental expectations, and through women's own internalized feelings of being inferior. These are not likely to be captured by analysis based on large-scale census or achievement data. For example, in 2009 PISA tests girls did better in reading than boys and as good as boys in mathematics. Another example is Wu and Zhang's (2010) study indicating there is little difference in educational attainment between rural women and men beginning in the 1990s. This is also the case in Tsui's (2002) study of girls' educational opportunities in China, and also in Hannum, Kong, and Zhang's study (2009) on the gender gap in education in rural

northwest China. Their analysis of survey data collected from mothers, household heads, children and home-room teachers in 2000 and 2007 revealed that there was little gender difference in “parental economic investments and provision of a learning environment, own achievement, industriousness, academic confidence, and alienation from school” (p. 483). In many circumstances, girls even outperform boys (Huang, 1993; Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2006). However, the fourth generation of Shancun women’s experiences clearly demonstrated gender discrimination is still a problem in schools and in their families. Also, given that son-preference persists as a social context in many areas of rural China (Stromquist, 1990; Ebenstein, 2010), I call for more research addressing women’s everyday schooling and other educational experiences in order to deconstruct the discourse of gender inequality in education happening in women’s daily lives.

This dissertation, as a beginning of my research on gender and education, enriches the literature in gender relations by bringing in Chinese rural women’s educational experiences. From a global perspective suggested by Nancy Cook (2007), as China became a world factory with rural women contributing to factory production, an extension of this study could consider how Chinese rural women’s education became involved in economic globalization.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Women's Education in Different Times

Time/Theme	Beliefs about women's education	Women's literacy	Women's movements	Government policies on women's education
Late Qing 1840s-1911	Confucian ideas on patriarchal hierarchy of gender, women's roles limited to family, educated women might help raise stronger future generations.	Majority were illiterate, with exceptions: some women were educated in Western missionary schools and private schools for basic literacy.	Intertwined with the patriotism reform movement, initiated mostly by men.	(1) Early Childhood Schools and Family Education Law (2) Charter of Women's Elementary Schools (3) Charter of Women's Teacher Education
Nationalist Time 1911-1949	Women's equal education rights were proposed and started to be implemented; the Confucian ideas on patriarchal hierarchy of gender still have a very strong influence.	Illiterates were still the majority; Peking university started admitting women students.	As a part of the May Fourth Movement around 1919, also initiated mostly by men but more women were involved.	(1) 1912-1913 Educational System Guidelines (2) 1922 Educational System Guidelines
Communist Time 1949-present	Women should be educated equally as men; traditional beliefs in gender became more subtle and complicated.	Women's literacy gradually catches up with men's; however, the illiteracy rate of women is still higher than men's.	(1) Phase 1: Women joining in workforce and establishment of the All-China Women's Federation (2) Phase 2: Establishment of women's studies programs in higher education	(1) Mao's idea that women "hold up half of the sky" (2) Guidelines of Education for Illiterates (3) Compulsory Education Law

Appendix 2: Participants' Information

Participant Code	Pseudonym	Age	Years of Schooling	Occupation
Nationalist G 1	Mei	80s	0	Farmer, retired
Nationalist G 2	Lan	80s	2 (elementary)	Farmer, retired
Nationalist G 3	Ju	Late 70s	0	Farmer, retired
Mao's G 1	Yin	Late 50s	9 (junior high)	Teacher
Mao's G 2	Jia	Late 50s	2 (elementary)	Farmer
Mao's G 3	Xiu	Mid 50s	3 (elementary)	Farmer
Post-Mao G 1	Hua	Early 40s	2 (elementary)	Migrant worker
Post-Mao G 2	Yan	Early 40s	4 (elementary)	Migrant worker
Post-Mao G 3	Hong	Early 40s	4.5 (elementary)	Migrant worker
CEL G 1	Wen	Mid 20s	7.5 (junior high)	Migrant worker
CEL G 2	Dai	Mid 20s	8 (junior high)	Not working
CEL G 3	Ni	Mid 20s	16 (college)	Student

Figure 1. Change of Women's Education Offered by Families vs. Schools

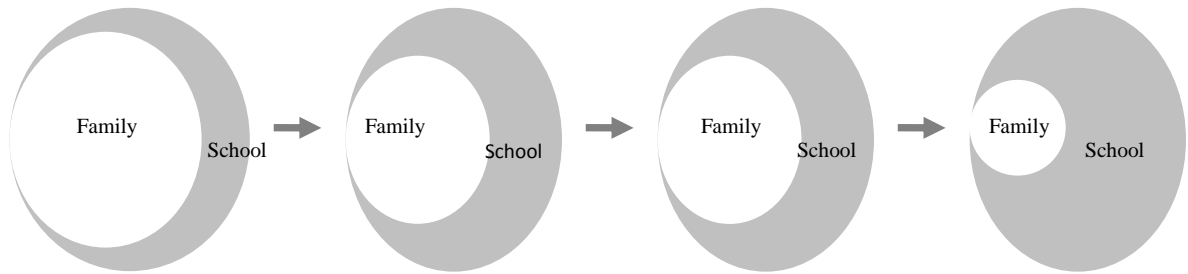
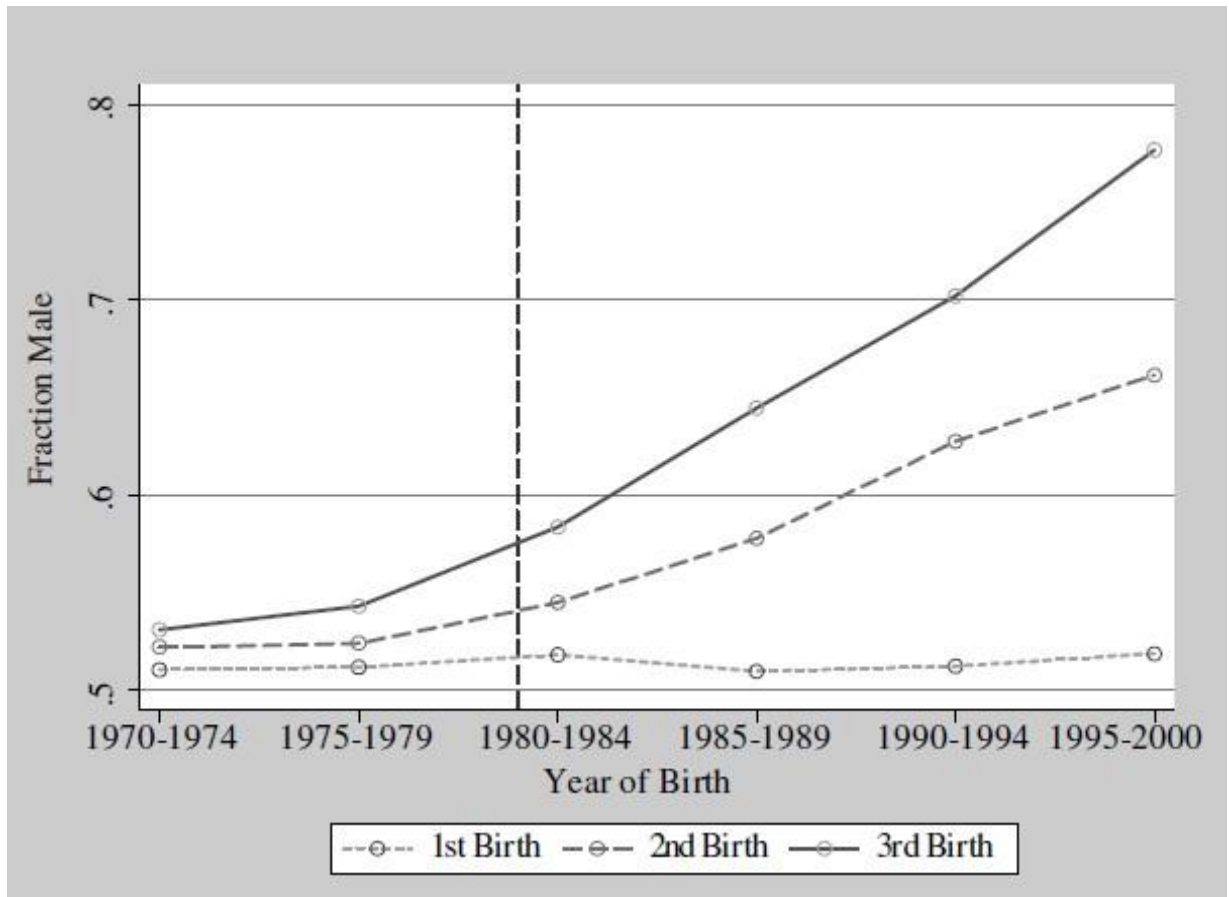
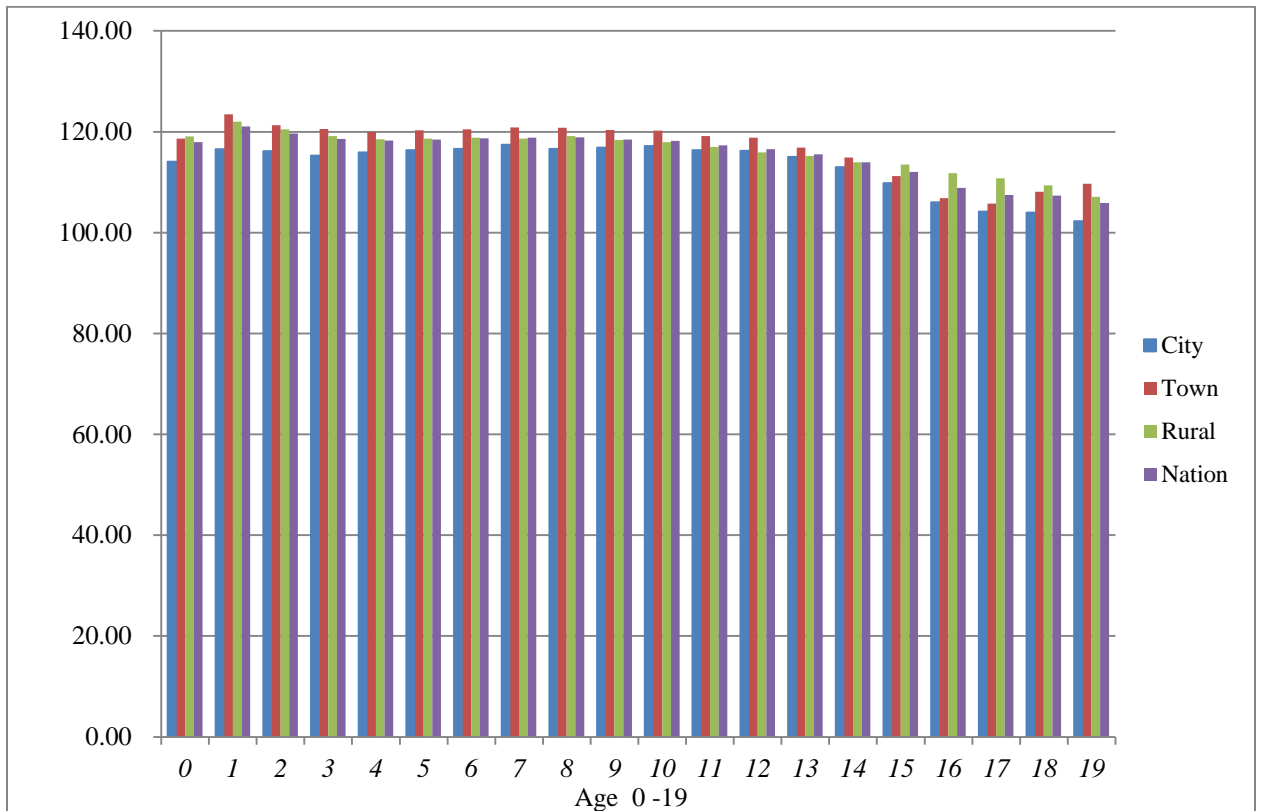


Figure 2. Proportion of Males by Birth Order in China



Source: As cited in Ebenstein, A. (2010). The “missing girls” of China and the unintended consequences of the one child policy. *Journal of Human Resources*, 45(1), 87-115.

Figure 3. Number of Boys per 100 Girls Among 0 - 19 Years Old in China



Source: National Bureau of Statistics of the P.R.C. (2012). *Tabulation on the 2010 population census of the Peoples' Republic of China*. Beijing, China: China Statistics Press.

VITA

Haigen Huang was born in Jiangxi, China. Before coming to the University of Missouri-Columbia for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, he studied at Beijing Normal University in Comparative and International Education. Between 2010 and 2014, he was a graduate research assistant at MU and an affiliated researcher for the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

Haigen's research interests are on policy issues on educational equity and social justice. During his study at MU, he initiated and led projects exploring women's education in a rural Chinese community, school effect on the socioeconomic-based achievement gap, and cultural capital and student performance.

In his spare time, Haigen enjoys reading, writing, gardening, and biking. He speaks Chinese, English, Gan dialect, and some basic Japanese. His next goal is to learn Spanish.