

DOCUMENTING THE EXPERIENCES OF CHINESE ADOLESCENTS  
IN SHANGHAI: FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS, PRESSURES, AND COPING  
STRATEGIES

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

In 1979, to reduce a rapidly growing population, China implemented a one-child policy restricting new families to one child. Since then, educators, psychologists and sociologists have studied the social and emotional development of Chinese only children. At present, controversy exists regarding the positive and negative influences of being an only child on Chinese adolescents' development. Early research focused on cognitive and academic achievement and neglected to examine social and emotional development. While more recent research is aimed at exploring the social and emotional development of only children, this research is largely quantitative and reflects assessment measures. Qualitative research that elicits the experiences of adolescents is urgently needed.

This research addressed the research gap in the current literature in the areas of social and emotional development and Chinese adolescents as only children by eliciting the unique perspective of adolescents. Their experiences were documented through qualitative interviews that elicited their perspectives on social relationships with parents and extended family members, as well as perspectives on pressure and coping strategies. This investigation identified significant themes for Chinese educators, policy-makers and parents. For example, adolescents experienced the love and support of their parents and noted that parents played significant roles; adolescents experienced pressures related to academics, exams and parental expectations, and; some adolescents adopted an active coping strategy to manage their pressures, while some used an avoidant coping strategy to dodge their pressures. Recommendations based on the research findings that are unique to China's social context are made.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Problem Statement**

China's one-child policy, aimed at controlling its booming population, has obtained the attention of the world as "a hot topic in psychological studies in China since the national family planning and birth control program was implemented in the late 1970s" (Wang, 1993, p. 99). Over time, concerns about the social and emotional health of only children have been voiced since the Chinese government implemented this birth control policy (Wang, Kato, & Inabat, 2000). In the late 1980s, concerns emerged about the social influence of this policy, in particular its effect on children's personality trait development (Poston & Falbo, 1990). However, previous research neglected to examine only children's social and emotional health, which is fundamental to the development of personality traits. In addition, a recent increase in cases of adolescent suicide and family violence—attributed to failure in the University Entrance Examination or "world-weariness" resulting from anxiety or social pressure—highlights the urgent need for investigations into the current social and emotional health of adolescents in China (Wang, 2001).

The context within which Chinese children grow has unique characteristics, for example, peers and friends of only children are also only children, and as only children each child is likely to be the absolute focus of the family. While a body of literature reflecting the difficulties only children face exists, it is largely based upon surveys about Chinese adolescents' emotional and behavioral problems (Deng, Liu, & Roosa, 2004; Liu, Tein, & Zhao, 2004) and Chinese adolescents' anxiety and depression (Chen, Chen, Kaspar, & Noh, 2000; Hesketh & Ding, 2005; Lau, Chan, & Lau, 1999). The current study adds to this body

of literature by reporting the experiences of only children, gathered through qualitative interviews that document their experiences in their own words.

## **The Context: China's One-Child Policy**

### ***Background Introduction***

The Chinese population increased by 80 percent between 1950 and 1980 (United Nations, 2005 as cited in Nie & Wyman, 2005). The traditional notion of "more children, more affluence" (Liu, Munakata, & Onuoha, 2005, p. 832) contributed to a Chinese "baby boom" (p. 832) since 1949. The population growth has also been attributed to contemporary social and economic development, as well as a resulting increase in fertility rates for women, which reached over six children per family in the middle of the 1950s (Nie & Wyman, 2005). This social phenomenon has led to a decrease in food supply and insufficient family housing and social welfare, including educational and medical services. Identified as a social problem by Chinese society (Liu et al., 2005), the Chinese government implemented a one-child policy in 1979, restricting new families to one child to decrease the rapidly growing population. It was estimated that if the average fertility rate remained at three children per family, then the Chinese population would be 4.26 billion in 2080, which in 1980 was the population of the whole world (Song, Tian, Li, & Yu, 1980 as cited in Nie & Wyman, 2005). The goal of the one-child policy is to maintain the Chinese population at a "1.2 billion benchmark" (Jiao, Ji & Jing, 1986 as cited in Liu et al., 2005, p. 832).

According to Zhu (2002), the one-child policy was not the first or only effort of the government to reduce its rapidly growing population. A policy named "late, long, few" (Zhu, 2002, p. 1) was implemented in early 1970 when China was confronted with the sharp

population increase: “from 540 million in 1950 to 850 million in 1970” (Zhu, 2002, p. 1).

The “late, long, few” policy utilized traditional family fertility planning and emphasized later child birth, a longer interval between births, and fewer children per family (Zhu, 2002).

Although this measure slowed the population increase, it was not enough. In the 1970s, over 60 percent of the Chinese population was under the age of 30. Baby boomers from the 1950’s and 1960’s had just reached or were very close to their child bearing years. It soon became evident that the Chinese government needed to do more to control population growth. Indeed, controlling growth was a critical step in the contemporary Chinese economic reform program (Zhu, 2002).

Exceptions to the one-child policy are permitted for some Chinese families. For example, a second child is allowed:

Firstly, in the case of second marriage where one partner has not had a child; secondly, if the first child has an abnormality or a condition which will reduce life expectancy; thirdly, if the father is in a dangerous occupation, such as mining; and fourthly, where both spouses are only children. In addition, third children were allowed for some ethnic minority groups. (Zhu, 2002, p. 2)

This allowance for the exceptional birth of the second child, while representing the flexibility of the one-child policy, also enabled the possibility that some only children living in urban areas may have peers who have siblings. Unlike in the urban areas, the one-child policy is not strictly enforced in rural areas, where almost 70 percent of the population live. In addition, the age when marriage is permitted is regulated. In urban areas, men must wait until age 25 and women must be at least 23 when married. In rural areas, the age to marry for

men is 23 and for women is 21. Typically, people living in rural areas get married earlier than people living in urban areas (Zhu, 2002).

To facilitate the implementation of the one-child policy, for most of the families who abide by this regulation, the Chinese government provides them with benefits. For example, a priority for school entrance and more medical aid are usually provided (Yang, Ollendick, Dong, Xia, & Lin, 1995). At the same time, to implement the only-child policy in urban areas, there are also penalties for people who do not follow the regulations. For example, if a pregnant mother, who is expecting her second child, decides not to terminate her pregnancy, then both she and her husband will lose their jobs, and will be highly fined as well to pay for the "cost to society" of this second child. The required fine is paid annually, ranging from one-fifth to triple the family annual income for up to five years (Brenman, 1999 as cited in Wang, Du, Liu, Liu, & Wang, 2002). Even privileged parents, who work for the government or national companies, will lose their jobs if they continue with "illegal" pregnancies. However, "for the majority the punishment includes fines, loss of benefits for the first child, and higher charges for obstetric care" (Zhu, 2002, p. 2).

### ***One-Child Policy Family Model***

Both the benefits and fines attached to the one-child policy supported the implementation of one-child per family, and gradually generated the unique developmental context of Chinese adolescents: almost all the students in the class, school and community are only children. After the one-child policy was implemented, Jiao, Ji, and Jing (1996) noted that approximately 70 percent of families in urban areas were one-child families with a fixed "4-2-1" structure: representing four grandparents, two parents and one child (Jiao et al.,

1996). Since then, the label “spoiled brat” or “little emperor” has been used to describe only children, in particular, only sons (Liu et al., 2005, p. 832).

Zhu (2002) indicated that there are some obvious benefits of the one-child policy in addition to the effective control of population growth. For example, Chinese mothers are released from the burden of multiple pregnancies, allowing them more time to cultivate and educate the only child of the family, to work outside the home, and for other pursuits. They may also have more time to study to obtain skills that enhance the family income. Overall, a mother’s social position is improved due to the increased financial independence of the family and her own increased self-confidence (Zhu, 2002). In addition, Zhu (2002) claimed that only children themselves benefit from additional and focused family resources including financial support and parents’ attention in their education. For example, under this policy only daughters are released from competing with male siblings for family resources.

The Chinese preference for male children, a long term cultural influence of a feudal economic structure, and the one-child policy may exacerbate discrimination against girls (Short, Zhai, Xu, & Yang, 2001). Now that parents can only have one child, some parents are disappointed when they have daughters. Indeed, patterns of abortion and abandonment indicate that girls are less welcome family members in some Chinese families (Coale & Banister, 1994). Therefore, the gender bias occurring in some families contributes to the reproduction of social gender inequities and may result in negative perceptions of female children and adolescents, as well as their families.

### **Research Purpose and Rationale**

The purpose of this research was to document the experiences of Chinese adolescents

who have been developing within a social context that requires families to have only one child. The one-child policy has been carried out for more than 30 years within the context of Chinese social, cultural, historical and economic influences. This research sought to elicit and document the experiences of Chinese only children, using their words to describe what being an only child meant to them.

The following questions guided this research: How do Chinese adolescents who are only children experience familial relationships? Specifically, how do they experience their relationships with their parents? How do they experience their relationships with their extended family members? How do Chinese adolescents who are only children experience pressure? How do they cope with the pressures they experience?

This research addressed a gap in the current literature in the areas of social and emotional development for Chinese adolescents who are only children by providing the unique perspective of adolescents themselves. In addition, this investigation identified significant themes for Chinese educators, policy-makers and parents. Recommendations are made based on the research findings.

### **Significance of the Research**

The significance of this research rests with the uniqueness and social impact of the one-child policy, which influences the developmental environment of Chinese children. As a country with nearly one-fifth the population of the world, the future of China depends on current young people, who might have different experiences and, as a result, differ in their social and emotional development compared with peers in other countries. In addition, this research contributes both theoretically and methodologically to the burgeoning research

literature on the social and emotional development of Chinese only children by addressing the gap in the literature that reflects the “voices” of the adolescents themselves.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

This chapter highlights relevant literature on social and emotional learning and development, adolescent development, perspectives on and of only children, and Chinese adolescents' development as only children. This literature was addressed to establish a foundation for the research questions and the themes that emerged from this research.

### **Social and Emotional Learning and Development**

Social and emotional learning is defined as the process of emotion recognition and management, caring about others, responsible decision making, ethical and responsible behaviour, positive relationship development and negative behaviour avoidance (Elias et al., 1997). The significance of social and emotional learning and healthy development is emphasized by Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, and Walberg (2004) for adolescents to "become responsible and contributing citizens" (p. 3) and achieve both school and life success with long lasting influences on their future behaviours. According to Elias et al. (1997) and Zins et al. (2004), schools are settings within which to educate and develop students' social and emotional well-being along with their intellectual development, because students experience living together as a group with peers and teachers.

In terms of adolescents' daily interaction with each other in groups, social and emotional learning is defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning as "the process of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively" (as cited by Schonert-Reichl, 2005).



Interpersonal relationships among adolescents emphasize effectiveness, which refers to whether the behaviour outcomes accord with the original purpose of the person.

Interpersonal effectiveness is important because life quality can be enhanced by numerous good interpersonal interactions (Johnson & Johnson, 2004). The current research explored Chinese adolescents' experiences in terms of their familial relationships, their experience of daily pressures, and the coping strategies they use to manage their pressures.

The quality of familial relationships manifest in daily activities is an important factor for the healthy development of social and emotional well-being. Thompson (1999) stated that the main characteristic of adolescents' social context is the close social relationships that they can rely on for support. Positive and intimate relationships impact adolescents' social and emotional development by shaping the environment in which adolescents experience, comprehend, and express emotion in their daily social interaction. For instance, Laible and Thompson (2000) found adolescents who developed positive parent relationships to be well adjusted. They showed the most sympathy and least depression and aggression. On the contrary, adolescents who scored low on their social relationships with parents represented more depression and aggression. The importance of parent relationships to social and emotional health has been concluded in previous research by Wel, Linssen, and Abma (2000) as well.

Compared with early childhood, adolescence is regarded as a developmental stage fraught with stress given the social, emotional and behavioural problems that may arise during this period, including depression, suicide and delinquency (Powers, Hauser, & Kiner, 1989). Adolescents' capacity to control and manage emotional problems may benefit them

when dealing with anxiety in school or other social settings, for instance, during tests or during examination periods (Lopes & Salovey, 2004). Moreover, Strauss, Frame, and Forehand (1987) reported that adolescents who have emotional problems, such as anxiety, are more likely to have negative peer relationships. The students who are anxious are usually disliked by peers and teachers. Consequently, both social relationships and emotional well-being are important factors of adolescents' social and emotional health.

### **Adolescent Development**

First coined by Hall (1904), adolescence is a term derived from the Latin word *adolescere*, originally meaning growing up. According to Hall, the increase of adolescents' pubertal hormones was usually described as the attribution of disturbance in adolescence. "Adolescence is a period of life that is often mentioned as the time of transition between childhood and maturity" (Newman & Newman, 1986, p. 2). Ausubel (as cited in Desjarlais & Rackauskas, 1986) argued that childhood experiences influence the nature of adolescent development, and that adolescent experiences greatly influence adult maturity. During adolescence, major physical and reproductive changes occur, which impact the student's growth socially, emotionally and psychologically (Desjarlais & Rackauskas, 1986).

A large portion of adolescents were unwilling to discuss their feelings about psychological changes in puberty with their parents (Brooks-Gunn & Reiter, as cited by Offer & Schonert-Reichl, 1992). However, Offer and Schonert-Reichl (1992) found that the majority of adolescents go through puberty with both positive and negative experiences, although research tends to focus on negative experiences. Consequently, Arnett (2001 / 1999) stated that adolescence is an important stage when "storm and stress is more likely to occur

than at other ages" (p. 242), although crises and anxiety do occur at other stages. Specifically, the notion that adolescents experience difficulties contains three elements: Conflicts with their parents, mood disruptions and risk behaviour (Buchanan, Eccles, Flanagan, Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Harold, as cited in Arnett, 2001/1999). Of interest, research findings by Boxer, Levinson, and Petersen (1989) reported that the psychological change and experience of puberty during adolescence largely depended on cultural definitions of desire and expectations at that stage.

### ***Adolescent Familial Relationships***

Johnson and Johnson (2004) claimed that the quality of adolescents' social relationships consists of various factors including social support, communication, coherence and attraction in daily interpersonal interactions. The emotional connections among adolescents have a great influence on their social and emotional learning. Healthy and positive social relationships can benefit adolescents' school performance, sense of group responsibility, personality, perseverance and motivation. Therefore, as one of the most crucial factors in social and emotional well-being, positive and stable social relationships during adolescence can benefit both intellectual and psychological development.

### ***Parent-Adolescent Relationships***

In general, the role for parents, in relation to adolescents, tends to be one of guidance, helping adolescents to take care of themselves, rather than caring for them directly. However, adolescents' parents usually have concerns about their children (Newman & Newman, 1986). During adolescence, social and emotional learning takes place in both formal and informal settings of school and home. Therefore, parents, in particular as role

models, guide adolescents in terms of social and emotional development.

Typically, parents attempt to bring their adolescent child's behaviour into line with what they perceive as socially accepted norms and values through criticism, punishment, and praise. In more informal interactions, parents influence children's interests and guide their aspirations. (Newman & Newman, 1986, p. 186)

In this way, parents educate adolescents regarding social norms to improve their acceptable social skills through daily interactions. Meanwhile, parents also shape adolescents' social and emotional experience with parents' own characteristics and interests in mind.

### ***Patterns of Parent-Adolescent Interactions***

Given independence in and options for extracurricular activities, plus time spent in school, parents have less time to interact with adolescent children. Sometimes, dinner and breakfast time provide parents with their only interactions with children throughout the day. In addition, some adolescents stay at home alone after school because both parents are still working when school is over (Newman & Newman, 1986). Many parents who have adolescent children find it difficult to acknowledge that their child will grow up and move to another home. Some parents feel sad about the fact that they are being rejected by their children (Sarafino & Armstrong, 1980). Larson (1983) reported that while adolescents spend 30 percent of their time with peers, they only spend 18 percent of their time with parents. The other 52 percent of their time is spent in school or by themselves. On the other hand, adolescents prefer to interact with peers more than with parents. Communication with parents was found to be more constrained and passive than with their friends (Czikszentmihalyi, Larson, & Prescott, 1977).

Various patterns of parental relationships between male and female adolescents were reported by Montemayor (1982) through interviews. In this study, boys were found to spend significantly more time with fathers while girls spent significantly more time with mothers, although girls reported more conflicts (1.21 conflicts in a three-day period) with parents during interaction, while boys only reported 0.85 conflicts. Newman and Newman (1986) claimed that only 2% of adolescents' interactions with their parents are conflicts.

Both quantity and quality of adolescents' interactions with parents influence the outcome of their social and emotional development. However, research has indicated that when adolescents spend more time with peers instead of their parents, social and emotional skills increase while academic performance declines (Newman & Newman, 1986). More frequent time spent with adolescents enables parents to help them improve their social and emotional skills, so that they can manage their emotions effectively and concentrate more effectively on school work (Larson, 1983). Adolescents are sometimes concerned about how their peers view their intimate relationship with parents, and "even though adolescents may feel good about being affectionate and close with their parents; they are also sensitive to perceived expectations of peers that adolescents and their parents should not be too 'chummy'" (Newman & Newman, 1986, p. 189).

Regarding parenting roles and parenting styles, Forehand and Nousejainen (1993) reported that there are variances between paternal and maternal parenting styles. In terms of caring for children, mothers usually exhibit more warmth and affection as they play the dominant role in providing care for their children's daily lives, including providing kisses, hugs and smiles (Hossain & Roopnarine, 1994). In various cultures, Engle and Breaux (1998)

indicated that a mother's role in parenting is typically considered to be responsive, in particular when taking care of young children. A father's role typically increases as children grow up. For instance, a father might guide a child's discipline and education. Collins and Russell (1991) reported that fathers' interactions with children show less responsiveness and warmth than mothers' interactions with children.

### ***Parental Criticism***

Along with social development, gaps between every generation are noticeable due to variations in preferences for clothing, music, hobbies and catchwords. It is not strange that some parents consider their children to be strong-willed, irresponsible and indocile while adolescents consider their parents to be outdated (Sarafino & Armstrong, 1980). Indeed, parents may criticize their children on various aspects of their behaviours and ideas, which they find unsatisfying or unacceptable. Too much parental criticism, or criticism in an inappropriate way, may lead to low self-efficacy in adolescents and result in a vicious circle: more parental criticism leads to lower self-image, which then stimulates the behaviours that lead to more criticism again (Newman & Newman, 1986). Adolescents usually regard frequent parental criticism as a source of their stress and a major factor that inhibits their parental relationship (Harris & Howard, 1984).

Baumrind (1996) stated that the focus of the socialization process in families is parenting styles. In general, there are four different parenting styles that differ in terms of warmth and control. Here "warmth refers to the parent's emotional expression of love" (p. 410). Authoritative parenting refers to parents who show their warmth to children while having full control of the developmental direction of children's behaviour due to parents'

responsive and highly demanding child-rearing attitude. Authoritative parents criticize their children's behaviour with rational explanations and warm guidance within an engaged and friendly parent-child relationship (Baumrind, 1996). While parents who exhibit the second style of parenting, authoritarian parents, also have strong control of children's behaviour, they are more likely to exert power rather than warmth in prohibitive and punishing ways to demand obedience from children. Hence, children who grow up with authoritarian parents sometimes suffer from emotional problems of fear, depression or anxiety (Lempers, Clark-Lempers, & Simons, 1989). The third parenting style is permissive parents defined by Baumrind (1996) as "parents who are responsive but not demanding" (p. 412), which means parents who always show warmth to their children, coupled with a lack of control. The fourth parenting style is unengaged parents, who are defined as "parents who are neither demanding nor responsive" (p. 412), referring to parents who show neither warmth nor control.

Baumrind (1996) also indicated that various cultural groups differ in parenting styles and child-rearing goals. Thus, particular cultural contexts may require different solutions to issues of child-rearing.

### ***Parents as Role Models***

As the most important adult element of adolescents' social and emotional development, parents' interaction with children and with each other at home provides adolescents with role models for emotions and behaviours in interpersonal relationships (Balswick & Avertt, as cited in Newman & Newman, 1986). Parents' ability to express their emotions and feelings, together with parents' interactions with relatives, neighbours, friends

and colleagues, demonstrate ways for adolescents to express themselves, deal with emotions, and create and maintain social relationships. Moreover, "high levels of parental expressiveness may give adolescents some insight into the array of feelings aroused by the challenges and achievements of adult life" (Newman & Newman, 1986, p. 190).

### ***Extended Family Relationships***

Relationships with all family members are embedded within the whole family system, and therefore are influenced by relationships with extended family members. For example, grandparents usually play an important role in children's growth through frequent interactions and/or establishing intimate relationships with them (Cox & Paley, 1997). Mueller and Elder (2003) found that relationships between grandparents and grandchildren were also influenced by grandparents' relationships with their children, the parents of their grandchildren, and also their relationships with their own grandparents. Grandparents who are supportive of their grandchildren spend more time with them in activities together, while providing children with educational guidance and emotional support (Mueller & Elder, 2003). For those grandparents who do not live with their children and grandchildren together, they usually show their love and warmth to the grandchildren by spending some time together with grandchildren weekly or monthly, or they "may provide tangible financial support for college or travel or may promote a particular life direction through their authority and experience" (Mueller & Elder, 2003, p. 404).

In some Asian countries, for example, in China, many children grow up together with their parents and their grandparents under the same roof. Sometimes other extended family members, such as aunts, uncles and cousins, live with them as well. Living with



extended family members tends to nurture close relationships between children and their extended family (Arnett, 2006). Research found that some children had more daily interactions with their grandparents than their parents, probably due to the fact that parents were at work (Storm et al., 1999). In addition, different from parents' authoritative control of their children, grandparents may provide a different sort of support and nurturance to grandchildren. Research showed that some adolescents growing up with grandparents had closer relationships with them than with their parents (Schlegel & Barry, as cited in Arnett, 2006).

Regarding relationships between grandparents and grandchildren, culture plays an important role. Differences are found in these relationships across various cultures, as well as variations between or among the generations in a same culture. Large differences exist between Chinese and American cultures (Storm et al., 1999). For instance, when compared with their American counterparts, Chinese grandparents usually have more frequent contacts with their grandchildren. In addition, grandparents in China generally have similar opinions with their grandchildren and children; more similar than American grandparents. Compared with American grandparents, Chinese grandparents are also usually regarded by their own children as perfect baby-sitters when they go to work (Storm et al., 1999).

### **Perspectives On and Of Only Children**

According to Hall and Smith (1907), "being an only child is a disease itself," as cited in Bayrakal & Kope, 1990, p. 1). Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, researchers have negatively described only children, arguing that siblings are important for positive social and emotional development (Rosenberg & Hyde, 1993). Liu et al. (2005) stated that only

children are likely to be overprotected and spoiled, which may lead to their negative perception of themselves psychologically. Only children are described as more egocentric (Jiao et al., 1986), less cooperative, less affiliated and more maladjusted than children with siblings (Hall, 1987). While Bayrakal and Kope (1990) mentioned that only children are often perfectionists, Jiao et al. (1986) also indicated that only children are also found low in behavior and emotion control and high in frustration proneness. Claudy (1984) claimed that some only children lack sociability and friends (Graham-Bermann & Gest, as cited in Rosenberg & Hyde, 1993), and have more mental health problems (Howe & Madgett, 1975). On the contrary, children with siblings are described as more persistent and cooperative, with higher peer prestige and better peer relationships (Claudy, 1984).

Of interest here, however, positive notions of only children exist as well. For example, some researchers noted that only children are superior to children with siblings in some characteristics while possessing fewer positive characteristics in other aspects (Wang et al., 2000). For example, Poston and Falbo (1990) found that the academic achievement of only children is usually higher than children with siblings while Yang et al. (1995) concluded that some only children had reduced levels of depression, anxiety, and fear. Compared with children with siblings, Rosenberg and Hyde (1993) mentioned that only children tend to have positive personality development and closer relationships with parents due to attention from parents. In addition, only children's higher performance on their intellectual achievement and school performance have also been noticed (Falbo & Polit, 1986; Poston & Falbo, 1990).

While research on the benefits and drawbacks associated with being an only child

exists, the research remains split at least three ways. Along with researchers who argue that only children are negatively influenced by not having peers, and researchers who argue that only children benefit from not having peers, some researchers claim there is no noticeable difference between only children and children with siblings (Rosenberg & Hyde, 1993). Chen (1985) also stated that no obvious variations of personality traits between only children and children with siblings were found.

### **Chinese Adolescents' Development as Only Children**

#### ***Differences between Only Children and Children with Siblings***

Hall (1987) stated that some psychologists in the United States claimed that only children tended to be self-centered when they grow up. Drawing on this work, Jiao et al. (1986) conducted comparative research in Beijing with only children and children with siblings with a total number of 993 participants. Research outcomes, by peer rating, supported the hypothesized concerns: most of the only children were more self-centered and uncooperative than children with siblings, regardless of the age groups and gender groups. In addition, significantly more only children than their peers with siblings were found to decline another child's demand for help, to show less interest for group playing, to have less sense of responsibility, and to be reluctant to share their toys.

For cooperation, 14 of the 15 children who obtained the highest scores were sibling children, and one was an only child. For peer prestige, 13 were sibling children and two were only children. Among the 15 children with the highest scores for egocentrism, 11 were only children, and four were sibling children. (Jiao et al., 1986, p. 361)

These data represent a gap between only children and children with siblings in terms of cooperation, peer prestige and egocentrism as collected through the perspectives of peers using the method of peer rating. When confronted with obstacles or problems during an assignment, only children were more likely to lose their patience, give up or cry for an adult's assistance. However, their peers with siblings appeared to be more independent and persistent; they made additional attempts, or observed how others solved the issue (Jiao et al., 1986).

Research findings to support the positive impact of being an only child, as mentioned by Hall (1987), stem from teacher ratings that only children in Beijing are better at school academic performance, particularly in language ability. In addition, Hall claimed that children in nuclear families are likely to be more intelligent than children in large extended families.

According to Wang et al. (2002), given the one-child policy, most Chinese parents in urban cities are willing to invest more family resources, time and money, in the education and the future career of an only child. For instance, it is popular for parents to enhance the educational fund for early childhood education and add some private tutoring after school for an only child in addition to the routine school programs and classes. According to Poston and Falbo (1990), the higher school performance of only children might explain the reason why most Chinese teachers hold positive views of the family support of only children. Since only children obtain their parents' full attention and higher expectations of their development (Rosenberg & Hyde, 1993), when compared with children with siblings, only children score higher in both intellectual achievement and parent-child relationships (Falbo & Polit, 1986).

## *The Context of Chinese Adolescents' Social and Emotional Development*

### *Cultural Influences: Collectivism and Confucianism*

Clearly, Chinese culture differs from Western culture in many ways that influence education, as well as adolescents' social and emotional development. Conventional Chinese cultural values still play an important role in molding adolescents' learning and achievements, while also taking a toll on their social and emotional health (Salili, Zhou, & Hoosain, 2003). Cultural values, social norms and conventions influence pedagogical styles and parenting models as well. Some cross-cultural studies have found variations between Chinese and American schools in terms of students' learning experience and notions of success and failure (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Chinese conventional culture and the educational context have influenced various aspects of social and emotional development for Chinese adolescents in ways quite different from North America.

Chinese culture emphasizes collectivism, which positions the benefits and glory of the group as more important than that of the individual. It is believed that cooperation, modesty and courtesy among group members, and harmonious, hierarchical relationships can all contribute to the glory of the group, as well as to Chinese society. Among all these elements, collectivism focusing on loyalty and obedience toward family and kin is most advocated by Chinese society. For instance, Chinese students are required to work hard for both their own future and for the glory of their family (Salili et al., 2003). Salili (1995) also reported that Chinese students' academic achievement is usually motivated by their families. The notion of filial piety motivates students to achieve school success, which is considered a great honor for their families. Western culture, however, stresses individualism,

independence, and equality in social relationships (Liu, Kurita, Uchiyama, Okawa, Liu, & Ma, 2000).

Collectivism, as the essence of Chinese culture, has been extensively represented and leveraged in social, cultural, moral and educational areas in China for thousands of years. It is also reflected in the goals of education and the structure of schools. For example, Chinese students are required to have a course on moral actions and beliefs to learn collectivistic notions and values, which are regarded as the foundation for students' social, emotional, intellectual and physical development (Chen, Rubin, Li, & Li, 1999).

In collectivist cultures like China, family and group goals are usually given more importance and higher priority than individual goals (Hui, 1988). Therefore, most individual goals are closely aligned with group goals. For example, some Chinese students work hard in school aiming to gain a successful future in society, because this honors the whole family. Suzuki (1980) indicated that Chinese children's education is closely associated with the traditional notion of collectivism, which regards the child's school success as an important accomplishment for the family and, conversely, academic failure as shame for the family.

As a collectivist culture, Chinese culture reflects a sharp contrast to the individualistic Western culture. Variances in the concept of self between groups from individualistic and collectivistic cultures were compared by Markus and Kitayama (1991). The individual was viewed in an individualistic culture as "an independent, self-contained, autonomous entity that comprises a unique configuration of internal attributes" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 226). Based on this notion, an individual's personality traits characterize the self-concept. People from collectivistic cultures, however, usually advocate

interdependence and harmonious relationships within groups, for instance, in the daily interactions among family members, peers or colleagues. In the context of a collectivistic culture, the adaptation to others' requirements and the fulfillment of group obligations are crucial to social relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Triandis (1989) also claimed that compared with North American students in terms of cultural values, Chinese students score lower on individualism, higher on collectivism, and stronger on group benefits.

Chen et al. (1999) stated that it is crucial in both conventional and contemporary Chinese society to sustain a collectivistic and harmonious social system. Chinese people are usually educated to restrain their interests and urges, rather than pursue their individual demands. Teachers and parents socialize their students and children to help them "learn how to control individualistic acts and to reduce unique individual characteristics, to develop collectivistic ideology and behaviour, and finally to make contributions to the achievement and welfare of the collective" (Chen & Kaspar, as cited in Chen et al., 1999, p. 201).

Students learn to be interdependent and cooperate with each other to manifest and leverage the collectivity. While small group learning and discussion is not the traditional teaching method in Chinese classrooms, in all extracurricular activities Chinese students are educated to cooperate in interpersonal relationships with peers (Chen et al., 1999).

Regarding the educational practices in China and the philosophical concepts embedded in these practices, Hess, Chang, and McDevitt (1987) highlighted the embedded impact of Confucian doctrines. Both cultural values and moral virtues in Chinese society are guided by the Confucian doctrine of internal dispositions and external values, which continue to influence the Chinese educational system and school practices even today

(Watkins & Biggs, 1996). Confucius regarded humility as the fundamental attitude in learning (Li, 2001). This means that people always need to improve themselves by learning and being taught continuously (Li, 2002).

Hess et al. (1987) represented and explained the essence of Confucianism by providing some Chinese ancient proverbs regarding education such as, "It is still possible for a student without talent to achieve success, as long as this student has will. But if a student only has talent, then it is worthless to talk about study. Because will is the premise of study and talent is the advantage," and "Being diligent in study means life-long devotion of efforts." Confucian values in education also help to explain the reason why Chinese students are expected to be highly engaged in learning and committed in academic achievement. In addition, Chinese students are also required to have a positive and diligent attitude in school learning (Lee, 1996). Consistent with Confucian doctrine, Chinese teachers tend to weigh more importance on students' moral development compared with North American teachers. Starting from primary school through university education, moral coursework has been mandatory in China (Gao & Watkins, 2001).

### ***Cultural Values***

Leung, Heimberg, Holt, and Bruch (1994) indicated that Chinese parents are more restricted, excessively protective and emotionally unexpressive compared with child-rearing styles in other countries, especially North American parents. Influenced by traditional notions of Confucianism and intense social competition, Chinese society has increasingly emphasized children's education. Parents usually set high expectations and demands on their children's academic achievement, particularly when most parents have only one child (Salili,



1995). Stevenson and Stigler (1992) found that Chinese parents pay more attention to children's academic achievement and are willing to spend more time than North American parents in tutoring and monitoring their child's schoolwork (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Hence, Chinese students report more pressure and depression from their parents' high expectations (Grant & Dweck, 1998). Even Chinese families with low socioeconomic status (SES) are education centered, which means that the main family expenditures are spent on the education of the child. Therefore, the motivation of many hard-working students from low SES families has been attributed to both their desire for a better future, and their intention to fulfill their parents' expectations and family status.

A well-known Chinese saying of "strict father, kind mother" was noted by Wilson (1974). This saying was further explained by Ho (1989) as "the father was typically characterized as a stern disciplinarian, more concerned with the demands of propriety and necessity than with feelings, who was to be feared by the child; and mother was characterized as affectionate, kind, protective, lenient, and even indulgent" (p. 231). In terms of parenting behaviours, there were also variances reported by Shek (1998) who pointed out that Chinese fathers show less response and concern, less harshness and demand. However, a Chinese mother's parenting includes more positive and nurturing interactions than a Chinese father's.

Hard work is greatly valued in Chinese culture; therefore, the pressure that working hard brings may lead to anxiety and depression for Chinese students. Effort and perseverance are considered to be critical causes resulting in academic success. Chinese adolescents are educated to value strong will, effort and perseverance, because these elements may result in

students' successful academic performance (Yang, 1986). Therefore, Chinese children are inculcated by both parents and teachers with the notion that hard work will gain them academic success. According to Li (2002), in Chinese culture, diligence, steadfastness, hard work and concentration form the elements to define effort. As a virtuous Chinese social norm, diligence refers to the frequent behavior of working hard with the emphasis on time-consuming studying. This is illustrated by the traditional Chinese proverb to "always have a book in hand to read." Steadfast perseverance is regarded as a crucial quality, because knowledge cannot be obtained overnight. Instead, it is accumulated through step-by-step learning over a long period of time (Lee, 1996).

There are common beliefs held by many Chinese parents and teachers regarding the importance of effort in relation to teaching and learning which may differ from North American parents and educators, such as those notions articulated by the traditional Chinese sayings "laziness results in failure," and "pain should be paid first before gain" (Watkins & Biggs, 2001). A study of parental beliefs about children's academic performance by Hess et al. (1987) reported that Chinese mothers attributed insufficient effort as the main reason for their child's school failure in an examination of mathematics, whereas American mothers tended to attribute their child's poor school performance to equal factors including lack of ability, practice, hard work and luck. In addition, Stevenson and Lee (1990) reported that both Chinese students and their parents are more likely than their North American counterparts to ascribe students' academic success to effort only. In Hong Kong, Hau and Salili (1991) also conducted a study and found that Chinese students tended to explain their successful academic performance in terms of effort, rather than ability or intelligence.

Because studying hard and excelling in academic work are viewed as the primary task of students, Chinese adolescents displayed a comparatively stronger desire to enhance the levels of their academic competence in school (Stigler, Smith, & Mao, 1985). Students also regarded working hard on academic work as their basic obligation. For example, Hong and Lam (1992) stated that students in Hong Kong would have feelings of depression and guilt if they did not do well in examinations. Students believed that it was their fault if their families lost face and felt responsible to achieve their parents' expectations. Hess et al. (1987) also reported that the Chinese educational context seems to continuously encourage hard work and promote effort attributions to school success.

### ***Chinese Education and Classroom Environment***

Compared with North American education, Chinese education is conducted with larger class sizes and more strict discipline at school. To prepare for tests and examinations, expository teaching emphasizes repetitious practice and memorization adopted for whole class participation, rather than the small group or cooperative group learning more common in North American classrooms (Salili et al., 2003).

Chinese society not only values continuous learning, but also holds the notion that learning and more knowledge can lead to academic success, bringing benefits to the person and family, for example, through higher social status, honor, and material benefits (Li, 2002). To encourage academic achievement and collective behaviors, the experiences of role models usually appear in Chinese textbooks (Blumenthal, 1977). Stevenson and Stigler (1992) also claimed that Chinese students show significantly higher enthusiasm for studying and school work than North American students. In general, Chinese people believe that

education provides them with more opportunities for better careers, financial benefits and advancement of social position (Sue & Okazaki, 1990), while for many people in North America, education is viewed as a necessary social process to obtain knowledge and skills.

The Chinese educational system is famous for its tough, competitive and nationally unified University Entrance Examination. University has become the learning goal for most urban adolescents in high schools (Chen et al., 2000). Salili, Chiu, and Lai (2000) claimed that Chinese society and educational systems, particularly, place more importance on performance goals than on learning goals. This finding also explains the fact that students in China work hard for their competitive academic performance, this final university entrance examination, from their first day of school. The higher the score, the more likely the student is to be enrolled in a top university. This situation has led to a highly competitive learning environment in schools, and has resulted in a performance goal orientation.

In China, the entire educational system is equipped and furnished to prepare students to pass all kinds of examinations. Under these conditions, it is not surprising to find most Chinese students are driven by performance goals. The typical instance is in English class at Chinese schools, both teachers and students are eager to teach and learn English grammar, rather than oral communication abilities, because grammatical problems in the form of multiple choice, true or false and reading comprehension are the major parts to be tested in the examinations. Salili et al. (2000) reported that instead of trying to master the knowledge taught in classrooms, most Chinese students would rather memorize limited knowledge that might be tested in order to pass exams. In addition, the proportion of students to pass the university entrance examination and the ratio of students to obtain high

grades in other monthly and term exams are the key criteria to judge and rank teachers' performance. Consequently, Chinese teachers are also motivated by the performance-oriented goal.

In China, high schools and universities are divided according to a ranking system of academic quality. A single Entrance Examination for all students is regarded as a fair tool to identify students with good examination grades for entrance to top schools. For example, before Chinese students graduate from elementary school, they complete the Junior High School Entrance Examination. The students who receive good scores on this examination are enrolled in the best public junior high schools. When Chinese students graduate from junior high schools, they complete the Senior High School Entrance Examination. This entrance examination ranks them for entry into the best senior high schools.

The most important examination for all Chinese students is the University Entrance Examination. The students who perform well on this critical examination and receive top scores become eligible to be enrolled in several of the best universities in China. For graduate school, Chinese undergraduates need to score well in the Master's Program Entrance Examination.

The current examination system to identify academic high-achievers originated from Chinese history. Chen, Rubin, and Li (1995) stated that in ancient China, government officials were a highly prestigious class with power, social respect and good pay. In ancient China, academic success was the only criterion by which to choose government officials. Only those people who excelled in the annual open examinations by achieving the highest mark obtained an opportunity to be government officials. Chen et al. (1995) also suggested

that in East Asian countries, such as China, Japan and Korea, the emphasis that the educational system places on examinations to provide students with a competitive learning context, stemmed from these ancient nation-wide examinations to select government officials. This is reflected, as well, in the Chinese school grading system and the curriculum.

Stressful learning environments have adverse effects on the development of adolescents, particularly for social and emotional well-being. Further evidence that Chinese students are confronted with pressure from school performance is represented in the research conducted by Crystal and colleagues (Crystal et al., 1994). They reported that Chinese adolescents showed a higher frequency of anxiety and frustration and more sleep problems and eating disorders than North American students. Chinese students considered the school environment to be the main source of their depression and pressure, whereas North American students considered peer relationships as the key reason. Therefore, a focus solely on performance goals within a highly competitive learning environment has negative effects not only from an educational perspective, but also from the view of adolescents' development, particularly in terms of their social and emotional health. Some low academic achievers were unable to manage the psychological pressure to continue studying in schools and eventually had to drop out of school.

According to Shi, Wang, Wang, and Zuo (2001), collectivism lends itself to seeking social approval from others, such as teachers, parents and peers. It is a challenge for Chinese students to study in such a competitive learning context. For instance, students in Hong Kong have so much daily homework that they spend most of their time after school simply completing homework. Even the high academic achievers in class face the intense pressure

of high achievement standards (Salili & Hau, 1994). Due to intense academic competition in school, Chinese students have to spend almost all their leisure time after school completing academic work and studying in private and complementary classes in order to be more competitive. They do not have time to play or relax, and sometimes may not have enough sleep. The prevalence of this phenomenon in Chinese urban areas has resulted in students' extreme weariness both physically and psychologically (Salili et al., 2003; Wang, 2001). Wang (2000) found that Chinese adolescents suffer from mental health and emotional problems including anxiety, depression and over-sensitivity in social relationships.

Researchers of teacher-student interactions and classroom management highlighted the norms and climate of the classroom and how the environment may affect adolescents' motivation to learn and healthy development (Pintrich, 2002). Differences in teaching and learning practices between North America and China may influence social and emotional development differently as well. Due to the large population in China, teachers in China have to manage the teaching process and control the students' attention to ensure teaching and learning quality in spite of large class size. Therefore, Chinese teachers with large classes tend to focus on classroom management and whole group instruction. Cortazzi and Jin (2001) described the whole-class teaching approaches Chinese teachers adopted in teacher-centered classrooms to keep students actively engaged in large classes through "listening-focused learning" (Watkins & Biggs, 1996). Given their traditional motivation to achieve, students continued to be successful academic learners in this context.

Sometimes regarded as passive learning, traditional direct instruction has been criticized by North American educators who argued that it might bore students (Watkins &

Biggs, 1996). The classroom size in North America is usually smaller. Although the major pedagogy in North America remains direct instruction, additional instructional approaches are available for teachers to increase both teacher-student interactions and interactions among students, such as cooperative groups, team projects and small group discussion (Watkins & Biggs, 1996). These approaches have been found to facilitate students' social and emotional development in classrooms (Zins et al., 2004).

### ***Mental Health Status as Only Children***

The mental health status of Chinese adolescents has gained educators' attention since the one-child policy took effect several decades ago. From self-reports, stress related to academic learning and performance was the main causal factor linked with emotional and mental problems of Chinese adolescents and this increased with age (Liu et al., 2000). However, few researchers have probed into the mental and emotional status of Chinese adolescents within the stressful learning environment in Chinese high schools (Salili et al., 2003). Turner and Acker (2002) found Chinese adolescents felt lonely and isolated in their classroom due to teachers' strictness. Chinese students were found to have heavy burdens in their life. These burdens surfaced not only as external burdens from the heavy work load of their courses, but also their internal burden of psychological stress and emotional pressure. As evidence of the intense pressure adolescents face, the rate of suicide for Chinese adolescents exceeds that of adolescents in Western countries (Hesketh, Ding, & Jenkins, 2002). In addition, the data from the Beijing Huilongguan Epidemiology Research Office (2000, as cited by Salili et al., 2003) reported that suicide has become the major cause of death in young people between the ages of 15 to 24. Research further indicated that



academic pressure, leading to anxiety and depression, is the dominant factor (Salili et al., 2003).

Zhao and Zhang (1995) reported that the root cause of the anxiety of both elementary and high school students came from academic pressure, particularly stress about frequent tests, examinations and entrance examinations of high schools and universities. During face-to-face interviews, 83 percent of participants referred to their fear of unsatisfying grades and 82 percent of participants noted concerns about failure in university entrance examinations. Moreover, social relationships, as well as seeking jobs in the future, were also reported to cause their anxiety (Zhao & Zhang, 1995). Liu and Zhang (2002) indicated in their investigation that Chinese senior high school students, just prior to completing the university entrance examination, were found to have noticeably higher levels of anxiety, depression, fear and loneliness than Chinese students in elementary school or other grades of high school. As noted by Salili et al. (2003), Chinese adolescents pay for their academic performance with heavy emotional and psychological burdens, and ultimately, for some, their social and emotional well-being. In addition, in a study by Wang et al. (2002), Chinese adolescents with siblings were found to have higher levels of anxiety, depression and fear. Wang et al. (2002) noted that Chinese children who were experiencing mental, physical and social change simultaneously showed the highest level of anxiety. During this research, Wang et al. (2002) adopted the Zucherman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire for assessment of personality traits and the Plutchik-van Praag Depression Inventory and measured the level of depression among 134 university students with siblings and 126 university students as only children. The results showed that students with siblings had

increased neuroticism-anxiety, aggression-hostility, and depressed mood. Consequently, Wang et al. (2002) concluded that Chinese students with siblings had an increased tendency toward depression. This study stated that, different from only children, students with siblings represented more aggression-hostility and neuroticism-anxiety (Wang et al.), which might be due to family competition with their siblings to get parents' attention and financial support for higher education, as well as reduced social benefits; usually families with only one child receive more social benefits, for example, the Only-Child allowance.

In addition, Salili (1995) reported that the quantity of tests and examinations is the major cause of adolescents' anxiety and stress. Bourke (as cited by Salili et al., 2003) also found that stressful learning circumstances bring negative effects on Western adolescents' intellectual achievement. Moreover, it is widely considered in Chinese culture that recognition of failure or shame can foster motivation to improve; hence the most successful and the poorest students' academic and social performance are sometimes announced in public, such as on a classroom board, in a school corridor or during student meetings. This phenomenon leads to a sense of inferiority, low self-efficacy and a lack of confidence for those students with intellectual, emotional or behavioural problems (Chen et al., 1999).

Recent research regarding the difficulties faced by Chinese adolescents in general does not reflect a consensus. In previous research on psychological and emotional differences between only children and children with siblings, Yang et al. (1995) concluded that both young children and adolescents with siblings showed more depression, anxiety and fear than only children.

Opposing research exists, however, in a recent study that explored the mental health

condition of Chinese only children in both urban and rural areas, Liu et al. (2005) indicated that Chinese adolescents as only children in urban areas demonstrated higher levels of depression, anxiety, stress and dependency than children with siblings. Whether only children or children with siblings are better off remains the subject of heated debate.

### *Coping Strategies*

Given the amount of academic and achievement related pressure on Chinese adolescents, research on coping strategies becomes important. In view of mental health, Compas, Malcarne and Fondacaro (1988) pointed out that the ability of adolescents to cope with stress is more important than the issue or stressor itself. Liu et al. (2000) noted that Chinese adolescents might be confronted with more unsatisfying events in their daily relationships with peers and parents. Furthermore, the developmental stage of adolescence is accompanied by more changes, both physically and psychologically, which may lead to behavioural and emotional problems. Nevertheless, few Chinese parents or teachers have realized the extent of the problem, tending to pay most attention to the intellectual growth and improvement of Chinese adolescents as only children. For example, Chan (1995) mentioned that information is limited about Chinese adolescents' coping strategies for tackling social stressors and other mental problems, although some previous research has been conducted in Taiwan and Hong Kong. However, as an important difference, only Mainland China has implemented a "one-child policy"; therefore, the conclusions of these researchers may be difficult to generalize to Chinese only children.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), there are two patterns of coping strategies for adolescents in North America: emotional-focused coping and problem-focused

coping. While emotional-focused coping represents children's efforts to control, adjust and avoid emotional distress, problem-focused coping means children cast their attention to the problem itself to try to resolve it. In China, Liu et al. (2004) found that multiple coping strategies are adopted by Chinese adolescents. Active coping and avoidant coping are the two most widely used models of coping strategies.

Active coping style involves positive appraisal and thinking, distancing, problem solving and help seeking, while avoidant coping style includes behaviours of avoidance (i.e. keep feeling to self, avoid the situation, and stay away from people).

(Liu et al., 2004, p. 283)

The definition of these two coping styles reflects the importance of adolescents' social and emotional development. Children who actively try to solve problems are more socially competent and usually have positive methods for dealing with pressure. However, according to Liu et al. (2004), avoidant coping tends to result in an "increased risk for behavioral problems" (p. 281). Sandler et al. (1989) reported that avoidant coping can worsen the negative influence of pressures such as helpless feelings, loss of emotional control and negative social relationships.

In addition, some researchers studied gendered influences on adolescents' coping strategies. Kurdek (1987) found that there was almost no difference between male and female adolescents who relied on avoidant coping. In addition, Chan (1995) claimed that no gender difference was found in a study of Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong regarding coping strategies. However, Olah (1995) found that fewer male students adopted avoidant coping strategy in China. Liu et al. (2004) also reported that more female adolescents tended

to adopt an avoidant coping strategy than male adolescents, while avoidant coping usually led to more risks in adolescents' psychological issues, and active coping could protect adolescents from suffering from their pressures.

Noted earlier, Chinese parents in both rural and urban areas traditionally prefer to have sons (Hall, 1987). However, in Chinese rural areas, gender discrimination towards girls is more distinct and notable. Therefore, Chinese girls have lower self-concept and self-esteem and higher anxiety and stress (Spillane-Grieco, 1984). Following this cultural value, according to Shi et al. (2001), traditional Chinese culture influences academic motivation differently for boys and girls. Recent research conducted in China found that male students scored significantly higher than female students in assessments of school performance, self-efficacy, life and career goals, and the feelings of belonging in class and school (Shi et al., 2001). Boys not only exhibited a more positive attitude towards school and class, but also had higher self-efficacy (Shi et al., 2001). In addition, Chinese people tend to be more tolerant toward a girl's failure in learning, but always require boys to achieve their greatest performance level (Shi et al., 2001). In general, there is more pressure placed on male students to achieve; however, female only children in urban areas were also reported to experience pressure. Pressures on female only children may reflect their future careers due to the potential of female employment discrimination (Tsui & Rich, 2002).

The use of these coping styles appears to reflect some differences between the way male and female adolescents attempt to cope with stressors. Active coping is adopted by more male adolescents in China, exemplified by thinking positively, attempting to adjust the situation, or comparing with the worse case scenario to gain some comfort. Hence,

employing an active coping strategy may help students decrease social and emotional problems (Liu et al., 2004). However, female adolescents are more likely to use an avoidant coping strategy by crying, being alone and becoming upset. As a positive coping strategy, active coping may lessen stress while avoidant coping may make the situation worse by increasing feelings of desperation and uncontrolled anxiety. Moreover, it was reported that “active coping, distraction, and support seeking are generally associated with decreased psychological symptoms, while avoidant/passive coping is associated with increased symptoms” (Liu et al., 2004, p. 276).

### Summary

Based on the current literature, this study documented Chinese adolescent's experiences as only children in terms of familial relationships, pressures, and coping strategies. Their experiences in social relationships with parents and grandparents were explored in their own words. In addition, the pressures and the strategies they adopted to cope with these pressures were documented as well. This research contributes to the current literature about Chinese only children, particularly in light of the unique context created by the one-child policy in China. The interviews provided rich information that complements and extends the research gathered using quantitative measures. Recommendations for Chinese educators, policy makers, and parents are made.

### **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Despite the significance of this research topic, little is known about the experiences of Chinese only children in relationships with parents and extended family members, and in terms of their experiences of pressure and their coping strategies. The purpose of this study is to partially address that research gap by conducting qualitative research using open-ended interviews with Chinese adolescents. For this study, interviews were conducted in Shanghai, an urban area and the city where the researcher herself was raised as an only child.

#### **Qualitative Interviewing**

An interview is a particular form of conversation that conveys knowledge and information about participants' own lives and experiences. Miller and Glassner (2004) claimed that the interview is not merely a process to record participants' narratives, but to construct social worlds. Interviews establish mutual and symbolic interactions between the researcher and participant with deep "access to the meanings people attribute to their experiences and social worlds" (p. 126). Qualitative interviewing is an effective tool to record and comprehend the experiences and perspectives of the interview participants that researchers aim to probe. Successful interviews collect the "knowledge of the social world" through "inter-subjective depth and deep mutual understanding" (p. 127).

Patton (1990) stated that the purpose of conducting open-ended interviews is to obtain access to the participant's own perspective. He defined the standardized open-ended interview as an "interview that consists of a set of questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words" (p. 280). Therefore, a fixed

interview protocol was designed with the same content and sequence of interview questions for this standardized open-ended interview to “minimize interviewer effects” by asking exactly same set of questions of each participant (p. 285, see Appendix A). Suggested by Patton (1990), standardized open-ended interviews can minimize the probability of bias, which stems from various interviews of various people, by reducing the differentiations in the interview questions asked of participants. For this research, prompts were identified in advance and incorporated on an as needed basis.

A pilot study was conducted with two participants in order to both confirm the interview questions and practice conducting interviews. Participants appeared happy to discuss their experiences with the researcher and expressed themselves openly, easily filling the allotted time. However, the interview duration could not exceed one hour, and therefore the pilot study confirmed that the interview protocol was too long. It was not feasible to conduct the interview as originally designed, which included 11 questions about peer relationships and friendships. Therefore, the final interview protocol excluded the last section regarding peer relationships and friendships.

### **Participant Selection**

This research involved six senior high school students from Senior 2 (around 17 years old) – three male and three female participants – from one of the top high schools in Shanghai (see Table 1) . In accordance with the research purpose – to explore Chinese adolescents’ experience of familial relationships, pressure, and coping strategies – several criteria for purposive sampling were designed and achieved (Patton, 1990). First, each participant was an only child. Second, participants consented to describe their experiences



and express their feelings. Third, male and female participants were included equally. A research introduction describing the purpose of the study was sent to the school principal to obtain his approval and recommendation for possible classes from which participants could be sampled. Then the researcher contacted the teacher in charge of the recommended class and set up a meeting to brief the teacher regarding the research purpose, procedures and criteria to select the participants. The teacher suggested potential participants and helped deliver parent consent forms and participant consent forms for the potential participants to take home to read and decide whether they were going to sign. Both teacher and participants were informed of the interview duration: up to one hour. Next, the date, time and venue of the interviews were scheduled.

**Table 1: *The Six Participants in this Research***

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Hong	17	female
Wei	17	male
Fang	17	female
Lin	17	male
Yan	17	female
Hua	17	male

### **Data Collection**

An interview protocol was designed with open-ended questions to elicit

participants' own perspectives of their experiences and feelings (Appendix A). The interview process was conducted in the form of a structured conversation, which facilitated participant description and expression within the structure of the standardized open-ended interview to enable the researcher to gather the richest data. The interview with each participant was audio-taped to ensure accuracy during data collection, and to enable the researcher to focus on the communication with the participant. Recording verbatim field notes may have reduced the attention of the researcher to make appropriate responses to participants' comments (Patton, 1990). However, the researcher took abbreviated field notes during the interviews, recording the key points of what the participant said to "facilitate later analysis as one of the nonverbal behaviors that helps pace the interview" (p. 349).

### **Data Transcription and Translation**

After conducting the interview, the raw data on audio tapes was transcribed into text in Chinese by the researcher (see Table 2). To ensure accurate transcription, a cross-check process with the researcher's own field notes corroborated the interview transcripts. After a series of checks for accuracy of the transcripts, the researcher translated the Chinese transcripts into English transcripts for data analysis. The descriptions and expressions of the Chinese students reported here are a translated version of what they said in Chinese. To ensure both accuracy and cultural relevance, the researcher translated for meaning, rather than conducting a literal translation.

Translating for meaning was a negotiated process between the researcher and her thesis supervisor. The researcher is not a native English speaker, so the thesis supervisor read and compared the translations word by word. This process occurred for each of the six

English transcripts. The thesis supervisor identified English words that might need qualification or replacement in order for meaning to be maintained. The researcher then returned to the corresponding parts of the original interview transcripts in Chinese to cross check the original wording in Chinese with the English words. She worked jointly with the thesis supervisor to find the best English translation for the original meaning in Chinese. Though this method was time-consuming, the meaning lost through the translation process was reduced and the data, transcripts, and translations were checked several times.

It is important to note that some Chinese words do not have corresponding words in English. When this occurred, the researcher explained the exact meanings and discussed with the thesis supervisor ways to paraphrase the original Chinese words in a corresponding English phrase or sentence to represent the original meaning. This process reduced the loss of meaning given the difference in Chinese and English lexical options. In addition, for some Chinese words that needed additional explanations as contextual cues for better understanding, the researcher explained and consulted with the thesis supervisor to add supplemental information in square brackets after the words were translated into English. To guarantee confidentiality, the transcription and translation process was conducted by the researcher herself; the translation draft was read through and checked by the thesis supervisor to ensure the accuracy of the English translation for the original meaning. Finally, Chinese pseudonyms were used in the final thesis.

**Table 2: *Transcript Conventions in this Research***

**Transcript Conventions**

Symbol	Meaning
. period	Termination, whether grammatically complete or not, marked by falling intonation. Absence indicates interruption or trailing off.
, comma	Speaker parceling of talk.
? question mark	Rising intonation to indicate question or uncertainty.
! exclamation mark	Expression of shock or surprise.
“” quotation marks	Used to mark a change in voice quality, as when the speaker uses another person's words.
[] square brackets	Used to add additional information by the interviewer to explain clearly.
... three dots	Used to note hesitation or brief pause.
- dash	Indicates a false start, or rewording, reorganizing by the speaker.
{ } squiggle brackets	Additional information from the speaker as a supplement to clarify the previous sentence
WOW capitals	Used to mark a word or part of a word that is stated emphatically.
Ideas for this set of transcript conventions were mainly borrowed from Vadeboncoeur and Luke (2004).	

**Data Analysis**

After confirmation that the data, transcripts, and translations were complete, the main process of analysis began. Patton (1990) indicated that the first step in qualitative interview analysis is description. The validity, reliability and rigor of qualitative analysis rests with “presenting solid descriptive data,” which is often called “thick description” (p. 375). This study relied on a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts.

Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information. The encoding

requires an explicit “code.” This may be a list of themes; a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related; or something in between these two forms. The themes may be initially generated inductively from the raw information or generated deductively from theory and prior research.

(Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4)

Thematic analysis consists of the process of “pattern recognition” (p. 7), “developing codes” (p. 9), “sensing themes” (p. 9), and finally interpreting the result of analysis (Boyatzis, 1998).

Aronson (1994) noted that patterns of experience or behaviour, and themes that can be identified, are the focus of thematic analysis.

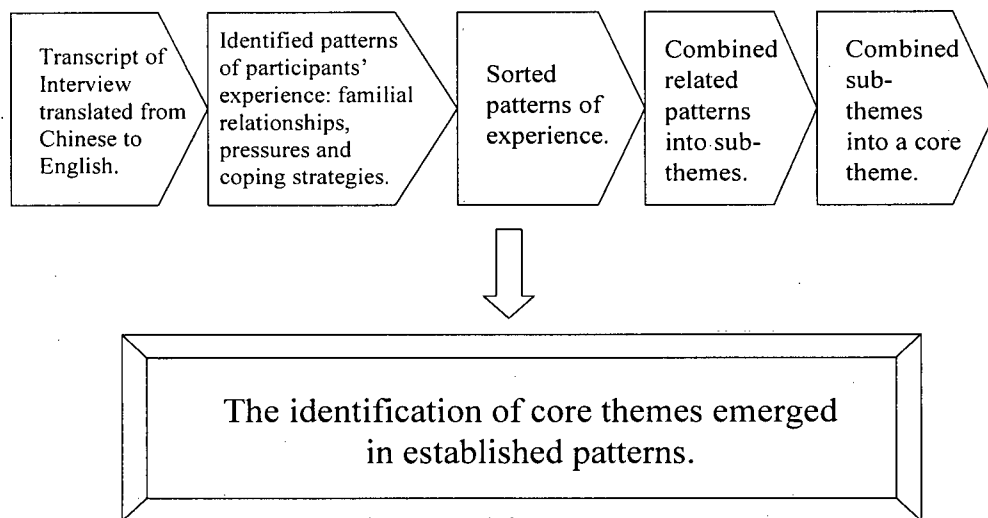


Figure 1: *Thematic Analysis Process*

As suggested by Patton (1990), the researcher read through the English transcript of each interview, and organized the data by making comments in the margin, classifying the data into topics or labels. Simplifying the “complexity of reality into some manageable

classification scheme" (p. 382) was the critical step of qualitative data analysis aiming to "facilitate the search for patterns and themes" (p. 384). Following Aronson (1994), first, the transcribed, translated and categorized data from the interviews yielded patterns of participants' experience in their familial relationships and their pressures and coping strategies. Second, the researcher categorized all the data into the already assorted patterns of experiences. Next, the related patterns were combined into sub-themes, because "themes are defined as units derived from patterns" (p. 1). Finally, the themes that emerged from these transcripts of Chinese adolescents' experience as only children was obtained by combining sub-themes into themes to "see a pattern emerging" (Aronson, 1994, p. 2).

After the researcher listed the sub-themes of each participant's experience, she then re-arranged all the sub-themes in order of representativeness. Themes that emerged across the participants' descriptions of their experiences were identified as more representative and were listed before those that emerged from fewer participants' descriptions. In this way, the researcher gathered a total of seventy-five sub-themes inductively from the raw data collected in the interviews, ranked in order of representativeness: emerging from six of six participants' experiences (6/6), emerging from five of six participants' experiences (5/6), emerging from four of six participants' experiences (4/6), emerging from three of six participants' experiences (3/6), emerging from two of six participants' experiences (2/6) and, emerging from one of six participants' experiences (1/6). Sub-themes emerging from one participant's experience were deemed useful as "outliers," and though less representative, still important. Thirty sub-themes are reported and discussed here because they directly respond to the research questions (Appendix B). The process reduced the loss of some

unusual themes and enhanced the validity of the research.

Then the researcher read through every sub-theme and the related data again, from which the sub-themes had emerged, with a process of comparison and synthesis. After the completion of the thematic analysis, seven core themes were identified in established patterns, to represent the experiences of adolescents as only children in Shanghai. This process transformed the data into a descriptive understanding of participants' experiences while the data within various categories and the sub-themes in rank order of representativeness were compared with each other. Comparison and synthesis allowed the researcher to respond to the research questions given the final core themes.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Introduction

The purpose of this research was to investigate the experiences of Chinese adolescents in familial relationships, and their pressures and coping strategies as only children in Shanghai. Seven core themes, together with related sub-themes, emerged from the thematic analysis of structured open-ended interviews with six participants. Each core theme is identified separately and illustrated by various sub-themes with an exemplar that is most representative. Other important examples of each sub-theme are listed in Appendix B organized by core theme. Participants' pseudonyms and transcript line numbers are identified for ease of cross referencing.

#### Theme 1: The Significant Roles Played by Mothers

Sub-Theme A	Exemplar
My mother cares about my daily life in a considerate and thoughtful way. [Representativeness: 5/6]	"My mother cares about my daily life very considerably. Everything, including my clothes, what to wear, shoes, every other respect, including eating and living, she always cares more" (Lin, ln 282-284).

Five of the six participants mentioned that their mothers cared for every aspect of their day to day life. Mothers shared warmth and tended to fulfill their daily needs in a considerate, detailed and thoughtful way. These participants appreciated their mother's care and shared detailed descriptions of examples of the kinds of things their mothers did that



made them deeply touched. Lin exemplified his mother's love for him through examples, such as helping him decide "what to wear" and what to eat. Hong mentioned that although she did not think that there was a clear difference between her father and mother's care in her life, she felt that her mother's care about her daily life mattered more. In addition, Fang noted that she felt her mother's warmth toward her daily life in various detailed and "trivial things." Fang's mother showed Fang the depth of her feelings by watching closely and taking care of even the smallest things.

Sub-Theme B	Exemplar
<p>She is willing to communicate with me, so she knows me well.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>"I think except my mother's caring about my life, more importantly, she is willing to communicate with me in a calming and comforting way. She has the will to understand me more, from her – I should say she is good at this area, unlike some parents who are very commanding to their child"</p> <p>(Wei, ln 167-170).</p>

Five of six participants emphasized the fact that their mothers understood them better than their fathers did. They valued their mothers' willingness to listen to them. Wei indicated that it was important to him that his mother was willing to communicate with him, listen to him, and understand him in his daily life. Hong noted that her mother not only gave her advice to deal with some issues, but also listened to her and appreciated her opinions.

Sub-Theme C	Exemplar
<p>I buy birthday gifts to show my mother that I care for her.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 4/6]</p>	<p>“However, when my parents have their birthday, I think of what kind of birthday presents I buy for them one month ago. My mother’s birthday present didn’t take me a long time to decide. Although it cost some of my savings, I feel it was very worthy. She was very happy at first, then she felt it was too expensive” (Hong, ln 161-165).</p>

Four of six participants showed their love and appreciation toward their mother’s warmth and care by buying their mothers birthday gifts. In Chinese culture, buying birthday gifts for others is a traditional way to show respect, warmth and appreciation. This is particularly true for family members and senior people. Hong described her mother’s emotional reaction when receiving a birthday gift from her. She loved receiving it, but was then concerned that Hong was using her own money for this gift. Wei mentioned that he also prepared a gift for his mother on every Mother’s Day. In terms of his mother’s birthday gifts, Hua claimed that he was well prepared and never forgot.

Sub-Theme D	Exemplar
<p>I have a special relationship with my mother.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 4/6 in all, 3/3 in boys]</p>	<p>“They are like my friends, especially my mother. My father is also comparatively like my friend. But he is not as intimate with me as my mother. When I have any problem or pressure, I first talk to my mother. I feel that in my 3-membered family, my relationship with my mother is the best. I feel like she is my friend” (Fang, ln 44-48).</p>

Four of six participants stated that they felt closer to their mother than their father. From this sub-theme, a gender difference emerged when participants described their relationships with their mother and father. All of the male participants and one female participant expressed that they loved their mothers more. Fang indicated that her relationship with her mother was just like a close relationship with an intimate friend; someone whom she could talk to about any of her problems and pressures. Lin distinguished the difference between his relationships with his mother and father by precisely using “love” for his mother and “respect” for his father (Lin, ln 96). Wei also expressed his feeling that there was no generation gap between his mother and him. He noted that her opinions were “closer to mine” in the areas of his dress, everyday life and academic work (Wei, ln 67).

## Theme 2: The Significant Roles Played by Fathers

Sub-Theme A	Exemplar
My father cares about me in bigger areas. [Representativeness: 5/6]	“My father guides me more in my academic learning and learning methods, and also outlook on life and values. He tells me more in those respects” (Yan, ln 114-116).

Five of the six participants described various areas in their lives to which their father contributed. Fathers guided their daughters or sons in general areas, for example, academic work and philosophy of life, while mothers usually cared about day-to-day life, for example, food and clothes. Yan emphasized that her father guided her more generally, for example, in terms of her outlook on life and values. Lin added that his father only cared about his academic needs and study and did not care about his daily life. Fang felt that his father talked better about larger issues, such as academic issues and current affairs. Hua indicated that he chose different topics when talking to his parents: speaking with his father about academic study and further jobs. Hong's father influenced her in terms of “critical and far-reaching things” in life, for example, her father used his own experiences to guide Hong's study (Hong, ln 132).

Sub-Theme B	Exemplar
<p>I like my father more; his control over me is quite acceptable.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 3/6 in all, 3/3 in girls]</p>	<p>“I feel my relationships with my mother and father are slightly different. Although I have very good relationship with them both, I feel my father dotes on me more” (Hong, ln 71-72).</p>

Another sub-theme emerged regarding participants' different responses to gendered parental roles. When mentioning their relationship with their fathers, each of the female participants not only totally accepted their fathers' control of them, but also stated that they liked their fathers more. When explaining the reasons, Hong stated that it was because “my father dotes on me more” (Hong, ln 72). In terms of relationships with her parents, Yan claimed that she liked her father more than her mother. Fang reasoned that almost no conflicts had happened between her and her father. For each of the female participants – Hong, Yan, and Fang – this was a common feeling.

Sub-Theme C	Exemplar
<p>My relationship with my father is good, even though he does not express his feelings.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 2/6 in all, 2/3 in girls]</p>	<p>“My father sets up a very relaxed family circumstance for me. I feel I am always happy and laughing when I talk to him. I never feel any nervous air” (Hong, ln 227-228).</p>

Hong and Yan both mentioned that they like and value the way their fathers showed warmth to them. Hong also emphasized “the relaxed family circumstance” that her father established for her (Hong, ln 227). Similarly, both Fang and Yan felt that although their fathers’ love for them was very deep, the love from their fathers could be described as closed: their fathers usually did not express their love to them easily, rather they did things for their daughters instead of telling them their feelings.

### Theme 3: Relationships With Parents

Sub-Theme A	Exemplar
<p>My parents give all their love to me.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“My parents give all their love to me, but their parents had to take care of many children at the same time. I think this is the happiest point for us only children. {That is, we get more love and care}” (Wei, ln 7-9).</p>

Five of six participants emphasized their feelings that their parents gave all their love to them. Wei made a brief summary that having all of his parents' love was the happiest thing for only children. Hong expressed her appreciation toward her parents by describing herself as happy, lucky and very touched. She felt that for everything, her parents always considered whether it was beneficial for her first. She also believed that parents "are the people who love you most in this word" (Hong, ln 58-59). In addition, Hong used a metaphor to describe her parents' warmth to her: "they are like sunshine" (Hong, ln 68). Both Hong and Hua pointed out that they were the absolute focus in their families as only children. Hua added that in his parents' mind, he was always the only focus of the family. As an only child, all the attention and resources of Lin's parents were offered to him alone.

Sub-Theme B	Exemplar
<p>I have a good relationship with my parents; it is democratic and harmonious.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 3/6]</p>	<p>"I have good relationships with both of them, because my family is a typical... I mean the relationship between me and them is very democratic and harmonious. {I used some political words to describe.} They don't impose their will on me forcedly and also don't force me to do anything that I'm unwilling to do. I feel that every family will... just like my family, they also ask for my advice sometimes in terms of daily life things" (Hua, ln 27-32).</p>

Three of six participants stated that their relationship with their parents was very

good. When describing their relationships with their parents, both Hua and Hong mentioned that it could be characterised by being “harmonious” and “democratic.” Hua added in detail that his parents never forced him to do anything. Instead, they always discussed issues with him and asked for his opinions. This was how it was done even for small things in his daily life. Fang also stated that her relationship with her parents was “quite harmonious,” and they had few conflicts between them.

Sub-Theme C	Exemplar
<p>Sometimes I have conflicts with my parents.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“It is OK. I feel the biggest conflict lies in the academic area.....Then this would cause some misunderstanding and estrangement between us. Their requirements are beyond my capability”. (Wei, In 42,48-49).</p>

Five of the six participants noted that they sometimes had conflicts with their parents. Wei emphasized that the main reason leading to his conflicts with his parents was due to academics; his parents required that he achieve at a level that he felt was too high for him. The difference between what he thought he was capable of, and what his parents thought he was capable of, caused “misunderstanding” and “estrangement” between Wei and his parents. Along with conflicts about his academic work, Wei also noted that he found a personality gap between him and his father. This gap made him feel that he was unwilling to share everything with his father. Different from Wei’s experience, Yan was unsatisfied with the effectiveness of communication with her mother. She complained that when she was not



in the mood to talk, her mother worried about the reason why she did not want to talk.

However, when Yan really wanted to speak with her mother, her mother did not seem to pay enough attention to listen to her. Although Hua did not have any experience quarrelling with his father, he argued that this was probably because he worked to avoid conflicts because he did not want to quarrel.

Sub-Theme D	Exemplar
I was spanked when I was very young.  [Representativeness: 6/6]	“My mother’s control during my childhood was mainly spanking me. The last time she spanked me was when I was Grade 2 in elementary school. She mainly spanked me when I was very young. Later on, she liked to let me deal with it myself” (Lin, In 297-299).

All participants described experiences of being spanked by their parents during their childhood, but each participant also noted that this stopped when they were older. Lin’s mother talked to him instead of spanking him after Lin was in Grade 2 in elementary school. Wei observed that his father felt embarrassed to spank him when he was getting older. Hong and Lin mentioned that their mothers’ main method of control when they were young was spanking. In China, parents traditionally control children when they are very young by spanking. The purpose of spanking is to let young children know what is right and what is wrong, as well as teaching children what they can do safely. Similarly Wei, Fang and Yan stated that their fathers spanked them during their childhood. Hua explained the reason why

his father had spanked him during his childhood: “because I did not eat and sleep” (Hua, ln 183-184).

Sub-Theme E	Exemplar
<p>They expect me to attend a good university.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“I think my parents expect me to be enrolled in a top university, for example, Tong Ji University” (Wei, ln 156-157).</p>

When talking about their parents’ expectations, five participants of six mentioned that their parents wished that they could be enrolled in a good university. Wei stated that Tong Ji University, a top university, was the preference of his parents. Both Hong and Fang claimed that their parents expected them to enrol in a good university. Yan said that besides going to a top university, her parents also expected that she would “achieve more accomplishments” in the future than them (Yan, ln 205).

Sub-Theme F	Exemplar
<p>They expect me to have a happy life in the future.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“They wish that I will have a very happy life in the future. That means they do not require that I must reach a certain level in my life, they think the most important thing is that I can be happy. Of course, I must pay with my effort for this happiness” (Hong, ln 191-194).</p>

In addition to academic expectations, five of six participants added that their parents expected that they would have a happy life in the future. Hong stated that her parents expected her life to be happy without a requirement to achieve a certain level. Wei mentioned that his mother expected him to “have a happy family” in the future (Wei, ln 160-161). A bit different from the others, Fang’s parents expected that she would “have a safe and peaceful life” (Fang, ln 172-173) and Lin’s mother hoped that his future life could be “wealthy” and “steady” (Lin, ln 272). Compared with their own quality of life, Yan’s parents would be satisfied if Yan’s future life was better than theirs.

Sub-Theme G	Exemplar
<p>I can not share some ideas with my parents.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“But we do not wish to exchange ideas with our parents on some topics. We want to communicate with persons of the same age” (Hong, ln 12-14).</p>

This sub-theme emerged from five participants’ detailed descriptions about sharing their own ideas with their parents. They emphasized that some ideas or topics, could not be shared with their parents. Instead, they needed to talk to friends or peers of a similar age. If they had had a sibling, they may have been able to speak with him or her. The “topics” differed across various participants. Hong and Lin both referred to “topics” in a general manner, such as “exchange ideas” (Hong, ln 13) and “to communicate” (Lin, ln 3). However, Yan mentioned that she did not want to talk to her parents about “some unhappy things” (Yan, ln 18) or “problems” (Yan, ln 104), which were very private to her. Fang indicated that

she would like to share some of her private thoughts with a sibling if she had one, for the reason that it would be “much easier” for effective communication between siblings of similar ages.

#### **Theme 4: Relationships With Grandparents**

<b>Sub-Theme A</b>	<b>Exemplar</b>
<p>I have close relationships with my grandparents.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“My grandparents all like me quite a lot. My grandmother raised me when I was very young. I have very intimate relationships with my grandmother and grandfather” (Wei, ln 190-191).</p>

Five of the six participants stated that they had close relationships with their grandparents. Wei, Hong, Fang and Lin explained that they were raised by their grandparents. Compared with American grandparents, Chinese grandparents are also usually regarded by their own children as perfect baby-sitters when they go to work (Storm et al., 1999). Currently in China, many grandparents help to raise grandchildren when parents both go to work. Both Lin and Wei emphasized that their relationships with grandparents were “intimate” (Lin, ln 320; Wei, ln 191). Fang described that her grandparents treated her “really very well” (Fang, ln 229). Hua added that when he got some free time, he was very eager to visit his grandparents.

Sub-Theme B	Exemplar
<p>There is no difference in my relationship with grandmother and my relationship with my grandfather.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 3/6 in all, 3/3 in boys]</p>	<p>“No, there isn’t a difference between my relationships with my grandmother and grandfather” (Lin, ln 332-333)</p>

When asked about possible differences between relationships with grandfathers and grandmothers, the three male participants noted that they did not feel any obvious difference. Lin and Hua stated that there was no difference between their relationship with their grandfathers and grandmothers. Wei said there was a slight difference, because his grandmother remembered all his preferences. He thought this kind of difference was small.

Sub-Theme C	Exemplar
<p>There are some differences in my relationships with grandmother and grandfather.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 2/6 in all, 2/3 in girls]</p>	<p>“There are differences. I have a very intimate relationship with my grandmother. I act in an intimate and charming manner in front of her, just as in front of my mother. But I don’t do this to my grandfather. They make me feel that female is water, male is mountain. I feel their difference is just like the difference between my mother and father” (Fang, ln 237-241).</p>

Two female participants described that there were some differences in their relationships with their grand parents. Both Fang and Hong felt that grandmothers doted on them more, while their grandfathers’ love was less obvious and closed. Fang added that the difference in her relationships with her grandparents was similar to the difference in her relationships with her parents. She used the metaphor “female is water, male is mountain” to describe this type of difference (Fang, ln 239-240).

### Theme 5: The Benefit of Having a Sibling

Sub-Theme A	Exemplar
Although my life wouldn't change a lot with a sibling, I think having a sibling would bring me benefits. [Representativeness: 5/6]	"But if I had a brother or a sister, I think I would be happy too. Because I feel it would be a VERY, VERY BIG enjoyment to have a person with the same age to live together with me. It would be very convenient for me to exchange ideas with him/her in lots of areas" (Hong, ln 17-20).

As only children, five of six participants claimed that although they did not think that their lives would be changed substantially if they had a sibling, they believed that having a sibling would benefit them in some areas. Hong thought a sibling would bring her benefits and happiness, in terms of adding "enjoyment" (Hong, ln 18) in her life, gaining "more understanding and sharing things" (Hong, ln 33-34), and having a "more perfect psychological status" (Hong, ln 42-43). Different from Hong, Fang described that in her imagination, she would learn more from "life experiences" (Fang, ln 18) and learn how to "consider others" (Fang, ln 30) and "take care of others" from her sibling (Fang, ln 19). Lin placed importance on the notion that he felt himself to be a "separate individual" (Lin, ln 22), who wants to go his own way in life. Hua and Yan both mentioned that they assumed that their communication with a sibling of similar age would be better if they had one.

Sub-Theme B	Exemplar
<p>My pressures would be reduced with a sibling.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“I think it would be different. It depends on my sibling’s status. If he/she didn’t do well at academic work, then my parents would shift their expectation to me and think that I should be better. If my sibling already did very well at academic work, then I would not make them care about me too much. {Yes, they would put less expectation on me}”</p> <p>(Fang, ln 183-187).</p>

Besides other benefits that participants believed having a sibling would bring, one important benefit that five of the six participants mentioned was that they felt their pressures would be reduced if they were not the only child in their families. Fang, Lin, Hua and Yan stated that if they had a sibling whose academic work was good, then they would not experience so much pressure from their parents as their parents’ “only hope.” Instead, they would be able to shift the attention and high expectations to their sibling. According to Yan, one more child in the family might divert her parents’ attentions away from her. Hua noted that if he had a sibling, his happiness might be enlarged, while his pressures would be decreased through effective communication with his sibling. Hua summarized that with a sibling, if one child did not do well in school work, then parents would work to ensure that the other child did not fail. Ideally, there must be at least one child who performs well in each family. In addition, Hong added that if she had a sibling, there would be one more person of a similar age to share her pressures, particularly during the examination period.



Wei mentioned that he would play sports with his sibling to help him cope with his stress.

Sub-Theme C	Exemplar
I wish I had an older brother.  [Representativeness: 2/6  in all, 2/3 in girls]	“In fact I always want to have a brother. Because I feel that girls all hope to be protected. If I had an elder brother, I would go to school and go back home together with him. Then if I was bullied at school, I would tell him” (Yan, ln 14-16).

During the interview, Yan and Hong stated that if they had the option, they would like to have an elder brother. Yan described her reason for wanting an elder brother in terms of a sense of being protected. She stated her wish to have an older brother to guard and protect her if some students in her school bullied her. Hong emphasized that she wished to have an older brother all the time, and added that she thought girls all liked to have elder brothers. This seemed to reflect social and cultural influences. Many female only children in China would choose an older brother if they could have a sibling.

Sub-Theme D	Exemplar
If I had a younger sibling, I would take care of him or her.  [Representativeness: 4/6]	“If this brother or sister, if I was an elder brother, then I would take care of my younger brother or sister very much.  Particularly if they were much younger than me, I would treat him/her as my own child” (Lin, ln 16-18).

Four of six participants stated that if they had a younger sibling, they would take good care of him or her. Lin even mentioned that if his sibling was much younger than him, he would treat him or her as his own child. If Fang had a younger sister, she would “contain” (Fang, ln 28) her younger sister’s mistakes because she was younger and “weaker” (Fang, ln 38). As the youngest, Fang reasoned that “she might need more love” (Fang, ln 38). Yan stated that she would regard taking care of her younger sibling as “a happy thing” (Yan, ln 21). Hua also felt a sense of responsibility and a willingness to take care of a younger sibling if he had one.

#### **Theme 6: Pressures Related to Academics, Exams, and Expectations**

<b>Sub-Theme A</b>	<b>Exemplar</b>
<p>My pressures are from the academic area.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“Yes, I’ve experienced pressures. For example, I felt pressure before the Senior High School Entrance Examination, because the students who can get an offer from the top high school in my district are few..... In addition, I felt pressure on examinations. Because I know I can not do poorly on the examinations, after all, we all have to face the final University Entrance Examination in the near future. This is regarded as an important gate in our life. My pressure mainly lies in this area” (Hong, ln 271-277).</p>

Five of six participants described the experience of pressures from academics,

including the examinations and most specifically the University Entrance Examination.

Hong stated that the academic area was the main source of her pressures because she “could not do poorly” on the examinations, especially the critical milestone of her life: the University Entrance Examination (Hong, ln 274). Wei noted that his peers had common pressures given the heavy requirement of academic achievement. Fang argued that besides pressures concentrated on the University Entrance Examination, she felt psychologically tired. Yan emphasized that her pressures were in her academic study area. Hua described that his pressures were from the “ranking at school in terms of academic performance” (Hua, ln 252).

<b>Sub-Theme B</b>	<b>Exemplar</b>
If the Entrance Examination System was changed, my pressures would be reduced. [Representativeness: 5/6]	“I think the change of current Chinese educational system will reduce my pressures. I don’t think it’s necessary for my parents to change, because their reaction is a result of this system” (Wei, ln 237-239).

When asked what changes could be made to reduce their pressures, five participants called for a change in the Entrance Examination System to reduce their pressure. Wei stated that his parents did not need change to reduce the pressure he experienced, because their reaction was due to the current Chinese Educational System. Therefore, he thought that if the educational system could be changed, the pressure from his parents might decrease. Hong added that the Entrance Examination System placed pressure on the entire generation of

school children. Different from other participants' opinions, Fang regarded the examination system as a kind of social competition. She thought her pressure was a result of suffering from exam preparation and completion, which was actually a form of social competition.

Sub-Theme C	Exemplar
<p>My pressures are from my parents' expectations of my academic achievement.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 4/6]</p>	<p>"My father gives me lots of pressures and high requirements, all in academic study" (Lin, ln 348-349).</p>

Besides pressures from academics, four participants stated that they had pressures from their parents' requirements and expectations for their academic work. Therefore, they were doubly stressed given academic requirements and their parents' expectations. Lin stated his pressures from his father were "all in academic study" (Lin, ln 349). He then emphasized that, as a male only child, all his family's attention was put on him only. His parents expected him to be "outstanding" later, which made him feel pressure. Wei mentioned that his parents always required that his academic results achieve "a certain level," which was regarded by him as "the main pressure." Fang explained that the reason why her parents were quite strict in terms of academic work was because they considered her to be their only hope as the only child. Therefore, parents had high demands and were "very strict" with their only children in the hope of ensuring their child's academic success.

### Theme 7: Coping With Pressures

Sub-Theme A	Exemplar
My coping with pressure is to distract myself from it.  [Representativeness: 4/6]	“When I have pressure, I don’t want to tell my parents, because they might be...might be worried about me. I do some other things to distract myself from the pressure. For example, listen to music or watch a movie, or go out for a walk” (Hong, In 283-285).

In terms of coping strategies for managing pressure, four of six participants described methods they used to distract themselves from the pressure. For example, Hong indicated that she usually “listened to music, watched a movie or went out for a walk” to make herself feel better, rather than telling her parents about her pressures (Hong, In 284-285). A male participant, Wei, stated that his coping strategy for dealing with pressure was to participate in sports. In addition, Fang described her strategies for coping with pressure as going out for a walk, drinking of her favourite soft drinks, or having some discussions with her peers to distract her attention from pressure. Yan added that besides listening to music, she also worked harder in academic areas. She thought this might reduce her pressure, in particular if it improved her academic performance.

Sub-Theme B	Exemplar
<p>I conquer my pressures.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 3/6]</p>	<p>“I think I belong to the group of persons who want to conquer the pressure. When I’m confronted with a problem, I will be quiet to think it over. For example, I lie in the bed and think what kind of case this problem puts me in. If I must conquer it, furthermore, if it is related to my future, so I must conquer. Then I think of some good ways to conquer it” (Fang, In 286-291).</p>

Three of the participants stated that they liked to conquer pressures, while Fang mentioned that she always thought of good methods to conquer her pressures. Hong expressed that she regarded her pressures as an external factor, while self-control to conquer her pressures was an internal factor; therefore, she would not “dodge the pressure” (Hong, In 288).

Sub-Theme C	Exemplar
<p>I dodge my pressures.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 3/6]</p>	<p>“I think I like to dodge my pressure because I don’t want to think about it” (Wei, In 220-221).</p>

Another half of participants claimed that they usually dodged their pressures. Wei, Yan and Hua stated that they liked to dodge their pressures by not thinking about them. Wei mentioned that the reason why he wanted to “dodge” his pressure was “because I don’t want

to think about it” (Wei, ln 220-221). Hua emphasized that he was too busy to have enough time to “think about pressure” (Hua, ln 275).

Sub-Theme D	Exemplar
<p>My pressures are reduced by my peers’ encouragement and advice.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 3/6 in all, 3/3 in boys]</p>	<p>“There are several of my best friends who know my pressures. But they just think that I have the capability to conquer the pressure. Therefore, they give me much confidence by telling me that I am able to do these things well” (Lin, ln 375-377).</p>

Regarding whether participants’ pressures could be reduced when they talked to their peers about their pressures, there emerged a sub-theme with a gender difference. All the male participants stated that their pressures were usually reduced by a peer’s encouragement or suggestions. Lin stated that his confidence to conquer his pressure was also supported by his best friends. Hua described his friend who was proud of Hua’s good academic performance, and who would help to solve a problem if Hua needed him. Wei emphasized that his peers provided him with suggestions about methods to study well.

Sub-Theme E	Exemplar
<p>My parents help to ease my pressures.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 3/6]</p>	<p>“Sometimes they will...For example, sometimes when I am doing my homework earnestly, my mother will come over and ask me to take a rest. Then I will go out with her for a walk. She will help me not think of anything and not think about the academic work. She says that we can just take a walk for you to relax. She solves my pressures in this way. Then she will chat with me about some unrelated things to relax me. We will buy some snacks to eat or stroll in some small stores” (Fang, In 300-305).</p>

Regarding parents' reaction to their pressures, three of six participants described the ways in which their parents helped them to ease their pressures. Both Fang and Hua stated that their mothers usually asked them to go out for a walk together and talked to them when they were stressed with their academic work. Another two of six participants emphasized the suggestions from their parents to help them face and deal with their pressures. Hong stated that her parents required her to treat her pressure in an objective manner and not over-think it. Instead, her parents advised that pressure could be transferred to motivation. Wei's parents suggested that he face his pressure, because in one's life, there would be all kinds of pressure or difficulties.



Sub-Theme F	Exemplar
<p>My pressures are reduced by knowing that my peers have the same pressures.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 2/6 in all, 2/3 in girls]</p>	<p>“My peers are just like my brothers and sisters with the same trouble and tribulations. Sometimes they sigh with emotion, sigh for the current situations. Such as: so much homework, what a heavy schoolbag, so many quizzes and exams.</p> <p>Actually, sighing with emotion together with peers relaxes a lot, although the pressures are not really solved. However, I feel relaxed psychologically due to a sense of group identification” (Fang, In 314-319).</p>

Two of the three female participants noted that they felt better when they heard that their peers suffered from the same pressures, because this gave them a sense of group identification. Fang described that her pressures were reduced psychologically when “sighing with emotion” together with her peers (Fang, In 315). Similarly, Yan added that when she had the same “illness” as her peers, she felt better because they could share their hardships together.

### Summary

To summarize, seven core themes and thirty sub-themes surfaced from the qualitative interviews of six participants as only children in Shanghai. The themes revealed participants’ experiences in their familial relationships, the pressures they encountered and the kind of strategies they adopted to cope with their pressures. Each core theme was represented as a separate category and exemplified by different, but related, sub-themes.

Each sub-theme was represented by an exemplar.

Several sub-themes emerged in this research that appeared to have gendered features. For example, all the male participants had a closer relationship with their mother, while all the female participants liked their father more; all the male participants thought there was no difference between their relationships with grandmother and grandfather, while two of three female participants thought there were some differences in their relationships with grandmother and grandfather. In addition, two female participants wished to have an elder brother if possible. In terms of reducing pressures, all male participants mentioned that their pressures were reduced by their peers' encouragement and advice, while two female participants stated that their pressures were reduced by knowing that their peers had the same pressures.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

The experiences of Chinese adolescents as only children in Shanghai revealed seven core themes and related sub-themes on the topics of familial relationships, pressures and their coping strategies. Data were collected through in-depth qualitative interviews and analyzed through thematic analysis. The following core themes emerged from the thematic analysis: 1) The significant role played by mothers; 2) The significant role played by fathers; 3) Relationships with parents; 4) Relationships with grandparents; 5) The benefit of having a sibling; 6) Pressures related to academics, exams, and expectations; and 7) Coping with pressures. In this chapter, these seven core themes are discussed in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Next, the implications of the findings of this study for Chinese adolescents' social and emotional development is addressed, as well as the strengths and limitations of this research. Finally, in the last section, educational implications are highlighted and recommendations to Chinese educators, policy-makers and parents are made to reduce Chinese only children's pressures, as well as to benefit their social and emotional development.

### **Theme 1: The Significant Roles Played by Mothers**

A number of studies were conducted in North America regarding mothers' roles. Engle and Breaux (1998) found that mothers were usually regarded as the primary person responsible for the daily care of young children. As dominant care-givers, mothers took care of children's daily requirements as well as showed more affection to children. For instance, mothers liked to smile, hug and kiss (Hossain & Roopnarine, 1994). McMahon (1995) stated that mothers established their connectedness with their child by providing daily care to their

child.

In terms of mothers' roles within the Chinese context, a good model of the Chinese mother was anticipated to be kind and loving to their child, as well as always with main concern about their child (Wu et al., 2002). Chinese mothers were found to score significantly higher on total involvement than North American mothers in terms of daily interaction with their child (Liu et al., 2005). Ho (1987) stated: "Mother was characterized as affectionate, kind, protective, lenient, and even indulgent" (p. 231).

The finding of this research regarding mothers' roles was consistent with current literature. Five participants described that their mothers cared about almost everything in their day-to-day life in a detailed, thoughtful and considerate way. Participants expressed their appreciations of their mothers' care and love.

### **Theme 2: The Significant Roles Played by Fathers**

Regarding research conducted in North America about fathers' roles, Collins and Russell (1991) claimed that the interactions between father and child showed less warmth and responsiveness than interactions between mother and child. As children grow, fathers tend to become more involved. For example, Engle and Breaux (1998) stated that fathers may pay more attention to their children's sense of discipline.

Research on the Chinese fathers' roles showed that in terms of child-rearing style, Chinese fathers were reported to be more restrictive than North American fathers (Chiu, 1989). In addition, Fu, Wong, Oi, Lam, Ching, and Kwok (2003) found that Chinese fathers tended to focus more on discipline while exerting more control over their children. Ho (1987) explained this saying: "The father was typically characterized as a stern disciplinarian, more

concerned with the demands of propriety and necessity than with feelings, who was to be feared by the child” (p. 231).

However, findings that emerged from this study were partially consistent with the literature. In this study, five participants described that their fathers cared about them in bigger but restrictive areas, for instance, life philosophy and academic work. In addition, two male participants described that their fathers exerted more control over them in terms of academics and exams. These were consistent with the literature. However, all the female participants stated that they liked their fathers more and quite accept their fathers’ control over them. No participant mentioned their father’s attention to discipline.

Leung et al. (1994) found that compared with parents in other countries, particularly parents in North America, Chinese parents, both fathers and mothers, were more restricted and emotionally unexpressive. The opinion of female participants in this research partially agreed with the literature. They mentioned in the interviews that although they felt their fathers’ deep love for them, they also found their fathers’ love was closed, which means emotionally concealed. Some participants also felt the same concealed love from their grandfathers. However, no participant reported a similar feeling toward the love from their mothers or grandmothers in this study. This phenomenon is probably rooted in Chinese culture, which emphasized that men cannot show their emotions easily. For example, usually, Chinese men cannot cry in public.

### **Theme 1 and Theme 2: Gender Differences in Fathers’ Roles and Mothers’ Roles**

Contrasting Theme 1 and Theme 2, there emerged gender differences in parenting

roles and styles. Research conducted in North America published by Forehand and Nousiainen in 1993 reported that maternal parenting styles were different from paternal parenting styles. Mothers represented various parenting roles in caring for children and showed maternal warmth when compared with fathers, because mothers were typically the dominant care-givers.

When being studied within the Chinese context, gender differences in parenting roles were claimed by Wilson (1974), who noted the famous Chinese saying, "strict father, kind mother," to represent paternal and maternal parenting differences. Shek (1998) stated as well that Chinese adolescents reported differences between paternal and maternal parenting styles. Fathers were reported to show less concern, less response, less demand and more strictness, while mothers' parenting styles were rated higher in terms of concern, response and demand.

This research's findings were basically consistent with literature that mothers were reported to be kind to them with high concern and response to participants' demands in daily life, and two fathers who had high expectation of participants' academic performance were described as being strict. However, there were no obvious negative comments about fathers' parenting styles and roles found in this research.

Although previous literature regarding parent-adolescent relationships included patterns of parent-adolescent interactions, parent criticism and parents' role models, specific literature examining gender differences in parenting styles and parents' warmth that is particular to adolescents' social and emotional development as only children in the circumstances of Chinese society and culture is rare. In this research, participants noted that

their mother and father showed warmth in different ways, though both were significant. Usually mothers cared about issues of daily life, while fathers cared about general areas of concern and future oriented areas. During the interviews of this research, sometimes even without being prompted, some participants emphasized the different ways in which their fathers and mothers showed their warmth to them. All the participants seemed to accept this gender difference in their parents' roles and none of the participants showed any dissatisfaction about this difference. This fact was clearly consistent with literature regarding various paternal and maternal parenting styles.

### **Theme 3: Relationships with Parents**

Previous research conducted in North America by Rosenberg and Hyde (1993) stated that only children who have close relationships with their parents have more positive personality development, given the fact that their parents pay so much attention to them. Falbo and Polit (1986) compared only children with children who have siblings in terms of intellectual achievement and parent-child relationships, and found that only children scored higher in both areas.

In Chinese urban cities, Wang et al. (2002) also found that most parents are willing to invest more of the family's financial resources and time to educate their only children, aiming to gain a better future for them. In this study, participants emphasized that they had a close relationship with their parents. As only children, they were the absolute focus of their families. Therefore, their parents gave all their love, high expectations, and attention to them. Participants in this research mentioned that it was popular for parents to register and pay for some private academic-tutoring classes after school for them, so that they could be more

competitive in the academic arena.

Collectivism is highly emphasized in Chinese culture. Triandis (1989) found that in light of cultural values, Chinese students scored higher on collectivism and group benefits, and lower on individualism, compared with North American students. Hui (1988) indicated that compared with individual goals, family and group goals were addressed with higher priority in China. Suzuki (1980) also found that Chinese children's school failure was regarded as the shame of the family, and vice versa; Chinese parents treated their children's school success as the glory of the family. Salili et al. (2003) stated that Chinese parents required their children to study for good school performance both for a better future and the honor of family. Therefore, Chinese students' motivation toward hard work in the academic arena is also encouraged by their parents given the Chinese traditional notion of filial piety (Salili, 1995). In addition, Chinese parents were found to set high expectations for children's school performance, especially for their only children (Salili, 1995).

The findings of this study were consistent with current literature regarding both family honor and parents' high expectations. Participants mentioned that they worked hard not only for their own future, but also for their parents; parents who would feel a loss of face if their only children failed in their school performance. Participants described their parents' high expectations, which could be represented as attending a good university, having a good future and happy life. Some participants emphasized that they had the feeling that they must study well and obtain a good academic performance, so that their parents would not be disappointed. Particularly Wei and Lin, who had strict parents with high expectations of their academic performance, as well as their future, expressed this feeling. In one of the



interviews conducted for this research, a male participant, Lin, expressed his doubt to the researcher and wondered whether his father required so much from his academic performance for his son's future only, or for his own glory, as well as the whole family's glory.

According to Baumrind (1996), authoritative parenting refers to parents who show their warmth to children while having full control of the developmental direction of children's behaviour due to parents' responsive and highly demanding child-rearing attitude. Baumrind (1996) defined warmth as "parent's emotional expression of love" (p. 410). From the findings of this research, the authoritative use of both warmth and control reflects the two ways Chinese parents were involved with their only children. Regarding the only child of the family as the only hope, Chinese parents usually gave all their love, thoughtful caring, and attention to their only children. Most of the family resources were invested on the education of the only child. Therefore, the way Chinese parents showed their warmth was highly related to their expectations for their child's academic performance, bright future, and final success.

Although Montemayor's (1982) research in North America reported that boys spent more time with fathers and girls spent more time with their mothers, this research found that female participants liked their fathers more, because they felt their father doted on them more. Female participants stated as well that they experienced few conflicts in their relationship with their fathers. However, male participants claimed that they felt closer to their mothers, because mothers not only cared about their daily life, but also were more willing to communicate with them and therefore, understood them more. This difference

might be attributed to cultural differences in gendered roles between China and North America.

Despite this difference, another finding of this research was consistent with previous literature in that although all six participants stated that they had good relationships with their parents, five participants mentioned that sometimes they had conflicts with parents due to differences in ways of thinking or parental expectations for academic achievement. These conflicts in daily life might be ascribed to the generation gap between Chinese only children and their parents as well, which were consistent with an investigation finding that around 2 percent of adolescents' interactions with their parents were reported as conflicts (Newman & Newman, 1986).

In previous literature conducted in North America, Larson (1983) mentioned that adolescents spend more time with peers than with their parents. In addition, Czikszenmihalyi et al. (1977) stated that some adolescents like to have more interactions with friends than with their parents, because they felt that communication with parents was more passive and constrained. Sarafino and Armstrong (1980) reported that when a child rejected his or her parents, those rejected parents felt upset. However, findings of this study showed that participants spent much time at home with their parents as only children. Consistent with Czikszenmihalyi et al. (1977), most participants in this research did not want to share some topics with their parents. Instead, they tended to share with peers and friends about their private topics. However, no participant reported rejecting parents in this research.

#### **Theme 4: Relationships with Grandparents**

In terms of adolescents' relationships with their grandparents, a number of research studies conducted in North America have been published. Cox and Paley (1997) found that grandparents who had frequent interactions and close relationships with their grandchildren played an important role in children's development. More specifically, Mueller and Elder (2003) stated that supportive grandparents not only spent more time playing with their grandchildren, but also supported them both educationally and emotionally. In addition, supportive grandparents who did not live with their grandchildren were found to show their love and warmth by meeting grandchildren periodically and providing financial assistance toward their education as well (Mueller & Elder, 2003). Some adolescents growing up in the same home with their grandparents had more intimate relationships with grandparents than with their own parents (Schlegel & Barry, 1991).

However, there are cultural influences on the relationships between grandparents and grandchildren. For example, Storm et al. (1999) found that Chinese parents regard grandparents as good baby-sitters when they go to work. In contrast, because American grandparents frequently live independently, American parents may not be able to rely on grandparents' support for raising grandchildren (Storm et al., 1999).

This research was consistent with previous literature regarding the relationships between grandchildren and grandparents. Participants claimed to have close relationships with their grandparents and five of them were raised by their grandparents. Some participants did not live in the same home as their grandparents, but no matter how busy they were in academic study, they visited their grandparents when they could.

### **Theme 5: The Benefit of Having a Sibling**

Regarding only children's development, there have been hot debates worldwide since early last century. Hall and Smith (1907) stated that the status of being an only child can be compared to a disease. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century view, only children were negatively described, given the importance of siblings to enable a child's social and emotional development (Rosenberg & Hyde, 1993). Some current research portrayed only children as more egocentric (Jiao et al., 1986), less affiliated and cooperative, and more maladjusted than children who have siblings (Hall, 1987). Moreover, only children are reported by Jiao et al. (1986) to be less able to control their behaviors and emotions, and quick to become frustrated. In addition, Howe and Madgett (1975) claimed that only children had more problems in their mental health, while Claudy (1984) reported that children who had siblings are more cooperative and persistent, and are prone to have better peer relationships.

Consistent with previous research in terms of the positive influence of siblings, participants in this research thought having a sibling would bring them benefits. For example, they noted they would have a family member close in age at home with which to communicate and discuss topics that were difficult to share with parents. In addition, their pressures could be reduced through daily interactions with a sibling. Some participants mentioned that having a younger sibling would let them know more about how to care about others.

On the contrary, there also exists some research that portrays benefits of only childhood. Wang et al. (2000) claimed that only children have more positive characteristics than children with siblings. In addition, only children were found to have higher school

achievement (Poston & Falbo, 1990) and more positive development in terms of personality (Rosenberg & Hyde, 1993).

In this research, although lacking a comparison group of adolescents who had a sibling for comparison in terms of characteristics and school achievement, participants described that they felt happy and benefited from being the only child of the family as well. They noted that the benefits of being an only child were that they had all their parents' love and attention, and were supported by all the family resources for a good material life.

#### **Theme 6: Pressures Related to Academics, Exams, and Expectations**

Chen et al. (1995) reported that in some Asian countries, for example, in China, Korea and Japan, educational systems emphasized examinations that originated from an ancient system of selecting high-achievers to be government officials by examination. The use of examinations throughout the process of schooling results in a competitive learning environment for students. This ancient examination system also influenced the current Chinese curriculum and the grading system. Crystal et al. (1994) showed that Chinese students were pressured to perform academically and reported that Chinese adolescents experienced not only frustration and anxiety, but also more sleeping and eating problems than American students. Therefore, a stressful school environment was considered to be the primary source of pressure on Chinese students, along with the concomitant feelings of depression. Salili and Hau (1994) stated that in the competitive school environment in China, even high academic achievers are pressured to maintain good academic performance.

Consequently, to be more competitive, Chinese students in urban cities have to sacrifice their leisure time to do homework and attend complementary or tutoring classes

after school. Both Salili et al. (2003) and Wang (2001) reported that this phenomenon directly led to students' psychological weariness and physical exhaustion. As a result, Chinese adolescents were found to suffer from emotional and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression (Wang, 2000).

Regarding participants' pressures, the themes that emerged from this research were consistent with previous literature. Participants described their pressures as mainly from academics. Academic study occupied most of their time. When asked about what changes could be made to reduce their pressures, participants stated that a change in the current Entrance Examination System would reduce their pressures. This finding surfaced in the literature review as well, which reported that both elementary school and high school students in China claimed that their anxiety came from academic pressure (Zhao & Zhang, 1995). Participants in this study felt especially stressed given the frequency of examinations and the entrance examinations that occurred at each step toward higher education. Participants were senior high school students in Shanghai, and consequently, the finding of this research were consistent with the findings of former research conducted by Liu and Zhang (2002). Chinese senior high school students, who were facing the upcoming University Entrance Examination reported a noticeably higher level of anxiety and pressure than Chinese students in elementary school and junior high school.

Previous research conducted in China reported that some of students' pressures were from their parents. Stevenson and Stigler (1992) found that Chinese parents paid more attention to children's school performance and spent more time monitoring and guiding their academic work than American parents. Grant and Dweck (1998) found that Chinese students

also attributed their pressures to the high expectations of parents. In addition, Salili (1995) reported that Chinese parents usually had high expectations for good academic performances from their children, especially from their only children. In this research, participants also reported that some of their pressures were from their parents' high expectations in terms of their academic performances. Although most participants in this study emphasized that they understood the reasons why their parents put pressure on them, parents' high expectations and criticisms of their child's academic performance were also a source of participants' pressures. Pressure from parents to achieve was due to the current Entrance Examination System as well, and this was understood by the participants to be linked.

However, this finding in Shanghai was partially consistent with previous research findings in North America, where different from Chinese adolescents, North American adolescents tended to attribute their stress to their parents' frequent criticism (Harris & Howard, 1984). While Newman and Newman (1986) found that North American adolescents were stressed by their parents' criticism, participants in this research also stated that frequent dissatisfaction, negative comments from their parents, and/or high expectations, made them lose interest in communicating with their parents. This phenomenon formed a vicious cycle as less communication led to more criticism from parents. In this research, the more participants were criticized by one of their parents given high expectations for academic achievement, the less willingness they showed to communicate with this parent. Usually, those participants liked their other parent more due to the fact that they felt more understood and less criticized by that parent.

In terms of other Chinese cultural values, findings in this research were consistent

with the previous literature review. All the participants in this study reported that their parents required them to work hard and not to waste time. This parallels another important Chinese cultural value that effort is highly treasured in Chinese culture and society (Yang, 1986). Confucian values in Chinese education help to explain why Chinese students are expected and required to work hard (Hess et al., 1987). One participant in this research mentioned that his father required him to have a book in his hand to read all the time, reflecting the similar Chinese proverb cited in the literature review from Li (2002). Consistent with this research, participants expressed their wishes to have a more relaxed life and some leisure time to be spent doing things other than academic work.

The pressures created by parents of participants in this research together with their daily monitoring of participants' performance and efforts in terms of academics could be regarded as the main form of control used by the parents of these participants. Therefore, the main parenting style parents adopted with participants in this research was authoritative parenting, which is positive and effective. According to Baumrind (1996), authoritative parents not only criticize their children's behaviours with rational explanations, but also provide warm guidance within an engaged, friendly and harmonious parent-child relationship.

From the interviews, although some participants stated that their parents put pressure on them in terms of their academics and high expectations, all the participants expressed their appreciation for their parents' love. They understood their parents' good will to motivate them to achieve due to the current entrance examination system in China. Participants noted that they had good relationships with their parents, because they



understood the way the examination system affected their opportunities for education and they knew their parents hoped that their expectations would help them to achieve.

### **Theme 7: Coping with Pressures**

In terms of North American adolescents' coping strategies to reduce their pressures, Compas et al. (1988) claimed that the capability for North American adolescents to cope with their pressures is more critical than the pressure itself in terms of mental health. However in the Chinese context, Chan (1995) stated that there is limited information about how Chinese adolescents cope with their pressures and other mental issues. Regarding Chinese adolescents' coping strategies, Liu et al. (2004) reported that although adolescents use multiple coping strategies to deal with their pressures, the main models adopted by Chinese adolescents are active coping and avoidant coping. Adolescents who actively cope with their pressures aiming to solve the issues are more positive and competent, while adolescents who use an avoidant coping strategy tend toward an "increased risk for behavioral problems" (p. 281). In addition, Sandler et al. (1989) found that avoidant coping sometimes led to negative influence from the pressures, which might cause loss of control both psychologically and emotionally. Regarding possible gender differences in coping strategies adopted, Chan (1995) stated that there was no obvious gender difference found in the coping strategies used by Chinese adolescents. However, Liu et al. (2004) claimed that compared with male adolescents, Chinese female adolescents tended to adopt an avoidant coping strategy.

Although participants in this research said that they usually distracted their attention from the pressures they had, half of the participants mentioned that their coping strategy was

to conquer them, while the other half noted that they usually dodged their pressures as a coping strategy. This finding supported previous research in China – that active and avoidant coping are the two most widely adopted methods in terms of Chinese adolescents' coping strategies to their pressures (Liu et al., 2004) – however it diverged in terms of gender. In this research, a gendered tendency did not emerge in terms of the adoption of active coping or avoidant coping strategies to deal with pressures.

Regarding parental support to deal with their adolescent's pressures, Larson (1983) conducted his research in North America, and indicated that parents who were willing to spend more time with adolescents helped them enhance their social and emotional skills to manage their emotional and mental problems. The finding in this research was consistent with the literature. Participants described how their parents helped to ease their pressures. For example, most parents suggested things like taking walks together and/or taking a rest to relax. Some parents talked to participants to provide some advice and suggestions to help manage their pressures. In addition, one participant mentioned that if he did poorly on his school performance, his parents would reduce their expectations for his future. In this way, his pressures would be reduced.

In this research, there emerged a gender difference regarding how talking to peers about participants' pressures could reduce their pressures. All the male participants claimed that a peer's encouragement or suggestions usually helped to reduce their pressures, while two of the female participants mentioned that their pressures were reduced by hearing that their peers suffered from the same pressures.

As mentioned early, participants in this research described the possible benefits that

a sibling would bring to them if they had one. Specifically, they stated that their pressures, which were mainly from academics, exams and expectations, would be reduced if they had a sibling, because in this case, they would not have to fulfill their parents' expectations alone. Therefore, if they did not achieve well in school, and their sibling's academic performance was better, their parents would shift their expectations to their sibling. Parents hoped that at least one child would have a good future and earn glory for the family.

### **Findings of this Study**

The findings of this research provided detailed information on patterns of participants' familial relationships with parents and grandparents, as well as their experiences of pressures and coping strategies as only children in Shanghai. The findings highlighted areas related to both the development of Chinese only children and their social and emotional health, which might require further longitudinal investigations, for example, for educational policy adjustments and intervention programs in terms of social and emotional health to benefit their development by reducing their pressures. To summarize, this research contributed to the current body of literature in the educational arena of social and emotional development, reflecting the experience of adolescents in China with a particular focus on their relationships with parents and grandparents, their experiences of pressures, and their coping strategies.

As mentioned previously, most of the current literature includes some previous research about children's social and emotional development, only children, and children who develop in China, respectively. There are limited investigations that combine even two of these three elements together to explore Chinese only children's developmental status. In

addition, quantitative questionnaires were commonly adopted as the main research methodology. However, the current study linked these three elements together to explore Chinese adolescents' familial relationships, pressures and coping strategies by collecting adolescents' own voices through in-depth qualitative interviews. Therefore, the findings of this study partially addressed the research gap in the current literature.

### **Limitations and Strengths of the Research**

There were five limitations to this research. Compared with a quantitative survey with a large sample size, this study included only six participants for qualitative interviews; a smaller sample size. In addition, the research was conducted in only one high school in Shanghai; experiences in others may be different. Due to the one hour interview time limitation as well, the researcher was not able to prompt the participants to elaborate as deeply as she would have liked. Moreover, in terms participant selection, this study followed Chinese conventions in school: the participating class was recommended by the school principal according to the researcher's criteria; then the potential participants were suggested by the teacher in charge of the participating class to reflect selection criteria. Therefore, as another limitation, the teacher's bias may have influenced participant selection. As a native Chinese speaker, the researcher's background was used to aid in interpretation of the data. The inevitable loss of information during the translation process was a limitation as well.

In addition to the limitations, there were three strengths of this research. First, little previous literature addressed Chinese adolescents' familial relationships, pressures and coping strategies, particularly through their own voices via qualitative interviews. The findings of this research partially contribute to a reduction in this gap. The second strength of

this research was that it reflected the researcher's background as an only child schooled in Shanghai, China, and as a Chinese language speaker. For example, the researcher was able to interview participants in their first language, Chinese, so that participants did not have any communication problems in terms of language during the process of the interview. In addition, the researcher understood what participants meant clearly and deeply when both sides were talking in Chinese. Shanghai was a familiar setting for the researcher to conduct her study and she was quite familiar with some of the experiences that the participants had. Finally, based first on the literature, the researcher's own reflections also helped to define the area of study and the interview protocol.

### **Educational Implications and Recommendations**

#### ***Educational Implications***

The findings of this research have implications for education. The experiences of six participants in this study revealed the significance of their familial relationships with parents and grandparents. Their voices expressed the difficulties of managing the pressure of the high stakes examinations that are used by the Chinese school system as a gateway for continuing or terminating educational studies. Although they were embraced by loving parents in well resourced surroundings, these young people experienced the singular pressure of academic achievement, which was both mediated and exacerbated by parents' expectations under these difficult circumstances. Participants used both avoidant and active coping strategies to reduce their experience of pressure. The support of parents and peers was beneficial, but ultimately did little to remove the real source of their pressure: the consequences of academic achievement and examination for junior and senior high school

entrance, as well as university and graduate school entrance. Based on these findings, recommendations are made for educators, policy-makers and parents.

### *Recommendations for Educators*

The current pressures faced by Chinese only children call for Chinese educators to design and implement social and emotional programs that teach children how to cope with their pressures. Coping skills may be taught directly, for example, in an after school exam preparation and study group. In addition, Chinese only children may be encouraged to foster social relationships with peers, friends and teachers, to enhance their quality of life, as well as lessen their pressures.

Aside from the skills and activities used to cope with pressure, as mentioned, ultimately Chinese only children need more leisure time for activities unrelated to academic achievement. Educators may design some in-class or after-class activities that teach students leisure skills, such as cooking, viewing and criticizing movies and theatre productions, and/or studying poetry, creative writing, and art.

At present, most Chinese schools do not have school psychologists screening for the experience of anxiety and/or pressure related to academics, exams and expectations. Therefore, in the short term, educators need to learn how to care about students' mental and emotional health, as well as how to help them reduce their pressures. In the long term, educators may advocate for visits from school psychologists for students about whom they are concerned, as well as for inservice and professional development for themselves and their colleagues.

### *Recommendations for Policy-Makers*

Even if social and emotional programs are implemented and become successful in the near future, the current Entrance Examination System still exists as the main source of these children's pressure. Parents and teachers contribute to students' academic pressures not because they want to harm them, but as a method for motivation. And indeed students are prepared this way through the whole series of entrance examinations that move them toward higher education from kindergarten. An educational policy change would be required to reduce the current pressures resulting from their heavy academic burden and exams.

Policy-makers would need to reform the current Entrance Examination System, perhaps providing students a second opportunity to sit for a critical examination, and/or reducing the amount of material tested at one time. Although nowadays, students in some cities in China are allowed to attend the University Entrance Examination more than once, the interval between each exam is one year, because the University Entrance Examination is held once a year. It means students, who require taking the exam again, need to spend one extra year to wait for the exam as well as prepare for the exam. This can be regarded as a penalty for students who do not achieve a satisfactory performance in the exam for the first time.

Therefore, it is necessary to offer more flexible scheduling to take the University Entrance Examination, rather than once a year, to provide Chinese students with more opportunities for higher education and less pressure.

Also the academic criteria used to judge whether a student is eligible for the next stage of education — and the school or university in which the student is enrolled — should be restructured to include other areas for the performance of excellence, alongside of

academics. For example, the criteria might be more comprehensive and include the quality and performances of Chinese only children's extra-curricular activities, school leadership programs, and/or their other special talents. Anything less than changing the Entrance Examination system will probably not impact Chinese students enough to reduce their experience of pressure. For example, related social changes outside the educational system, such as increasing social awareness and attention to academic pressure, alone will not reduce the pressure.

### ***Recommendations for Parents***

Parents need to realize that the effective communication between them and their only children, together with their deep understanding of their adolescent's social and emotional development, is currently sustaining their children during stressful times. Caring about their everyday life, planning their future goals, and providing them with a happy material life, for example, are behaviors that are interpreted by Chinese only children as ways parents care and attend to their needs. When parents are willing to stand in their only child's position, so that they really understand their child's feelings and pressures, they create ways of enabling their child to cope. In addition, however, parents need to realize that their expectations of academic achievement, as well as expectations of future achievement, serve to exacerbate pressures as well.

Social and emotional programs for parents to develop their skills, knowledge-base and ability to take care of their only child's social and emotional health might be implemented as well. In this way, parents, as the core members of Chinese only children's familial relationships – as well as the people who know their only children perhaps better



than any one else – might learn how to support healthy development for their adolescent and help them to cope with their pressures, and perhaps reduce them as well.

In addition, parents need to adjust their understanding of the definition of “life success” and share with their only children that achieving a good academic performance, studying in a top university, and getting an impressive job after graduation are not the only ways to achieve life success. Children are not “losers” if they fail to accomplish any one of these three. Perhaps redefining life success as feeling happy and satisfied with accomplishments and following one’s interests may refocus life success on “fulfillment,” rather than “achievement.”

These recommendations vary in terms of the extent to which they require a small or large change in the current educational and examination system. Perhaps it is best to think of them as both short and long term goals. Additional research on the experiences of young people in Chinese schools that explores the experiences of parents and teachers concurrently may provide a next step for research. Raising awareness of the difficult pressures faced by Chinese adolescents as only children may provide the necessity to call for adjustments or changes in the real sources which have caused Chinese adolescents’ pressures.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Protocol**

### **Background Information**

As Senior 2 students in one of the top high schools in Shanghai, the six participants were around 17 years old, and were residents in Shanghai. Among them, three participants were girls, and the other three were boys. Participants were coded as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 4, Participant 5, and Participant 6 for analysis, and given pseudonyms for the thesis.

### **Procedural Information**

After the interview protocol was translated into Chinese, it was piloted with two participants prior to engagement with the research participants. Piloting was useful as practice for the researcher, as well as a general test for the validity of the interview questions and prompts. Both interview questions and possible prompts are identified below.

### **Introduction**

Hi, it is nice to meet you, I am Qi Wu. I am a Master's student in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia in Canada. My Master's thesis is about Chinese adolescents' experience as only children. I would like to ask you some questions in four general areas. First, I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences as only child. Then, I would like to ask you questions about your family relationships. Third, I would like to ask about pressures and stress you may be facing. Finally, I would like to ask about how you cope with your pressures and stress. Our conversation will last up to one hour. What we talk about here will be confidential and will not be shared with anyone, including your teachers, peers, or parents. Your name will not be included, I will use a pseudonym



instead. I will record our conversation to avoid missing any important information, so that I can do an accurate transcription of what you say. If you feel like stopping this conversation and withdrawing from this study, you can do that at any time. Do you have any questions? Okay, let's begin.

### **Being an Only Child**

1. What is your experience of being an only child?
  - a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?
2. What would your life look like if you had a brother or a sister?
  - a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?
3. What sorts of things would be the same?
  - a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?
4. What sorts of things would be different?
  - a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?

## Family Relationships

5. In general, how would you describe your relationship with your parents?
  - a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?
6. What differences are there, if any, in your relationships with your mother and father?
  - a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?
7. What would your relationship with your parents look like if you had a brother or a sister?
  - a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?
8. What sorts of things would be the same?
  - a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?
9. What sorts of things would be different?
  - a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?
10. How have your parents guided your experiences in school?

- a. Relationships with teachers
  - b. Homework competition
  - c. Achievement
  - d. Any difference between mother and father
  - e. Other:
11. How have your parents guided your experiences with peers?
- a. Relationships
  - b. Time spent
  - c. Activities
  - d. Any difference between mother and father
  - e. Other:
12. If you could make suggestions to your parents, what advice would you give them for guidance you need?
- a. What things do they do that help you?
  - b. Is there anything they might do to help you that they aren't currently doing?
  - c. If yes, what are these things?
13. Tell me about a recent experience you and your mother had that was special?
- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
14. Tell me about a recent experience you and your father had that was special?
- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?

15. Tell me about a recent experience your and your mother had that was difficult?

- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
- b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?

16. Tell me about a recent experience your and your father had that was difficult?

- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
- b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?

17. In general, what are your parents' expectations of you?

- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
- b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
- c. What would an example look like?
- d. Do they differ between mother and father?
- e. How do their expectations make you feel?

18. How would their expectations be different, if at all, if you had a brother or a sister?

- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
- b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
- c. What would an example look like?

19. How does your mother show you warmth? (Baumrind, 1996)

- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
- b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
- c. What would an example look like?

20. How does your father show you warmth? (Baumrind, 1996)

- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?

- b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?
21. How does your mother control you? (Baumrind, 1996)
- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?
22. How does your father control you? (Baumrind, 1996)
- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?
23. How do you show your mother that you care for her?
- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?
24. How do you show your father that you care for him?
- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?
25. In general, would you describe your relationship with your grandparents?
- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?

26. What differences are there, if any, in your relationships with your grandmother and grandfather?

- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
- b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
- c. What would an example look like?

27. Describe your relationship with other extended family members?

- a. Aunt
- b. Uncle
- c. Cousin
- d. Other:

### **Pressures**

28. Describe the pressures you experience in your life.

- a. Parents / Home
- b. Peers
- c. Teacher
- d. Academic area
- e. Other areas:

29. How would your pressures be different, if at all, if you had a brother or a sister?

- a. Parents / Home
- b. Peers
- c. Teacher
- d. Academic area

e. Other areas:

### **Coping Strategies**

30. I'd like to ask you to think about each area where you experience pressure (Question 28).

Describe how you cope with the pressure in \_\_\_\_\_?

- a. Conquer the pressure
- b. Dodge the pressure
- c. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
- d. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
- e. What would an example look like?

31. How would your coping strategies be different, if at all, if you had a brother or a sister?

- a. Conquer the pressure
- b. Dodge the pressure
- c. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
- d. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
- e. What would an example look like?

32. How do your parents respond to the pressures you face?

- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
- b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
- c. What would an example look like?
- d. Any difference between mother and father

33. How would your parents respond to the pressures you face differently, if at all, if you had a brother or a sister?

- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?
34. How do your peers respond to the pressures you face?
- a. What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Tell me a bit more about \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What would an example look like?
35. In your opinion, what changes could be made to reduce your pressure?
- a. Academic area
  - b. Parents
  - c. Teachers
36. Finally, is there anything else of being an only child you want to share with me about the topics we talked about today?
- a. Peers
  - b. Parents
  - c. Something out of school



## Appendix B: Representative Data for Themes Included in the Thesis

### Theme 1: Significant Role Played by Mothers

Sub-Theme A	Examples
<p>My mother cares about my daily life in a considerate and thoughtful way.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“My mother cares about my daily life very considerately. Everything, including my clothes, what to wear, shoes, every other respect, including eating and living, she all cares more” (Lin, ln 282-284).</p> <p>“I think she is very considerate and very thoughtful. I feel I can not say in this way, because the warmth of my father and mother do not have a clear different line. But my mother probably has more in this side. I feel she is very careful and considerate” (Hong, ln 217-220).</p> <p>“My mother is very considerate. I can see it from many trivial things” (Fang, ln 189).</p>

Sub-Theme B	Examples
<p>She is willing to communicate with me, so she knows me well.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“I think except my mother’s caring about my life, more importantly, she is willing to communicate with me in a calming and comforting way. She has the will to understand me more, from her – I should say she is good at this area, unlike some parents are very commanding to their child” (Wei, ln 167-170).</p> <p>“Sometimes I will talk about my peers and teachers to her, she might tell me how to handle it, but more often, she just listens to my opinions” (Hong, ln 220-221).</p>

Sub-Theme C	Examples
<p>I buy birthday gifts to show my mother that I care for her.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 4/6]</p>	<p>“However, when my parents have their birthday, I think of what kind of birthday presents I buy for them one month ago. My mother’s birthday present didn’t take me a long time to decide. Although it cost some of my savings, I feel it was very worthy. She was very happy at first, then she felt it was too expensive” (Hong, ln 161-165).</p> <p>“For example, on her birthday and Mother’s Day, I always</p>

	<p>consider [what kind of gifts I should buy to her] to buy her gifts (Wei, ln 183-184).</p> <p>“Also, I always get well prepared for her birthday gift” (Hua, ln 200-201).</p>
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Sub-Theme D	Examples
<p>I have a special relationship with my mother.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 4/6 in all, 3/3 in boys]</p>	<p>“They are like my friends, especially my mother. My father is also comparatively like my friend. But he is not as intimate with me as my mother. When I have any problem or pressure, I first talk to my mother. I feel that in my 3-membered family, my relationship with my mother is the best. I feel like she is my friend”</p> <p>(Fang, ln 44-48).</p> <p>“I love my mother and respect my father” (Lin, ln 96).</p> <p>“I don’t have difficult experiences with my mother. I have always got along well with my mother” (Lin, ln 205-206).</p>

	<p>“It seems that my mother doesn’t have generation gap with me, almost not. Because in terms of dress, daily life and my academic performance, I feel that she – I should say her opinions are closer to mine” (Wei, ln 64-67).</p>
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## Theme 2: The Significant Role Played by Fathers

Sub-Theme A	Examples
<p>My father cares about me in bigger areas.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“My father guides me more in my academic learning and learning methods, and also outlook on life and values. He tells me more in those respects” (Yan, ln 114-116).</p> <p>“He doesn’t particularly care about me in daily life. He only cares about me in my academic work” (Lin, ln 93-94).</p> <p>“My father, he cares about me more in my academic work. He doesn’t care about my daily life. He just cares about what I need in my academic study.....” (Lin, ln 292-293).</p> <p>“However, I communicate with my father for some big and decisive problems, such as academic problems and issues of</p>

	<p>my school work, also some discussions in current affairs and politics. I talk about these kinds of things with my father, because I feel he talks better” (Fang, ln 61-64).</p> <p>“I talk to my father about my academic study, future job. The topics I talk to my father and mother about are different” (Hua, ln 34-36).</p> <p>“My father influences me on the critical and far-reaching things in my life” (Hong, ln 131-132).</p>
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Sub-Theme B	Examples
<p>I like my father more; his control over me is quite acceptable.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 3/6 in all, 3/3 in girls]</p>	<p>“I feel my relationships with my mother and father are slightly different. Although I have very good relationship with them both, I feel my father dotes on me more” (Hong, ln 71-72).</p> <p>“In addition, sometimes I feel that her attitude to my father is not too good, because I like my father more. So I feel that my current relationship with her is not...as good as the relationship with my father” (Yan, ln 80-82).</p>

	<p>“It seems that I do not have something unpleasant between me and my father” (Fang, ln 161).</p>
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Sub-Theme C	Examples
<p>My relationship with my father is good, even though he does not express his feelings.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 2/6 in all, 2/3 in girls]</p>	<p>“My father sets up a very relaxed family circumstance for me. I feel I am always happy and laughing when I talk to him. I never feel any nervous air” (Hong, ln 227-228).</p> <p>“.....Sometimes when I recall all these things, I feel that my father treats me very well” (Yan, ln 232-233).</p> <p>“My father’s love is kind of deep, indeed VERY DEEP, because he doesn’t express it easily” (Fang, ln 193-194).</p> <p>“My father is relatively closed” (Yan, ln 223).</p>

### Theme 3: Relationship With Parents

Sub-Theme A	Examples
<p>My parents give all their love to me.</p>	<p>“My parents give all their love to me, but their parents had to take care of many children at the same time. I think this is the</p>

[Representativeness: 5/6]

happiest point for us only children. {That is, we get more love and care}" (Wei, ln 7-9).

"My parents would give all their love to me. I feel that generally speaking, I exist as the focus of my family, due to the one-child policy. My parents consider many things for me, sometimes I feel my parents do lots of things for me. Their first consideration is whether this thing is good or bad for me. They always consider me first. This is my whole feeling..." (Hong, ln 2-6).

"Therefore as a boy, my family pays huge attention to me. All my parents' energy is spent on me" (Lin, ln 8-9).

"I'm the focus of everything at home and there is no competition in my daily life" (Hua, ln 6-7).

"My parents only have me in their minds" (Hua, ln 8).

Sub-Theme B	Examples
<p>I have a good relationship with my parents; it is democratic and harmonious.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 3/6]</p>	<p>“I have good relationships with both of them, because my family is a typical... I mean the relationship between me and them is very democratic and harmonious. {I used some political words to describe.} They don’t impose their will on me forcedly and also don’t force me to do anything that I’m unwilling to do. I feel that every family will... just like my family, they also ask for my advices sometimes in terms of daily life things” (Hua, ln 27-32).</p> <p>“I have very good relationships with my parents. I feel I am very lucky, because my parents are very open. They treat me very well, very caring to me. Sometimes I feel that they make me very very touched” (Hong, ln 51-53).</p> <p>“In fact, I feel that parents are the people who love you most in this world. My parents make me feel that very often...My parents are also very democratic. I have a very harmonious relationship with them.....Furthermore, I feel they are like sunshine, they make me feel very warm and very happy” (Hong, ln 58-69).</p>



	<p>"I feel that my relationship with my parents is quite harmonious" (Fang, ln 44).</p>
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Sub-Theme C	Examples
<p>Sometimes I have conflicts with my parents.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>"It is OK. I feel the biggest conflict lies in the academic area.....Then this would cause some misunderstanding and estrangement between us. Their requirements are beyond my capability" (Wei, ln 42,48-49).</p> <p>"Because he is my father, he is elder than me, I have to respect him in some aspects. But for sure, there are some things I can not talk to him. Because there is big gap between my father's personality and mine" (Wei, ln 52-55).</p> <p>"I wish that they sometimes could...I mean...I...When I want to talk...talk...talk to them very much, they could...pay more attention to listen, instead of keeping asking me when I do not want to talk, then when I really want to talk to them, they seem not to hear me by saying "Ah...ah." I feel very disappointed in this way, then I don't want to talk" (Yan, ln</p>

	<p>131-135).</p> <p>“Difficult? It happens almost every week. [smile]</p> <p>Actually...it’s all due to one reason, that is: because she feels that I don’t talk to her and ignore her, but I...I don’t know what I should talk to her about, because I indeed don’t have much to say. Sometimes she is a little...unhappy, then she says that I’m this, this, which makes me feel annoyed. So I don’t want to talk to her. First, I feel I don’t have much to say. In addition, I feel that sometimes what I talk to her...she doesn’t listen when I’m talking to her. But I don’t know why she keeps asking me when I don’t talk to her” (Yan, ln 186-192).</p> <p>“My father? I have never quarrelled with my father. But I feel that some things related to his decisions are not too good” (Hua, ln 119-120).</p>
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Sub-Theme D	Examples
<p>I was spanked when I was very young.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 6/6]</p>	<p>“My mother’s control during my childhood was mainly spanking me. The last time she spanked me was when I was grade 2 in elementary school. She mainly spanked me when I</p>

	<p>was very young. Later on, she liked to let me deal with it myself" (Lin, ln 297-299).</p> <p>"My mother controlled me more when I was young. Now, I can decide many of my own things. Then when I was young she might...in my impression, it seems that she spanked me. {when I was very young, she didn't do that since I went to elementary school} (Hong, ln 232-235).</p> <p>"My father spanked me, but not recently. When I grew up, he feels too embarrassed to spank me any more" (Wei, ln 180-181).</p> <p>"He spanked me when I was very young, but he doesn't any more. {After I went to elementary school, he doesn't spank me at all.}" (Fang, ln 211-213).</p> <p>"He spanked me when I was very young. Then he hasn't spanked me since I attended junior high school" (Yan, ln 258-259).</p>
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	<p>“He spanked me when I was very young, because I didn’t eat and sleep.” (Hua, In 183-184).</p>
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Sub-Theme E	Examples
<p>They expect me to attend a good university.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“I think my parents expect me to be enrolled in a top university, for example, Tong Ji University” (Wei, In 156-157).</p> <p>“They expect me to enter a good university” (Hong, In 194).</p> <p>“They wish that I could go to the top university” (Fang, In 169-170).</p> <p>“My parents require me to go to the university” (Fang, In 176-177).</p> <p>“Ah...they hope that I will achieve more accomplishments than them. Yes, they hope I will attend university. That’s all. They just feel...first, I should attend university, then they hope I will have a better life than them. That’s enough” (Yan, In 205-207).</p>

Sub-Theme F	Examples
<p>They expect me to have a happy life in the future.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“They wish that I will have a very happy life in the future. That means they do not require that I must reach a certain level in my life, they think the most important thing is that I can be happy. Of course, I must pay with my effort for this happiness” (Hong, ln 191-194).</p> <p>“The expectations from my father and mother do not differ a lot. They both wish me to have a happy life in the future. Happy and then – it will be the best if I am happy, however, they think it is unnecessary to set up a future goal now for me to reach by all means later” (Hong, ln 200-203).</p> <p>“...my mother I think she wishes me to have a happy family” (Wei, ln 160-161).</p> <p>“They also wish me have a safe and peaceful life” (Fang, ln 172-173).</p> <p>“My mother hopes me to have a wealthy and steady life” (Lin, ln 272).</p>

Sub-Theme G	Examples
<p>I can not share some ideas with my parents.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“But we do not wish to exchange ideas with our parents on some topics. We want to communicate with persons of the same age” (Hong, ln 12-14).</p> <p>“As a boy, I don’t like to communicate with my parents too much. I had some previous peers who had some distance with their parents” (Lin, ln 3-5).</p> <p>“The communication would be easier between siblings” (Lin, ln 20).</p> <p>“...because some things I don’t want to talk to my parents about. Of course it’s better now that I can talk to my peers in school” (Yan, ln 3-5).</p> <p>“Then if I came across some unhappy things, which I didn’t want to talk about to my parents, I could talk to him” (Yan, ln 17-19).</p> <p>“I would discuss with my sibling if I had problems.</p>

	<p>Sometimes it's difficult to communicate with parents, then if there were 2 or 3 persons, it would be better for communication" (Yan, ln 103-106).</p> <p>"There would be one more person for me to communicate with. I think it is much easier to communicate with a person of the same age as me" (Fang, ln 16-17).</p> <p>"Also in terms of communication, I feel that I would share more of my private thoughts with my sibling who was at the similar age of mine" (Fang, ln 41-42).</p>
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#### Theme 4: Relationships With Grandparents

Sub-Theme A	Examples
<p>I have close relationships with my grandparents.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>"My grandparents all like me quite a lot. My grandmother raised me when I was very young. I have very intimate relationship with my grandmother and grandfather" (Wei, ln 190-191).</p> <p>"My relationship with my grandparents is very good. When I</p>

	<p>was very little, because both my parents needed go to work, so I was raised by my grandmother for a long time” (Hong, In 252-254).</p> <p>“My grandparents, they had been raising me since I was very little until I went to elementary school. I have very good relationship with them. They treat me very well, really very well” (Fang, In 227-229).</p> <p>“I have an intimate relationship with my grandfather and grandmother on my mother’s side. Because my grandparents - I grew up with them” (Lin, In 320-321).</p> <p>“I have more frequent contacts with my grandparents on my father’s side, because my grandparents on my mother’s side live very far away in Song Jiang. [a county near Shanghai.]” (Hua, In 208-210).</p> <p>“Regarding my grandparents on my father’s side, previously I met them everyday. Now when I get some time, I still go back to meet them” (Hua, In 210-212).</p>
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Sub-Theme B	Examples
<p>There is no difference in my relationship with grandmother and my relationship with my grandfather.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 3/6 in all, 3/3 in boys]</p>	<p>“No, there isn’t a difference between my relationships with my grandmother and grandfather” (Lin, ln 332-333)</p> <p>“There are no big differences. My grandmothers remember my preferences, for example, what kind of foods I like to eat. My grandfather took me to the elementary school and picked me up and brought me back home everyday” (Wei, ln 194-196).</p> <p>“I think there is no difference” (Hua, ln 215).</p>

Sub-Theme C	Examples
<p>There are some differences in my relationships with grandmother and grandfather.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 2/6 in all, 2/3 in girls]</p>	<p>“There are differences. I have a very intimate relationship with my grandmother. I act in an intimate and charming manner in front of her, just as in front of my mother. But I don’t do this to my grandfather. They make me feel that female is water, male is mountain. I feel their difference is just like the difference between my mother and father” (Fang, ln 237-241).</p>

	<p>“There are some differences in my relationships with my grandmothers and grandfathers. Because my grandmothers dote on me very much because I am the next next generation. I can describe it as satisfying me with everything. But my grandfathers, in my impression, they act like a big parent of the family” (Hong, ln 257-260).</p> <p>“My grandfather still loves me very much. But he might not care about a lot of things about me. He may praise me often. He shows his love more in this way” (Hong, ln 262-264).</p>
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#### Theme 5: The Benefit of Having a Sibling

Sub-Theme A	Examples
<p>Although my life wouldn't change a lot with a sibling, I think having a sibling would bring me benefits.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“But if I had a brother or a sister, I think I would be happy too. Because I feel it would be a VERY, VERY BIG enjoyment to have a person with the same age to live together with me. It would be very convenient for me to exchange ideas with him/her in lots of areas” (Hong, ln 17-20).</p> <p>“I think if I had a sibling, most of things in my life would still</p>

	<p>be the same. I would still be the same me” (Hong, ln 32-33).</p> <p>“It would be the same as my current life. I think maybe there are some things more. [That a sibling would add.] But it should be the same as usual, no big changes. I don’t think having a sibling would affect me” (Wei, ln 30-32).</p> <p>“I feel in my situation, I myself am a separate individual. I want to go my own way in life. It has nothing to do with others. Of course it will be related – As long as I go well, of course it is good to everybody. So this point would not be changed. Secondly, I feel my filial piety to my parents, in this area, should not be less. This is the second point. Then, other things should not change as well. Of course relationships with peers, this would not...basically would not change. Material conditions would not change too much” (Lin, ln 22-28).</p> <p>“But maybe I would have more understanding about sharing things. Since it is still the same as my current life, I feel I would still be very happy” (Hong, ln 33-34).</p>
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“Also I think I would have a more perfect psychological status if I had a sibling. All current only children have an issue of self-centeredness. I think I would be better in this area if I had a sibling. Although I don’t know, because I have never had such an experience of having a sibling, my life would be happier than now in my imagination, if I had a sibling. Because from the people around, or from the novels, TV shows, I always feel that life would be more colourful with a sibling...” (Hong, ln 42-48).

“In addition, a brother or sister can make me learn more from life experiences, for example, I would learn how to take care of others. That’s the most important. Also I would learn how to return an other’s love while I am being loved. I think in this way: If I had a younger sister, then I would be able to care for her” (Fang, ln 17-21).

“In this way, I can learn very well about how to consider others. Also I feel that if I had a younger sister, my personality would be fuller, because I would have learned to consider and care for others” (Fang, ln 30-32).

“Would be different? Just as I said before, I think my personality would be fuller” (Fang, ln 40).

“The reason I think there might be some things more is because first of all, one more family member would bring more interesting things, or we can exchange more ideas. Then family life would be more colourful” (Wei, ln 34-36).

“Ah...I might be...I should...be a little better, probably in communication” (Yan, ln 103).

“But I feel that my spiritual life might be better. At least you have a brother to talk to about your innermost thoughts and feelings, and also your own things, because to you, he is a very close person” (Hua, ln 11-14).

“I always feel that I’m a person of sensibility. If I had a brother or sister at home, probably the obstacles in my life would be reduced by communication with him/her in daily life. I think annoyance would be reduced by half, happiness

	would be doubled and increased and pressures would be reduced in terms of spiritual life” (Hua, ln 22-25).
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Sub-Theme B	Examples
<p>My pressures would be reduced with a sibling.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“I think it would be different. It depends on my sibling’s status. If he/she didn’t do well at academic work, then my parents would shift their expectation to me and think that I should be better. If my sibling already did very well at academic work, then I would not make them care about me too much. {Yes, they would put less expectation on me}” (Fang, ln 183-187).</p> <p>“If I had a brother or a sister, I feel that if my brother’s academic performance was better than mine, then my father’s requirements of him would be higher” (Lin, ln 99-100).</p> <p>“If I had a brother and his academic performance was better than mine, then of course my father should emphasize more on his cultivation. But if my academic work was better than his, the effect would be the same” (Lin, ln 108-111).</p>

	<p>“Probably I would have less pressure, because all their hopes wouldn’t be placed on me” (Yan, ln 217-218).</p> <p>“The common status is: if there are two children, and if the elder brother doesn’t do well, then they would count on the younger one. However, I feel that they don’t give me any pressure, at least visible pressure” (Hua, ln 150-153).</p> <p>“If my sibling was better than me, then they would give up on me. I would be on my own. If he/she was not as good as I was, then for sure, the other one could not fail. I feel that they would pay more attention on me in this case” (Hua, ln 299-301).</p> <p>“Probably my pressures would be reduced, because my parents might divert their attention to my sibling” (Yan, ln 312-313).</p> <p>“If I had a brother or sister, then during my examination period, I definitely would share my stress with him/her instead of passing this tension on to my parents” (Hong, ln 27-28).</p>
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	<p>“If I had a brother or sister, I think my pressure would be less. Because he/she could share my pressures together with me” (Hong, ln 279-280).</p> <p>“If I had a brother or sister, I would share my pressure with him/her. I feel a sibling might help share my pressures with me, or communication and discussion with my sibling might be quite beneficial to ease my pressures psychologically” (Hong, ln 300-303).</p> <p>“If I had a sibling, I would play sports together with him / her. Maybe the effect would be better” (Wei, ln 224-225).</p>
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Sub-Theme C	Examples
<p>I wish I had an older brother.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 2/6 in all, 2/3 in girls]</p>	<p>“In fact I always want to have a brother. Because I feel that girls all hope to be protected. If I had an elder brother, I would go to school and go back home together with him. Then if I was bullied at school, I would tell him” (Yan, ln 14-16).</p> <p>“For example, I always wanted to have an older brother”</p>



	<p>(Hong, ln 9).</p> <p>“Actually, I prefer to have an older brother. Girls all think so.</p> <p>[Due to social and cultural influences, most of Chinese female only children would like to have an elder brother if they could have a sibling]” (Hong, ln 105-107).</p>
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Sub-Theme D	Examples
<p>If I had a younger sibling, I would take care of him or her.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 4/6]</p>	<p>“If this brother or sister, if I was an elder brother, then I would take care of my younger brother or sister very much.</p> <p>Particularly if they were much younger than me, I would treat him/her as my own child” (Lin, ln 16-18).</p> <p>“If she was my own younger sister, I think I would care for her more. I should contain her when she makes a mistake” (Fang, ln 27-28).</p> <p>“Because my younger sister is weaker than me, so she might need more love” (Fang, ln 37-38).</p> <p>“Then if I had a younger sibling, actually, it would be OK as</p>

	<p>well. Because I feel that I could take care of him/her. It should be a happy thing as well” (Yan, ln 19-21).</p> <p>“If I had a younger brother or sister, I would feel that I had one more responsibility on my shoulders” (Hua, ln 44-45).</p>
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#### Theme 6: Pressures Related to Academics, Exams, and Expectations

Sub-Theme A	Examples
<p>My pressures are from the academic area.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>“Yes, I’ve experienced pressures. For example, I felt pressure before the Senior High School Entrance Examination, because the students who can get an offer from the top high school in my district are few..... In addition, I felt pressure on examinations. Because I know I can not do poorly on the examinations, after all, we all have to face the final University Entrance Examination in the near future. This is regarded as an important gate in our life. My pressure mainly lies in this area” (Hong, ln 271-277).</p> <p>“My main pressure is the busy academic work. Then comes the worry about my future.....I feel big pressure from that. I</p>

	<p>don't have pressure from peers. They have the same pressures as mine and are all busy studying. I feel the main conflict currently lies in the academic area" (Wei, ln 202-207).</p> <p>"The pressures I experienced were in the period to prepare for the Senior High School Entrance Examination" (Fang, ln 257-258).</p> <p>"I had big pressures and was very tired mainly psychologically. All my pressures were focused on the Entrance Examination" (Fang, ln 268-270).</p> <p>"Pressure...is...academic study" (Yan, ln 302).</p>
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Sub-Theme B	Examples
<p>If the Entrance Examination System was changed, my pressures would be reduced.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 5/6]</p>	<p>"I think the change of current Chinese educational system will reduce my pressures. I don't think it's necessary for my parents to change, because their reaction is a result of this system" (Wei, ln 237-239).</p> <p>"I think if there was not such a big pressure on the entrance to</p>

higher education, it would be better. I think the current situation of the Entrance Examination causes the whole generation, over the course of a long time, to face the pressure of entrance to higher education. [there are multiple entrance examinations required for higher education.]..." (Hong, In 320-324).

"The social pressures. Family...I think my family gives me pressure just because of social pressures. The examination system is, in fact, the social competition. I mean the pressures from competition. I know the competition is rigorous for our generation" (Fang, In 321-324).

"If there was no University Entrance Examination. [smile] Then...maybe I didn't need to take a mathematics exam any more or something else, or it would be OK if the curriculum could be a little simpler, or they were willing to send me abroad to study. [smile]" (Yan, In 342-345).

"Yes, there is. In terms of the educational system, I feel that the system of University Entrance Examinations...My

	<p>personal feelings is probably the basic educational curriculum should be tested, but some contents are too profound for us to learn. My views might be a little extreme” (Lin, ln 387-390).</p>
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Sub-Theme C	Examples
<p>My pressures are from my parents’ expectations of my academic achievement.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 4/6]</p>	<p>“My father gives me lots of pressures and high requirements, all in academic study” (Lin, ln 348-349).</p> <p>“This leads to the latter issue, that is, some of the pressures we are now facing are from our parents. The most common situation is they require your academic performance to reach a certain level. This is the main pressure. I should say, I don’t have pressures in other areas” (Wei, ln 12-15).</p> <p>“An only child is the only hope of parents, so parents are very strict with them for this reason. For example, they require the child not to make mistakes, and require the child to have a better life in the future than others. Therefore, parents are particularly strict” (Fang, ln 6-9).</p> <p>“In addition, my mother told me definitely that my target was</p>

	<p>either this top senior high school or that top senior high school. Then she also raised some other top senior high schools as examples. She said it would be best if you could get in. I felt much pressure at that time” (Fang, ln 261-265).</p> <p>“Therefore as a boy, my family pays huge attention to me. All my parents’ energy is spent on me. This limits my extra-curriculum activities on one side, and on the other side, I feel big pressures” (Lin, ln 8-10).</p> <p>“Both my parents and my grandparents do everything with a focus on me. This gives me big pressures” (Lin, ln 12-13).</p> <p>“My father is highly demanding and very strict with me” (Lin, ln 62).</p> <p>“Then the whole family’s hope is that I could attend a top university. So my father’s requirement to me is EXTREMELY, EXTREMELY HIGH. His intention is to hope that I can be good in every area, and I’d better become outstanding later” (Lin, ln 105-108).</p>
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## Theme 7: Coping With Pressures

Sub-Theme A	Examples
<p>My coping with pressure is to distract myself from it.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 4/6]</p>	<p>“When I have pressure, I don’t want to tell my parents, because they might be...might be worried about me. I do some other things to distract myself from the pressure. For example, listen to music or watch a movie, or go out for a walk” (Hong, ln 283-285).</p> <p>“Sports can ease my pressures. I do not think of my pressures when I am doing sports, for example, play basketball and billiards. Because I am in a good mood when I do sports, I do not feel any pressure at that time” (Wei, ln 218-220).</p> <p>“I confide to my peers. Because I feel that in this key moment, I should discuss more with persons of my same age, {I mean persons who have the same problem}. I think I feel much better in this way. Because somebody has the same problem as me, so I can discuss it with them. Sometimes I go for a walk by myself. I feel quite relaxed this way. I take a walk and have some soft drinks, then 15 minutes later I go back to classroom</p>

	<p>to continue my work” (Fang, ln 281-286).</p> <p>“My hard working. I feel that my pressures will be gone if my academic performance is good. In terms of my mood, I listen to music. Then...or do academic exercises. When I’m doing exercises, I forget lots of other things” (Yan, ln 316-318).</p>
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Sub-Theme B	Examples
<p>I conquer my pressures.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 3/6]</p>	<p>“I think I belong to the group of persons who want to conquer the pressure. When I’m confronted with a problem, I will be quiet to think it over. For example, I lie in the bed and think what kind of case this problem puts me in. If I must conquer it, furthermore, if it is related to my future, so I must conquer. Then I think of some good ways to conquer it” (Fang, ln 286-291).</p> <p>“I won’t dodge the pressure, but I also will not care about it too much. That means I try my best to keep a calm mind and peaceful heart when dealing with these pressures. I feel that method is effective. I feel how to cope with pressure really depends on myself, that is: to adjust your mood and</p>



	<p>expectations as well. Pressure is external, whereas internal control by myself is mainly what's important" (Hong, In 288-293).</p> <p>"My coping method is: achieve good academic performance. This is the first method. Second is...this is...confidence. Having pressure before doing things is because you are afraid of failure. Even if I failed in this thing, I won't regret" (Lin, In 357-359).</p>
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Sub-Theme C	Examples
<p>I dodge my pressures.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 3/6]</p>	<p>"I think I like to dodge my pressure because I don't want to think about it" (Wei, In 220-221).</p> <p>"I should say that I dodge my pressures" (Yan, In 318-319).</p> <p>"I'm very busy and don't have much time left. So I don't think about pressure" (Hua, In 274-275).</p>

Sub-Theme D	Examples
<p>My pressures are reduced by my peers' encouragement and advice.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 3/6 in all, 3/3 in boys]</p>	<p>"There are several of my best friends who know my pressures. But they just think that I have the capability to conquer the pressure. Therefore, they give me much confidence by telling me that I am able to do these things well" (Lin, ln 375-377).</p> <p>"My peers give me some advice about the learning methods" (Wei, ln 232).</p> <p>"For example, one of my friends said: It's not a big deal. Many peers all had this. He will be...I mean proud of you. I feel that it is good to have such a friend. When you have problem, he will come to ease it" (Hua, ln 306-308).</p>

Sub-Theme E	Examples
<p>My parents help to ease my pressures.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 3/6]</p>	<p>"Sometimes they will...For example, sometimes when I am doing my homework earnestly, my mother will come over and ask me to take a rest. Then I will go out with her for a walk. She will help me not think of anything and not think about the academic work. She says that we can just take a walk for you to relax. She solves my pressures in this way. Then she will</p>

	<p>chat with me about some unrelated things to relax me. We will buy some snacks to eat or stroll in some small stores” (Fang, In 300-305).</p> <p>“Basically they don’t keep talking about it. When I feel very tired, they let me relax, and so on” (Yan, In 328-329).</p> <p>“When I spent much time in homework already, my mother said: Take it easy and stop for a while. Just go out for a walk. Although just for a short time, I could relax for a while” (Hua, In 294-296).</p> <p>“They ask me to treat my pressures more objectively or with a peaceful heart, instead of caring about it too much. They told me how to confront pressures and failures and how to regard pressures as my motivation” (Hong, In 305-307).</p> <p>“They think I should face my pressures, because that is life” (Wei, In 227).</p>
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Sub-Theme F	Examples
<p>My pressures are reduced by knowing that my peers have the same pressures.</p> <p>[Representativeness: 2/6 in all, 2/3 in girls]</p>	<p>“My peers are just like my brothers and sisters with the same trouble and tribulations. Sometimes they sigh with emotion, sigh for the current situations. Such as: so much homework, what a heavy schoolbag, so many quizzes and exams.</p> <p>Actually, sighing with emotion together with peers relaxes a lot, although the pressures are not really solved. However, I feel relaxed psychologically due to a sense of group identification” (Fang, ln 314-319).</p> <p>“In fact, everyone is different. Actually, if I talk to them about my pressure, they will just comfort me. But there is no substantive help. However, I feel...how to say, because they all have pressures, so it would be impossible for them to do this, this for you. But I feel there is kind of, I mean...feeling of sharing comforts and hardships together. I mean that all of us have the same “illness”. So I will...feel better, because I feel that they are around me” (Yan, ln 335-340).</p>