

A whole new world, a 'free' world for Chinese teenagers?

Qiong Xu
University of Worcester
xuqiongsh@yahoo.co.uk



Structure of the topic

- Mapping the Chinese context
- Research questions
- Research Design
- Theoretical framework
- Data Analysis

Let's implement late marriage and one child policy for revolution



Time has changed

**Man and women
are the same**



Parents' generation



'... an individual's life course was clear and standard, and conditioned by the institutional constraints. The political labelling of being from either a good class or a bad class determined the individual's political career, the birth place prescribed the individual's status as an urban or rural resident, and the local leadership made decisions about to which work unit and type of work the individual would be assigned. In terms of everyday life, there were politically and ideologically charged standards about what to wear, whom to date, when to get married, how to raise children, and so forth'. (p. 502)

The 1990s generation



Young people in contemporary Chinese cities like Shanghai have moved to a modern lifestyle which is not very different from that in Western countries. Ideas from the West that arrive with globalization may affect the attitudes of young Chinese to themselves.

How do girls see themselves as teenagers in contemporary Chinese society?

- *1. what do they think of Chinese values such as obeying parents?*
- *2. Going through their adolescence: appearance, romantic relationships*

Research Design

- 4 Focus groups
- Questionnaire survey : 773 girls and 598 fathers
 - 83.9% girls were only- child (45.7% girls from outside shanghai had siblings)
 - 14.8% fathers had non-Shanghai Hukou
- Interviews: 8 pairs of f-d were interviewed individually and 1 girl - 17 in total

Theoretical framework

- Individualisation (Beck 1992, Giddens 1991)

the duration of adolescence being stretched and the dividing line between childhood and adulthood becoming harder to define

young people's pathways are no longer seen as fixed, due to changes in the labour market, education and family relations

individuals in society are now free from normative constraints such as social class and gender, which are two of the greatest changes in modern society

- Criticism

iChina?

- iChina: the rise of the individual in modern Chinese Society

individualisation in China is a situation mixed with pre-modern, modern and late modern, which is 'characterized by the management of the party-state and the absence of cultural democracy, the absence of a welfare state regime, and the absence of classic individualism and political liberalism' ([Yan, 2010, p. 510](#)).

- Collectivism

Family obligation, group expectations, authority figures

Being a rebellious teenager?

- Authority figures should be challenged if they are wrong
- *A child should have her own personality, if you only follow what your parents say, I think when you join the society in the future, you will only learn how to obey your boss (Girl Liu).*
- *Arguments with mothers and fathers*
60.9% having no argument with their fathers in the last week
48.2% having no arguments in the past week with their mothers.
6.9% and 6.0% had arguments more than three times a week with their fathers and mothers.
- *Good daughters and bad daughters*
'do not make parents worry', 'do not make trouble for parents', 'do not interfere with parents' things', 'do not rebel', 'respect parents', 'fulfil parents' wishes' and 'obey parents'

Changes going through adolescence: appearance

- ‘I think I am getting pretty now and I have definitely become more sensitive’. (Girl Shen)
- ‘Nowadays, according to my own observation, most of the girls in my class like dressing up and they care a lot about their appearances. But maybe because it is during adolescence, therefore, they are very rebellious’
- *Happy with own appearance*

Happy with own body	Strongly disagree	Mostly disagree	Generally agree	Mostly agree	Strongly agree
Age 13-14	3.3%	13.7%	53.5%	16.7%	12.8%
Age 16-17	1.3%	20.7%	63.1%	10.0%	4.9%

Changes going through adolescence: appearance

- *The importance of natural beauty*

Being deliberately glamorous is against the traditional Chinese idea of beauty, which is supposed to be 'natural beauty'

B: Sometimes I see Zhang [another girl in her class]

A: It makes me want to vomit when I see her so ostentatious.

B: Not only ostentatious, she just looks like bewitching evil.

A: Yes, when we go out to do morning exercises, she has holes in her ears.

Then she wears earrings. Our class teacher saw it and said to her, you are like a gangster, take them out. Then she took them out, but she put them back soon after, because because

A: She is very rebellious now.

[Girl Wang whose father had senior high school degree and worked in a restaurant, and her friend, both younger group]

Romantic relationships during adolescence

- The right time to have a boyfriend?
- I feel like I won't fall in love at least during secondary school. I have just set foot in society. We are not mature. I think it must be very painful to fall in love. I think maybe when we get to university. Year One or Year Two will be better' [Girl Shen, senior high school]
- I just feel that they [classmates who were dating] are not serious, Umm... The relationship is just a little bit deeper than good friends'
[Girl Zhan, junior high school]

Giving up or fighting for more freedom

- Girl Nina: being obedient serves as a way to fulfill filial duty to parents.
- *'The most important thing for being a good daughter is to be xiao, and I think xiao is the same thing as listening to parents' words'.*
- *Not going out with friends if boys present, at back home on time*
- *Girl Mei: addicted to the internet, run away from home, meeting strangers online...*

Discussion

