

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

**Multi-kids Family Sleeping Arrangements  
and Cultural Values Among Contemporary  
Chinese Generations' Parenting Practices**

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## Introduction

Not only the western world claims the parents are their children's first and best teachers. Across mountains and oceans, eastern countries like China also tightly connect children's developmental accomplishment to their parents' actions. According to an old Chinese proverb, “养不教父之过” (it is father's fault if his children are not educated). Parenting practice is such a top concern for young parents in many sociocultural contexts.

Although both western and eastern countries recognize the importance of parenting, different cultural backgrounds hold different values, resulting in different ways of parentings. Pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton noticed a conflict between sleeping practice guidelines from his own culture and Japanese families' practices (Brazelton 1990). From the western view, which Brazelton holds, co-sleeping between parents and kids is unhealthy for kids' mental development and impedes their independence. From Japanese culture, it is normal for kids to co-sleep with their parents until adulthood even when multi-sleeping space is available. Japanese reports note that co-sleeping is a traditional way of forming cohesion between family members (Shweder and Jenson et al 2003). Thus, different cultural backgrounds would dictate different sleeping patterns, and those different practices reveal different meanings and values within the specific sociocultural environments.

Anthropologist Richard Shweder (2003) separately conducted a study about sleeping arrangements in Anglo-American families located in Hyde Park and Hindu families located in Orissa. Shweder et al (2003) created a scenario of multiple kids families with mixed genders (Father, Mother, Daughter of age 14, Daughter of age 3, 15-year-old son, 11-year-old son, and 8-year-old son) and asked the participants to pick their most satisfied and least acceptable options based on room availability from 1 room to 7 rooms. There are 877 permutations and

combinations of this study. The study confirmed that parenting practices are highly sensitive and determined by cultural traditions and values.

In recent years, Shimizu, et al (2014). has conducted a similar topic of research about sleeping arrangements that focused on the social change that has happened in the past decades in Japan. Author used two terminologies from German Sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies to analyze the social changes in Japan. Tonnies categorized social relationships into two dichotomous types: Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. Weber (1978) offered clear definitions of these two terms in his book *Economy and Society* that Gemeinschaft refers to groups in which individuals' interests need to take into account the needs of the group. Weber marked it as “unity of will” that members are regulated by shared common beliefs to respect the group at large. In contrast, Gesellschaft refers to “a gathered group in which associations never take precedence over the interests of the individual (Weber, 1978).” Shimizu, et al (2014) conducted the study from a mother’s perspective due to the tradition in Japan that mothers are responsible for co-sleeping with their kids. However, the study figured out that, with urbanization and the increasing number of working mothers, mothers encountered many conflicts in the contemporary Gesellschaft social environments and the traditional beliefs. This study offers insights into the ways shifting socio-economic status and social reformation have an impact on family structures and cultural values. China shares similarities with Japan both in cultural values and social development.

Sleeping arrangement patterns in China must be understood in the context of the nation’s social policies. China implemented the One-Child policy from 1980-2016 to control the rapid growth of population to balance the limited social resources. Based on the census data, the policy effectively slows down the population growth. Indeed, the new situation of gaining and lack of labor made China scrap this restriction in 2016. Without the One Child Policy, the size of

the families in the current generation may extend to multi-kid families. Thus, crafting a study of this new form of family structure is necessary for future studies of China's social development.

More importantly, because this policy shift has just happened within two years, there are not many discussions about this trend in academia. Also, mainstream studies about the one-child policy mostly focus on evaluating the impact on children or adolescents. There is a lack of study on being an only child from adult perspectives. Thus, my research can fill the gap within this field and help to appeal for more public attention to this group.

This paper focuses on a unique cohort in history—Chinese young parents who were the only child in their families and now are building their own multi-kids families after the government abrogated the One Child Policy. According to Mannheim (1952), a “social cohort” often develops a strong generational identity based on its shared social experience in a particular social-historical circumstance (particularly notable historical events closely related to the cohort) during adolescence years. As a major historical mark in China, the One-Child Policy has shaped generational characteristics of today's youth. This policy, combined with the country's rapid economic growth, social changes, and cultural reforms, has a massive impact on the life course of the young generation. Generations raised under the One-Child Policy provide rich social science resources due to the mandatory nature, mass-scale, and limited time frame of the policy. What are some of the parenting strategies of generations who were born in the period of One Child Policy and are growing into fathers and mothers now? Would their childhood experience as the only child in their family impact their parenting style? How would they assign their multi-gender kids to different rooms when the room availability is limited?

In order to study these questions, this paper includes five sections. In the first, I offer an overview of the One Child Policy by using a historical perspective to explain the derivation,

development, changes, and the decision of cancellation. The second section includes some analysis and current studies about family structures in China. The third section offers a literature review on sleeping arrangement studies that were conducted in other countries. In the fourth section, I discuss the methodology of this study and the results. Finally, the fifth section contains analysis and findings from this study.

### **Section 1: Historical Review of China's population since 1949 and the Family Planning Policy**

I will briefly describe China's population demographics based on the World Bank report and 7 issues of the National Population Census of the People's Republic of China. Data sources come from the National Bureau of Statistics.

Prior to 1949, after years of wars and a mess of documentation in government agencies, there was not clear data on total population. An article written by Mao Zedong, "The Bankruptcy of the Idealistic View of History (1949)," was exemplary of attitudes towards China's population in the first three decades of the regime. Mao concluded, "Among all things in the world, people are the most precious. Under the leadership of the Communist Party, as long as there are people, any miracle in the world can be created..." However, this conclusion was made based on very vague estimation.

The first census took place in 1953. The results announced the following year greatly exceeded Mao's expectation of a population of 470 million. The official summaries listed the total population of Mainland China as 582,603,417. Thus, in 1957, Mao first proposed that "human beings should control themselves and realize planned births," and later demanded more clearly that "except in ethnic minority areas, the densely populated areas need to promote

planned birth control.” However, in the next year, Mao overturned his idea. In 1958, Mao announced a confident claim that “A billion people are not afraid.” Mao’s swinging attitude on population hindered opportunities for establishing a coherent population policy and guidance. In 1964, China conducted the second census and got the number reported as 694,581,759. When Mao died in 1976, China’s total population had grown to 930 million, according to the World Bank. This huge population led the government to immediately adopt population management attempts to coordinate the limited social resources and population.

Soon after Mao Zedong’s death, family planning policies and propaganda were introduced. Eyferth (2004) analyzed the slogan culture in rural areas. Eyferth pointed out the slogans at that time were: “one is not enough, three are too many, two are just all right.” and “晚，稀，少: later, longer, fewer”: later marriage, longer intervals between children, and fewer children (U.S. National Library of Medicine). The rapid growth of population alarmed the pragmatic leader Deng Xiaoping. Then, a voluntary program was announced in late 1978 to encourage parents to have fewer children.

The third Census showed that such slogans had little impact on the overall demographics. The census found the total population of Mainland China in 1980 as 1,008,180,738. This led to stricter policy implemented and required immediate action. In 1981, the Family Planning Commission was founded and One Child Policy started nationwide that serves the purpose of reducing the growth rate of China’s enormous population.

Since 1990, according to the national conference decision, a national census has been carried out every ten years. According to the fourth census in 1990, there were 56 ethnic nationalities with a total population of 1,133 billion. Ten years later, In 2000, the fifth census showed the total population was calculated as 1,295,330,000. The census also covered

population growth, number of households, sex, age, ethnicity, educational attainment, and urban and rural population. Compared with the 2000's census, the sixth census in 2010 found the total population of Mainland China to be 1,339,724,852 persons, an increase of 73,899,804 persons from the previous census conducted in 2000.

Chinese academics warn the country's leaders that there could be many crises if the central government insists on a family planning policy. The *Report of China's Population and Labor no. 19* (commonly called "the green book") shows the shrinking of population foresees the decline in population, aging, economic and even political crisis in the near future. This report includes data from both the Census and the prediction from the United Nations (2018). "16.60% of the population was aged 0–14, 70.14% was aged 15–59, and 13.26% were aged 60 or over. This represented a decrease of 6.29% in the share of the population in the youngest age group, and increases of 3.36% and 2.93% for the 15-59 and 60+ shares, respectively." The decline in the birthrate, along with an increase in life expectancy in the older population, means there will soon be too few workers to support an enormous and aging population.

Government soon began to ease the One Child Policy. In 2014, the Chinese government eased the one-child policy, permitting couples nationwide to have two children if one of the spouses is an only child. In October 2015, China scrapped the one-child policy announcing that all married couples would be allowed to have two children, in a bid to reverse the rapid aging of the labor force. This easing brought immediate positive outcomes reflected on the data gathered in next year. In 2016, there were 17.9 million newborn babies which is an increase of 1.3 million over the previous year, but only half of what was expected by policy decision makers. In 2017, the birth rate fell to 17.2 million, far below the official forecast of more than 20 million (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2010). The 2020 census showed the population of Mainland China

was 1,411,778,724 as of 1 November 2020. This seventh census showed an improvement of balanced gender ratio. From the seventh census, the male-to-female ratio reached a new record low of 105.07. This is the most balanced gender ratio since the People's Republic of China began conducting censuses in 1953 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020).

The Politburo, the Communist Party's top decision-making commission, announced that ending the two-child policy would allow all Chinese couples to have three children to counter the declining birthrate. Based on the latest census data, there were just 12 million births in 2019. This led to the birth rate dropping to the lowest number since 1961. In 2021, the government started to propagate to the young generation that having up to three kids is encouraged and desirable. Based on *the Report of China's Population and Labor No. 21* (2020), the new policy will "help improve our country's population structure and help implement a national strategy to actively respond to the aging population." Each policy takes time to proceed and the results are still hard to predict. But given this policy shift, there is a foreseeable family structure reformation in China.

## **Section 2. Current Family Structure Trend in China**

China has a long history with agriculture. Ancient Chinese began farming rice over 9,000 years ago. Farming made life easier because people no longer had to travel to hunt animals, but could grow their food where they lived. This helped China to form a collective and big family. Under this preference of collective culture, a family model of “四世同堂” (four generations living together) means elders traditionally live together with their children were an ideal family structure. This tradition was maintained even after the founding of CCP. In the early PRC time, CCP came up



with a People's Commune movement in 1958. From Jacoby & Cheng's explanation, Communes were the largest collective units. Communes contained many smaller units called production brigades and production teams. The communes had governmental, political, and economic functions during the Cultural Revolution. Sociologists Fei Xiaotong (1998) states "the basic group in the countryside is the unit, an extended family. This group owns common property, and has a common budget, and they live a common life through the division of labor." Thus, the people's commune was commonly known for "同吃, 同住, 同劳动" (people collectivizing living and working practices, especially during the Great Leap Forward) meaning in rural area, people live together, eat together, and work together. This collective living style corresponds to the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies's definition of *Gemeinschaft* and was viewed as a practice of communism.

However, since the One Child Policy was implemented for three decades, the social environment has changed and has created a unique family structure. Wen Liu (2006) explains this unique family formation as the so-called "Four-Two-One Structure", that is, four grandparents, two parents, and one child. Liu's article used American sociologist William Goode's explanation of family formation. Goode (1963) believes that under the influence of industrialization, other parts of the world would embrace conjugal families formed by strong marital bonds. Goode argues "whether the economic system expands through industrialization, [...] extended kinship ties weaken, lineage patterns dissolve, and a trend toward some form of the conjugal system generally begins to appear – that is, the nuclear family becomes a more independent kinship unit." (p. 6). The report from the latest Census in 2020 confirms Goode's hypothesis. The results of the seventh Census in 2020 show that the average household size in China is 2.62 people living together in the same house. Even after years of cancellation of the

One Child policy, the size of the average household remains low. In the 2010 Census, the average household size was 2.10, which is equivalent to a decrease of nearly 0.5 per household (Zhang & Wang, 2022). This decreased data indicates the trend of decreasing in intergenerational households which contains more than two generations living in the same household. The tradition of collective families is no longer common in current Chinese society. With the spreading of Two-Child Policy and now change to the Up to Three-Child policy. The government hopes to see increases in family size, changes in family structure, and expanded family relationships (Zhang & Wang, 2022).

### **Section 3 Literature Review on Sleeping Arrangement**

Dr. Shweder, who is the author of *The Big Three of Morality* (1997) analyzed prior studies of sleeping patterns in different sociocultural environments and concluded that there were many factors that affected the decision-making process of the sleeping arrangements. First, different sleeping practices were shown in different ethnic groups and class groups even in the same country. Second, external living environment factors influenced the sleeping practice. For example, Whiting (1964) pointed out that climate might lead to co-sleeping to serve the purpose of warmth. Third, there was not sufficient evidence to suggest that sleeping patterns have long-term effects on individual psychological functioning. Shweder concluded there were enough studies to prove that different sleeping patterns existed in different cultures, and that those patterns were shaped and could reflect different cultural meanings within different cultures.

Dr. Shweder analyzed prior studies of sleeping patterns in different sociocultural environments and concluded that there are many factors that affect the decision-making process of who sleeps by whom. First, different sleeping practices are shown in different ethnic groups

and class groups even in the same country. Litt (1981) reported the routine parent-child co-sleeping in African-American families and Abbott (1992) studied the pattern of co-sleeping in blue-collar families. Second, external living environment factors influence the sleeping practice. For example, Whiting (1964) pointed out the climate may lead to co-sleeping to serve the purpose of warmth. Third, there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that either sleeping patterns have long-term effects on individual psychological functioning. Moreover, there are enough studies to prove that different sleeping patterns exist in different cultures, and those patterns shape and reflect different cultural meanings within different cultures. However, there is no “locked-in” single fixed pattern in any particular household. The moral order of cultures “constrain but do not determine” (Shweder 2003) the practical sleeping practices.

Shweder went into further discussion on cultural values and sleeping patterns. In the book *Who Sleeps by Whom* (Shweder et al. 2013), authors interpreted sleeping arrangement as a symbolic action to express and realize the “morality, cultural practices, and ethno-psychological knowledge, and personality development.” Kinship status in sleeping arrangement preference reflects the cultural values of moral goods and taboos. The moral orders in specific cultural backgrounds lead to different preferences when deciding who will share the bed with whom. Authors compared and analyzed Oriya families’ and American families’ co-sleeping options, revealing different moral goods in different cultural meaning systems that lead to different preferred arrangement options.

Based on Anglo-American families’ results, the revealed values are incest avoidance, the sacred couple and autonomy. From Hindu families, principle of incest avoidance, protection of the vulnerable, female chastity anxiety, and respect for hierarchy appeared. A noticeable conclusion is the avoidance of incest seems to be the principle shared with different cultures.

Other values may vary from culture to culture. Also, authors argued even though some choices were by different cultures, the attributions and logics may be different.

#### **Section 4 Methodology**

In order to find some unique values the current Chinese generation of young parents have put in their parenting practice on sleeping arrangement, I used mixed-methods with explanatory sequential design to study this timely topic. The study combines quantitative data and qualitative data. In phase one, I started with a sleeping arrangement option survey that was used in Dr. Shweder's study of Hindu families and western cultural families (in Hyde Park, Chicago). After I gained permission from Dr. Shweder, I translated his questionnaire to simplified Chinese. In phase two, I conducted interviews with selected participants to have one-on-one interviews. The main purpose of interviews is to look for using their response to interpret their sleeping arrangements option they made earlier in the survey questionnaire.

Ideally my participants' age range should be around 25 - 35, born in the year after the Chinese government enforced the One Child Policy, and having built their own family with interests to have more kids in the future. Although the one child policy was implemented for more than thirty years and impacted more than three generations, my research population is still limited.

After negotiating with local private school's admission offices, I got permission to attend their school events and introduce my project with parents. I made two presentations on school events and with teacher's assistance, I spread my survey to two class-based WeChat groups. I recruited 50 people to participate in the sleeping arrangement questionnaire. I sent the link of my questionnaire via WeChat, and gathered full responses four weeks after my presentations. One

participant withdrew the result later due to personal reasons. There were a total of 49 survey questionnaires collected and 24 fully completed responses on arrangement tasks. The arrangement task asks participants to pick their favorite/ least favorite options for sleeping arrangement under restricted room availability conditions. The independent variable is the room availability and the dependent variable is the arrange option. Then, all 49 participants responses to the survey questions of parenting pattern:

- Who has more involvement in the actual process of direct parenting practice during the child's 0-3 years of life?
- Who has more involvement in the actual process of direct parenting practice during the child's 4-12 years of life?
- Who has more involvement in the actual process of direct parenting practice during the child's 13-18 years of life?

After I compared the quantitative data with the existing data from Shweder's study, I came up with 4 open-ended survey questions regarding One Child Policy. 3 married couples, 6 participants in total, have joined the follow-up interviews. I chose 3 couples who were born between the years of One Child Policy effective, they grow up as the only child in their families, and after they married, upon the interview time, they have already had 2 mixed-gendered kids (means one kid is biologically identified as a boy, and one kid is biologically identified as a girl). The interviews were conducted via one on one phone call and was recorded by hand note taking. Each couple was interviewed separately and their answers wouldn't be shared with their spouse. I anonymized all of the informants from the data report and created pseudonyms to represent the interviewees in following data interpretations.

My interview questions includes:

- Are there any norms/ values as ground lines that guide you to make decisions when arranging the kids to different bedrooms during our survey questionnaire?
- As an only child, how did you feel about having siblings?
- From your perspective, what do you think is the biggest difference between the way you choose to raise your children and your parents raising you?
- What do you think is the biggest characteristic and uniqueness of the one-child generation as new parents?

Those questions offered me a frame of semi-structured interview. I dive deeper with participants based on their answers to find out their values and norms on sleeping arrangements. All the interviews were conducted by Chinese, and after I took notes from the interviews I translated them to English. The survey has both an English version and Chinese version on each question.

## **Section 5 Results**

### **Demographic**

There were a total 50 responses from my original posts on platforms. After being evaluated and filtered, there were a total of 24 responses included in this study. All 24 participants are qualified as the only child in their families, grow up without siblings, and have more than two kids or plan to have more than 2 kids. The mode of the age group is between 1981 to 1994. 42% are male, 58% are female. These 24 responses are parents from two private schools, one located in Zhengzhou (13), and one is located in Beijing(11). Because my

recruitments happened in private schools with higher than public school's tuition fees, I can infer my participants mostly come from upper-middle class.

### Survey results

Here are the results about logically possible solutions from my informants:

Room Constraint	Favored splits	Frequency of selection
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● (M, D14, D03)/ (F, S15, S11, S08)</li> <li>● (D14, D03)/ (F, M, S15, S11, S08)</li> <li>● (F, M, D03, D14)/ (S15, S11,S08)</li> <li>● (M, F)/ (D14, D03, S15, S11, S08)</li> <li>● (F, M)/ (D14, D03)/ (S15, S11, S08) in this case, sons live in living room</li> <li>● 1 not answered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 12</li> <li>● 5</li> <li>● 2</li> <li>● 2</li> <li>● 2</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● (S15, S11, S08)/ (F, M)/ (D03, D14)</li> <li>● D14. (F, M, D03)/ (S11, S08, S15)</li> <li>● S15/ D14/ (F, M, S11, S08, D03)</li> <li>● S15/ (D14, D03)/ (F, M, S11, S08)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 10</li> <li>● 12</li> <li>● 1</li> <li>● 1</li> </ul>

4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● (F, M, D03)/ (S08, S11)/ S15/ D14</li> <li>● D14/ (F, S08)/ (M, D03)/ (S11, S15)</li> <li>● (F, S11, S08)/ (M, 03)/ D14/ S15</li> <li>● S15/ S11/ S14/ (F, M, S08, D03)</li> <li>● (F, M)/ (D14, D03)/ (S15, S11,S08)/ Empty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 12</li> <li>● 4</li> <li>● 4</li> <li>● 3</li> <li>● 1</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● (F, M, D03)/ S15/ S11/ S08/ D14</li> <li>● S15/ S11/ S08/ (F, M)/ (D14, D03)</li> <li>● S15/ S11/ D14/ (F, S08)/ (M, D03)</li> <li>● S15/ S11/ S08/ (F, M)/ (D14, D03)</li> <li>● S15, D14, D03, (F, M) (S11, S08)</li> <li>● (F, M)/ (D14)/ (S15)/ (S08, S11)/ (D,03)</li> <li>● (F, S08)/ (M, D03)/ (S15)/ (D14)/ (S11)</li> <li>● (F, M)/ (D03, D14)/ (S15, S11. S08)/ Empty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 4</li> <li>● 4</li> <li>● 2</li> <li>● 4</li> <li>● 2</li> <li>● 2</li> <li>● 2</li> <li>● 1</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● (F, M)/ S15/ S11/ S08/ D14/ D03</li> <li>● (F, M)/ S15/ S11/ S08/ (D14, D03)/ Empty</li> <li>● (F, M, D03)/ S15/ S11/S08/ D14/ Empty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 10</li> <li>● 5</li> <li>● 3</li> <li>● 3</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (M, D03)/ F/ S15/ S11/ S08/ D14</li> <li>• F/ (M, D03)/ S15/ D14/ (S08, S11)/ Empty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 1</li> </ul>
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Least favorable options:

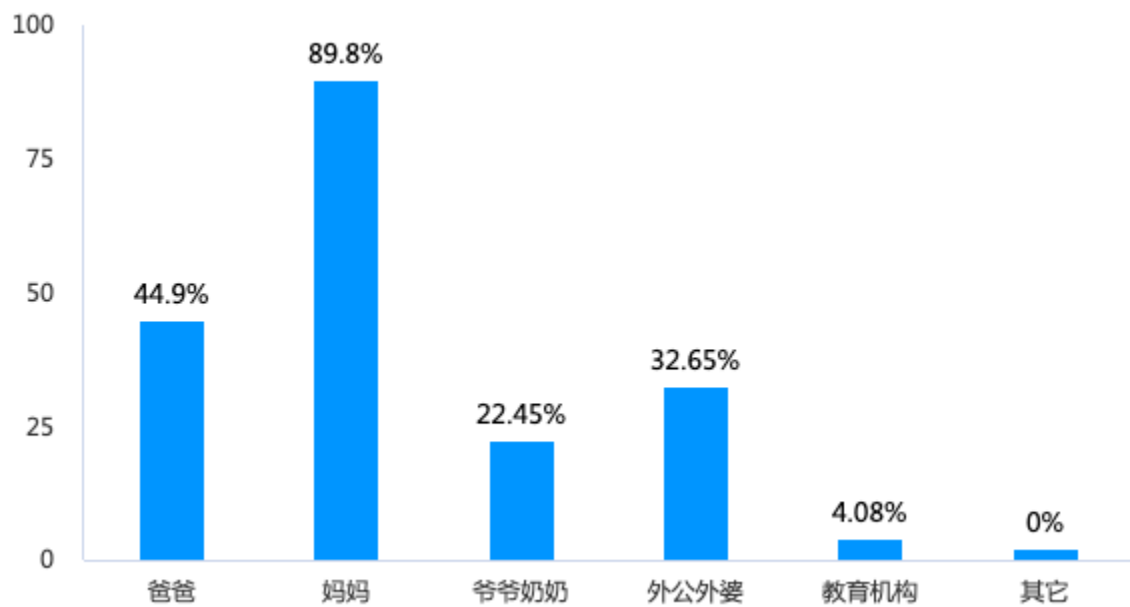
Room constrain	Options	Frequency
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (F, D14)/ (M, S15, S11, S08, D03)</li> <li>• (S15, D14)/ (F, M, S11, S08, D03)</li> <li>• (F, D14, D03)/ (M, S15, S11, S08)</li> <li>• D03/ (F, M, S15, S11, S08, D14)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12</li> <li>• 7</li> <li>• 3</li> <li>• 2</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• D03/ (S15, D14)/ (F, M, S11, S08)</li> <li>• (M, S15, S11)/ (D03, S08)/ (D14, F)</li> <li>• (F, D14, S15)/ (D03, S08)/ (M, S11)</li> <li>• (S15, D14, S11)/ F/ M/ (S08, D03)</li> <li>• (F, D14, D03)/ (M, S15)/ S11/ S08</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4</li> <li>• 5</li> <li>• 6</li> <li>• 6</li> <li>• 3</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (S15, S11, D14)/ F/ M/ (S08, D03)</li> <li>• D03/ (F, D14). (M, S15)/ (S11, S08)</li> <li>• F/ (M, S15)/ D03/ D15/ S11/ S08</li> <li>• S11/ (F, D14)/ (M, S15)/ (S08, D03)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6</li> <li>• 6</li> <li>• 4</li> <li>• 5</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 1: all the options that require mom to take care of sons alone</li> <li>● 1: all the options that require father with older daughter</li> </ul>	
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● F/ M/ (D14, S15)/ (S08, S11)/ D03</li> <li>● (F, S15, D14)/ M/ S11/ S08/ D03</li> <li>● (F, D14)/ S11/ S08/ S14/ D03</li> <li>● (S15, D14)/ F/ M/ S11/ (S08, D03)</li> <li>● F/ D14/ D03/ S11/S08/ (M, S15)</li> <li>● S15/ S11 S08/ (F, D15)/ (M, D03)</li> <li>● 1: Son- Daughter are not acceptable (not specific the age)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 6</li> <li>● 5</li> <li>● 4</li> <li>● 4</li> <li>● 4</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● (S15, D14)/ F/ M/ S11/ S08/ D03</li> <li>● (S11, D14)/ F/ M/ S15/ S08/ D03</li> <li>● (F, D14)/ F/ M/ S11/ S08/ D03</li> <li>● (F, D03)/ M/ S11/ S08/ D03</li> <li>● (S15, M)/ F/ D14/ S15/ S08/ D03</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 8</li> <li>● 7</li> <li>● 6</li> <li>● 2</li> <li>● 1</li> </ul>

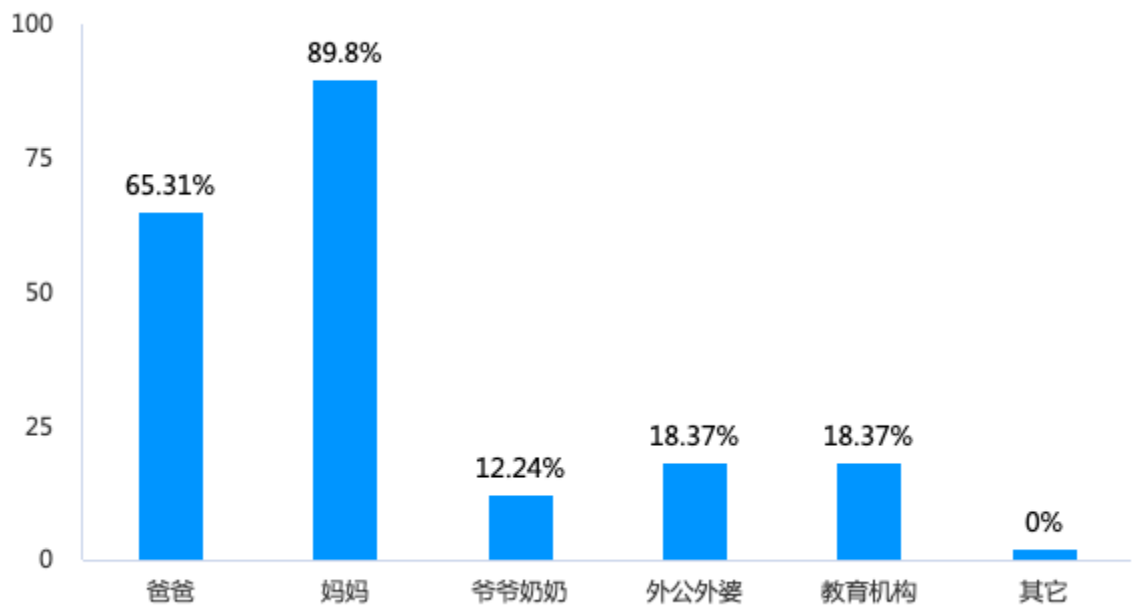
Below bar graphs reflect the results of direct contribution to parenting practice in three age phases in child rearing. According to the age and educational stage, I divided the children's age into three time periods: 0-3 years is the phase before entering kindergarten; 4-12 years is the phase when children go to elementary school; the last phase is till the children reach legal

adulthood (18 years old). The questionnaire allows multiple-choice for each question, thus the total answers is over 49 responses. The horizontal axis labels represent different clusters, from left to right are: father, mother, paternal grandparents, maternal grandparents, education institution, and other options.

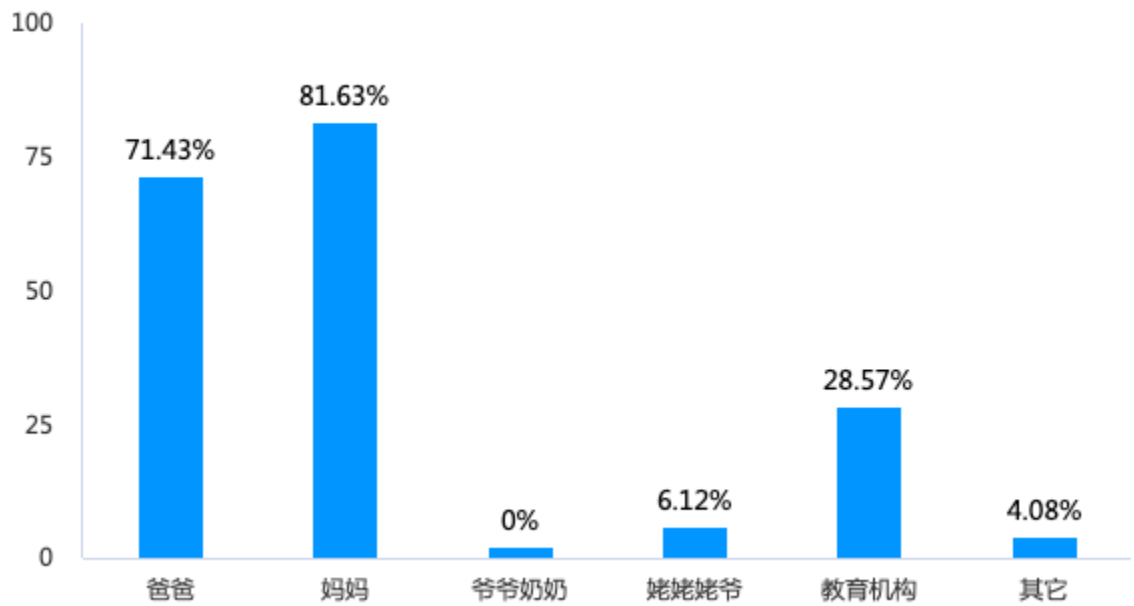
- Who has more involvement in the actual process of direct parenting practice during the child's 0-3 years of life?



- Who has more involvement in the actual process of direct parenting practice during the child's 4-12 years of life?



- Who has more involvement in the actual process of direct parenting practice during the child's 13-18 years of life?



## Section 6 Interview Results

I conducted semi-structured interviews with three couples independently, six interviews in total. I only came up with five questions as an interview guide. I listen and offer the floor to the interviewees to share their experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 30-50 minutes. All the one-on-one interviews were conducted via phone, and I promised each individual that their answers were only used for this study and would not be shared with their spouse or anyone else. I created fake names to represent the interviewees to protect their anonymity.

- Are there any norms/ values as ground lines that guide you to make decisions when arranging the kids to different bedrooms during our survey questionnaire?

Based on the interviews, all the respondents mentioned that their general choice guideline is gender/ sex. All six of my participants complained that a mix-gender sleeping arrangement is not morally acceptable. When I ask further about the pair, there is no significant attitude difference between (Father, Daughter) and (Daughter, son). Nevertheless, no response was discussed. They are uncomfortable with the (Mother, Son) option. Second, age is also a big concern. More than half of the respondents said the youngest kid is too young to sleep alone. When the availability of room numbers increased, parents would like older kids to have their own space. Third, two respondents replied that the two young kids should not sleep together since their son, at age 8, may be unable to take care of the baby, and they need their parent's assistance. Last, 4 respondents mentioned their preference for staying in the same bedroom with their spouse as possible as they can.

- As an only child, how did you feel about having siblings?

For this question, I coded the responses with two categories: positive and negative reactions. Five interviewees discussed their mixed feelings toward having siblings. They expressed their understanding of the pros and cons and offered me many vivid and practical examples of their life experiences.

For positive reactions, high-frequency responses related to family belonging, engaging communication, companionship, and less pressure of taking responsibility. Kiki shared her experience in summer camps when she was a kid and how enjoyable it was to live with other kids. Kiki said as an only child. She felt lonely at home during summer/ winter breaks. Her parents needed to go to work, so she left home. After being home for three days, she said she wanted the break to end because she missed her friends at school. So she and her friends joined the summer camp. She said it was incredible when girls shared the room because they could chat the whole night till the following day. She said it would be fun if she had any sisters. Lincoln, a 36 years old lawyer, said he was having a midlife crisis and suffered from too much pressure of taking responsibility. He has to work hard not to lose his job and earn more money because he has four parents and two young kids, depending on his income. He said if he had a brother or sister, it would reduce the burden on him. Maggie said growing up with siblings would help form a kid's personality. She said she is very introverted, enjoys the "me time", and feels uncomfortable speaking up in public. She said both of her kids are very outgoing and brave to talk in front of people because these two kids are unstoppable in arguing with each other. Although she knows both introverts and extroverts are equally important, based on her experience in the job market, extrovert people are more likely to gain promotion and have better peer relationships. She said she did not have much time to communicate with other people when she was young. Thus, she encouraged both of them to talk and express their opinions.

Some participants revealed different perspectives on having siblings. Angela said she viewed siblings as potential risks of competition in the family. She said she grew up in a small town which was very conservative and believed boys are more valuable than girls. She said the one-child policy offered her many opportunities that used to be lean to boys otherwise. Schooling is an excellent example in Angela's case. She said she would not have a chance to go to school if there were multiple kids in her family because girls were used to being devalued in rural areas compared to boys, and if there were limited resources, boys tend to be the ones to obtain the resources. Angela is grateful for the one-child policy that shifted her fate in life. Besides competing for limited resources, Brain also mentioned the concern about living quality when too many kids in one household.

Moreover, Brain adds that having multiple kids is a massive challenge for parents. He joked, "Raising kids is not like playing video games so that we can restart the game. If the older kid fails to meet your parents' expectations, sure, you can have a second baby-just, like creating a new figure in a video game—hopefully, you will not fail in one place twice. But what about the first kid? What if the parenting practice did not work out again?" Every step is challenging and full of unexpected risks.

- From your perspective, what do you think is the biggest difference between the way you choose to raise your children and your parents raising you?

Overall, respondents generally believe that having siblings has more advantages in the long term, including financial support, mental support, and achieving healthy intergenerational family relationships. Those benefits lead them to have at least two kids when building their own family.

All the respondents showed great interest in this question. I started this question by asking participants to evaluate their relationships with their parents through the teenage phase. Three respondents confirmed that their relationship with their parents was going well most of the time. One respondent said their relationship was delicate, majorly because he went to boarding school and then studied abroad, so he had few chances to fight or argue with his parents directly. Two respondents from different households replied with negative attitudes toward their relationship with their parents. One critique of his parents said he treats his children in everything opposite to how his parents treated him. Then he has already seen a massive improvement in family relationships.

With the respondents offering positive feedback toward their relationships with their parents, I further asked them whether they kept any methodologies from their parents. Some traditions they said they would inherit from their parents are: frequently communicating with children, respecting children's choices and preferences, and value education as a means of personal accomplishment.

To those who disapproved of their parents' practice, I asked them what they had learned from their childhood and where they had improved in their practice. First, Brain said that because his parents were nearly absent in his childhood, he invested more time contributing to his kids. He said his parents offered him abundant material resources, but he was not happy when he was far away from home in a foreign country. He spends an hour every day playing with both kids to connect with their daily life.

There are three significant aspects of changes based on my interviews. First, the relationships between parents and children have shifted compared to participants' relationships with their parents. Young parents tend to become more negotiable, instructional, and open-



minded. One participant said he wants to be friends with his children. Regardless of their ages, he treats them as independent individuals and respects children's preferences, unlike his parents, who used to give commands and make decisions for him without asking for his will. Second, young parents pay attention not only to their children's physical health but also their mental health. One participant complained about her childhood. She said not only did her parents neglect mental health, but the public environment did not treat mental illness fairly and seriously enough. Third, young parents build relationships with their children through communication, companionship, and listening. One impressive response said love does not come directly from blood heritage. It requires time-consuming, communication, and energy contributions to build up the relationship.

- What do you think is the biggest characteristic and uniqueness of the one-child generation as new parents?

First, respondents said the Internet brings convenient and fruitful resources on child-rearing. Whenever they have questions about parenting practices, they use online resources to deal with the problems. Also, two mothers showed me how many social media groups they joined to share child-rearing information.

Second, young parents rely on professional institutions. From the survey questionnaire, we can see that institutions (like schools, daycare centers, and school classes) are involved at a very early stage in children's childhood development. Although young parents said their parents would also take care of their grandchildren, young couples still tend to send their children to these institutions as early as possible even though this is costly and not the best convenient option. Young parents said they trust professionals to use the most scientific way to raise their children that would bring the best outcomes. Two mothers said they had many arguments and

disagreements with their parents about this topic, and it hurt their relationships. Thus, even though they know sending their children to institutions is economically challenging, it is still worth doing so.

Third, most couples in my interview said they have pressure and many puzzles on how to let the first-born children accept the second baby. Because young parents do not have experience with siblings, and their parents only have them as the only child, thus it is challenging to lead and help the older brother/ sister to take their role and embrace the newborn baby. More importantly, parents must understand that the two children are equally important, but in practice, they must treat them differently at some levels. For example, younger people require more attention and gentle care due to the vulnerability of their age and capabilities. Kiki said she doesn't know how to negotiate with her first kid about why she spends more time with the baby than with him.

Fourth, most participants admit they received support from their parents in child-rearing. Three couples said their parents helped them to form their families by paying part of their living expenses. Mr Luo said he got married soon after he got his first job. As a new employee, he needed more money to afford his wedding ceremony and the baby's cost. Interestingly, Mr Luo said he and his wife were not ready to have a baby so early. Thus, after having their first kid, Mr Luo and his wife handed their child to his parents. Other informants shared similar stories. Some acknowledged that they suffered constant peer pressure to give birth even though their young parents thought they were not well-prepared. However, Kiki said her parents told her that having a baby is not like making other life decisions "because you would never feel ready to be a parent until the moment you become one." Her parents encouraged her to have a baby sooner than later because they can offer more help to assist Kiki to go through this process when they remain in good health.

The One Child generation commonly accepts help from paternal or maternal grandparents. As the One Child generation reached their legal marriage age, their methods and standards for choosing partners and marital relationships grew increasingly diverse. Youngsters raised on a diet of individualism and focused on the emotional bond between husband and wife tend to postpone their plan of having babies. Kiki wanted to spend more time on her personal growth and build stable relationships with her husband. However, these couples' parents insist on traditional marriage beliefs that the essence of getting married is having babies. Kiki said both she and her husband suffered from the urging of her parents and the pressure of traditional concepts. These pressures pushed them to have their first baby—as Kiki's husband described, for their parent's sake. Thus, once the baby was born, the young couple handed the baby to their parents to raise. Although Kiki said later she chose to have a second child, her mom still came and lived with them to take care of the baby when Kiki needed to go to work.

- How many kids do you plan to have in your family?

Only one father expressed his interest in having a baby within two years. Other participants said they are either satisfied with their current family size or need further planning and discussion on having more babies. I asked the father, who plans to have a baby within two years, about his wife's thoughts. He complained that he had many arguments with his wife about having babies because his wife is looking for a job after being a housewife for almost six years and wants to focus on her career but not on her family. The husband showed his support to his wife but also expressed his concerns that his wife may be defeated by the current job market and cannot adapt to the working environment. His answer brings Chinese cultural criteria that it is still rare to see a father to the caregiver. China is a patriarchal society, and males tend to be viewed and define themselves as the breadwinners.

Notwithstanding that the job market has changed over the years, it also unfolds new opportunities that bring a gender-equal working environment to working mothers. In my interviews, mothers revealed their ambitious visions for their careers. Housewives explained that their decision to be home was mainly for their young babies, and once the kids go to school, "it is the signal of getting back to work" (Kiki). Some of them kept their jobs and only used their maternity leave. The husband is correct, the marketplace has changed, and many new formats of jobs have appeared that offer many new options and varied types of work. Indeed, one housewife with two wonderful yet exhausting kids says the internet "redefines" the meaning of "work" and "career." She wants to be a freelancer since this job offers more flexibility and fits better into her schedule.

When I asked how many children these mothers plan to have in their family, they all agreed that no more than 3 kids would be best, both financially and mentally. Mothers said that despite their interests in having their jobs for personal growth, financial reasons also push them to decide to return to work. Both Zhengzhou and Beijing have high living expenses levels. Thus, it will be more economically friendly if both parents make the income.

Given the high living expenses of raising more children, a dual income helps to reduce the pressure. Mrs Bai gave her experience as an example to show the necessity of letting mothers return to their careers. When Mrs Bai's eldest kid was 6, Mrs Bai gave birth to twins. At that moment, private and dual-language international schools were first introduced and became popular in the city she lived in. She reported that she constantly received advertisements about private schools, and all her friends suggested she start bilingual teaching as early as possible. Then she sent her Daughter to a private school when she enrolled in elementary school. This international private school offers a bilingual teaching environment, and the tuition is also

matched with "international standard"—the tuition is so expensive, and parents are required to pay for the after-class activities fee. Once Mrs Bai noticed the expensive fee for schooling, she immediately started looking for a job while she stayed at home and took care of the twins. She said that was the first moment she felt three children were too much for a family to afford.

## **Section 7 Findings & Discussion**

### **Sacred Couple VS Responsibility of being parents**

In Shweder's study, American participants tend to keep couples in the same room. This norm is the so-called "Sacred Couple" (2003). So, it is necessary to let parents sleep together. However, most of my interviewee's answers did not verify this value. Based on my research reports, the father and mother rarely share the bed together under the limited room availability. In Shweder's article "The Big Three of Morality and the Big Three Explanations of Suffering (1997)", Shweder uses Oriya's Moral Theme to explain the relationship between suffering and karma in Hindu culture. One of the explanations for people suffering an unwanted state of mind is the role-based obligations within one's role. Two of my participants mentioned their duty of being parents. A "moral causal ontology (Shweder, 1997)" offers the obligation of being parents to all my participants. One of my informants reported that he wants to stay with his wife during the night and enjoy their intimate life. However, the reality of being parents who have duties to take care of offspring restricts this want and limits their will to stay together.

Thus, the value of "Sacred couples" is irrelevant or not a significant consideration when setting up the rooms in my study. Chinese parents would consider the obligations of taking care of kids before thinking about their interests. Thus, their wants can be sacrificed when having conflicts with their social roles of being parents.

A new phenomenon has been discovered related to my study's obligations of social roles. Due to the quarantine policy during the COVID-19 pandemic, remote working has become the mainstream in China and broadly affects young parents. Despite the vast layoff rate in the only-child generation, young parents who remain at their job face difficulties remaining professional in a home setting. In my study, one couple decided to empty one bedroom as their working office in all the arrangement options that contain more than three bedrooms. They did the exact thing in their real-life criteria. Parents reported that creating an office room at home is the key to helping them to remain professional when working from home and not be distracted by their children.

Erving Goffman (1959) developed the dramaturgical perspective theory to interpret people's everyday behavior. Goffman used the metaphor "stage" to divide our daily social life into "front stage" and "backstage". Based on Goffman's theory, he described each individual as a performer. We act on the stage according to our social roles. "Front stage" behavior is what we do when we know that others are watching or aware of us. It is how we behave and interact when we have an "audience." Unlike the "front stage", where people feel intense and constrained, "backstage" is typically the place where people can relax and be themselves (Goffman, 1959). A home is a place which is usually considered backstage. Unfortunately, the pandemic breaks down these boundaries and makes home the substitute for a working office. In other words, the home became a partial front stage, and people created social norms for interactions. Young parents must take their roles as parents and employees in the same stage setting. This makes it hard for young generations to adapt to their proper roles and hard to bow to their audience when the show is over.

Protection of the vulnerable

Along with the responsibilities of being parents, another value that can be revealed from my participants' ranks is the duty of parents to protect the vulnerable ones in the family. The youngest kid is viewed as "needy and fragile and should not be left alone at night" (Shweder, 2003). Only one participant listed the favored option of the Daughter of age 3 to sleep alone. Furthermore, all participants mentioned the unwillingness to separate the youngest kid from their parents, but the unwillingness level differs for each participant. In Shweder's study, "protection of the vulnerable" is a culture-specific moral preference of Arias's case. My interview result shows that this is a shared value between Oriyas and the Chinese community.

Two of my informants revealed their concerns about young kids sleeping alone during the night related to their personal experiences. Both of them reflected on their anxious feelings about sleeping alone when they were around 3. So, their choices and ranks infer their experience. One of the participants said he felt his parents did not pay enough attention to his mental needs when he was young, so he considered caring for children's feelings the priority when listing his preferences.

#### Value of Respecting Personal Space (Autonomy)

All my informants mentioned personal privacy during our discussions. They respect others' privacy and are willing to offer personal space when room constraints are available. Young parents who grew up as the only kid mostly had their room after age 6. Kiki complained that it was hard for her to leave her parent's bedroom. She enjoyed sleeping with her mom and felt secure when family members were around. Although the first step is always challenging, soon after she had her private room, she enjoyed it and did not want to go back with her parents. All of my informants said they enjoyed their room. Mr Zhang said kids have secrets and do not want others to disturb them at certain moments. He was glad his parents respected his "me time"

and gave him enough space. Mr Zhang shared his fun time occasionally sleeping over at his friend's place, but Mr Zhang said he only wished to share a bed or room with others for three days.

This is reflected on the participants' preferred list. Options that offer individual rooms for Son 15 and Daughter 14 rank higher than other options. Older kids should have personal space because of their teenage sensitivity and privacy. This is emotional and physical support to help them have a smoothly rebellious stage. The same concern was pointed out in my interview, but one interesting finding from my participants' ranking is that autonomy or teenager sensitivity contains a threshold. Age 10 is the divided age to distinguish young children and teenagers because personal space was rarely discussed with the son of age 8. It is not relatively related to power hierarchy, but my informants and I would concern about more privacy toward S15 and D14 when setting the arrangements.

I discussed this finding with my last interviewee. She came up with the idea that young kids below 10 years old are not viewed as fully grown independent objects, so their ability to be independent is questioned. For example, one of my male participants said his mom would regularly come to his room to check whether he was playing video games without her permission. He reported that his parents did not trust his autonomy, and his behavior at that age proved he was not trustworthy because he did play video games secretly during bedtime. These considerations and ideas remain unchanged in their mind and influence their decision-making when they become parents.

### Incest Avoidance

Both studies in Hindu and Chicago families revealed the value of incest avoidance. Avoidance of Incest seems to qualify the notion of "Consensus Gentium" from Geertz's article



"Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man (1973)". Geertz defined there was a consensus of specific values that are shared by all humanity. From the results of my interview, the criteria that the father should not sleep with the older Daughter or mother should not sleep with sons for the avoidance of incest reason applied in all undesirable options. However, from my interview, none of my participants had directly pointed out this standard by saying "incest". Instead, most of them explained these options by reflecting on their uncomfortable feelings when thinking about the situation of mixed-sexes co-sleeping. Nevertheless, I would doubt this criterion because as a bisexual, I feel this "cisgender" hypothesis ignores the consideration of the LGBTQ community.

#### Gender equity

One of my classification standards was whether the sleeping arrangement met the goal of gender equity. If mom is the one to take care of all the offspring, I would rank it as unacceptable. This option gives me a sense that the female must take care of the offspring, and the male has the privilege of having his own space because it is not his business to care for his children. For example, I did not rank it as favorable in the option of five-room-condition: S15, S11, S08, (F, M), (D14, D03), even though many of my participants did. If I were a parent, I do not want to put my older Daughter with my younger Daughter because I do not want both daughters to wonder or implicitly guess why I assigned them together. After all, the norm females have the duty of caring jobs.

In contradiction, many interviewees said it is a favorable option for them. I asked one of my female informants; she said the idea of traditional Chinese parenting style could be one of the possible explanations. China has a long history of patriarchal society, and fathers stood at the top

of the hierarchy in traditional parenting style. Although gender equality is booming, many gender-biased facts in daily life remain unchanged and less noticed.

Cai & Lavelly (2003) indicated that the "preference for sons has long been a hallmark of Chinese culture". China is a patriarchal society in which men are greatly treasured and considered necessary to carry on the family name. On the other hand, married daughters are not perceived as a labor force in the natal family (Lui, 2016). Also, from the reading "Women and Gender in Twentieth Century" (Bailey), the virilocal marriage system whereby girls are raised by their natal family but "belong to" their marital family, not "belong in". Thus, traditionally, daughters are not viewed as socially or economically active for families. This is the cultural reason that girls were "devalued" in families and when facing the implementation of policy, girls tended to be "missing" in the Census.

Given this cultural history, some parents let daughters stay together if there are few rooms. However, one couple actively addressed their preference for gender equality in rearing children. Mr Zhang and his wife, Mrs Zhang, acknowledge gender unfairness in some arrangement options. Mr Zhang said he does not wish his Daughter to feel treated unevenly compared to her brothers. Accordingly, Mr and Mrs Zhang state that if their elder son has his private room, their Daughter has to have her own space. I asked Mrs Zhang whether her experience as an only child made her prefer staying in a private room. She admitted that she prefers her own space and that her experience in her grandparents' home triggered her to become sensitive to gender equality. She said that when she was little, they often went to her grandparents' home during the holiday season. When reunion at her grandparents' house with her cousins, the big family faced the problem of sleeping arrangements with limited room availability. Since Mrs Zhang was neither the youngest nor the oldest, she was often squeezed

into the most crowded room with other cousins and could not sleep well. Mrs Zhang said that when she saw my survey questionnaire about sleeping arrangements, she wanted to participate immediately because of her experience at her grandparents' house.

#### Practical reasons about sleeping quality

A noticeable difference between my list and the results I got from interviews is whether fathers should sleep alone and sons should remain in one room together. As I discussed before, I view father isolation as a symbol of gender privilege. However, some of the participants, both male and female, think fathers should sleep alone in some situations. For example, if a father snores, he had better have his room to give better sleeping quality to other members. Similar to the father's condition, some of the moms said the option of putting boys in one room without parents' supervision is not a wise choice. Four of six participants complained that their sons who were naughty at home would not sleep well with their brothers. Nevertheless, girls do so well by staying together in the same room. Thus, parents prefer to put girls to share the room but not boys.

### **Section 8 Conclusion**

#### Cultural practices and norms in guiding child rearing practices

Cultural practices are currently a prominent topic across many fields in social sciences. Developmental psychologists Jacqueline Goodnow, Peggy Miller, and Frank Kessel wrote a book that gathered some empirical research to discuss cultural practices as the contexts for development (New Directions For Child Development, 1995). Developmental psychologists focus on children as learning objects because the parent-children relationship is an excellent example of generational inheritance. Bourdieu emphasized the existence of asymmetrically distributed power in parent-children relationships (1979). Similar to the idea that children are not

full-grown human beings, children are not capable of being fully independent, thus requiring adults' rearing practice. In this case, children passively accept what their parents gave to them.

Goodnow (1990) implanted this idea in developmental scientists' view that the world that children move through may need to be viewed as "forceful" and "demanding". In this situation, parenting practices are viewed as a means to convey cultural values to the next generation.

Goodnow (1995) defined the practice as "actions that are repeated, shared with others in a social group, and invested with normative expectations and with meanings or significance that go beyond the immediate goals of action (p7)." Thus, cultural practices are meaningful actions in daily interactions that convey the values and embed these values as a sense of belonging and identity within the community. In Who Sleep by Whom study, Sheweder (2013) concluded that the sleeping pattern is not merely a personal or private activity. He defined it as a social practice that instantiates a group's moral and social meanings. Like Bourdieu's theory of habitus and disposition, sleeping patterns contain implicit but ingrained norms as conditioned responses to the culture in the living social world.

The responses I received in the Chinese study proved valuable insight into the transaction in cultural norms and values given by the shift in policy of current Chinese society. First, young parents who grew up as the only kid in their families bring new parenting models. Some practices revealed the heritage of traditional cultural beliefs; some practices were guided by new social environments, for example, the booming Internet and online resources, COVID-19, the existence of private institutions, feminism movements, etc. Thus, my research agrees that cultural values and meanings would guide people's sleeping patterns. However, individual experiences and the social environment influence people's decision-making, and the moral order can be reformed with social reformation.

One limitation of this study is the scenario I offered to my interviewees. Many of my respondents said it was hard to connect themselves and step into the hypothetical parents' shoes in the criteria. Since my study population is limited to young parents who grow up as the only kid in their families, the seven-persons-family is too vague for them to imagine. It would be possible to reduce the size of the hypothetical family structure to fit into Chinese culture for future studies.

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